
Conversation with the Managing Director

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Roger LEE Chak Cheong

Managing Director



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What is your vision for franchised public bus services? According to Government statistics, the proportion of Hong Kong people using public transport has reached 90%. As one of the public bus operators in Hong Kong, what role does KMB have to play in future developments?

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Public bus services with their inherent flexibility are an indispensable part of Hong Kong's transport environment. Our competitiveness will be greatly enhanced as bus services are brought more closely in line with passenger needs, with services flexibly deployed in response to different demands and demographic changes. The flexible deployment of buses and human resources and the development of new products will further enhance the efficiency of bus services.

Bus services need not be subject to existing demand; demand can be created by encouraging people who were staying at home to go out. To this end, the introduction of a Monthly Pass is a significant breakthrough, changing the inherent pattern of fare payment. With a Monthly Pass, passengers can travel across the territory on our network of nearly 400 routes, enjoying unlimited, flexible and convenient point to point bus services with our interchange facilities. With its competitive fare, the "KMB Monthly Pass" is set to reshape commuting trends.

In addition to double-deck and regular single-deck buses, we are also looking at introducing Medium Buses as a new vehicle mode to better suit certain market segments. The Medium Bus would be a new solution for areas currently with a low population density with potential for long-term growth. In line with the concept of the Medium Bus, which was raised in the Government's "Public Transport Strategy Study", KMB has taken the lead in conducting a pilot project in Tuen Mun and Yuen Long providing short-distance shuttle services between local communities and major transport hubs.

Another example of a new product is the introduction of a Premium Bus service. At present, commuters travelling from the New Territories to the urban areas have the choice of a bus with a fare of around HK\$20 or a taxi costing about HK\$200. There is a considerable price gap between the two options. The introduction of a Premium Bus service offers a means of bridging this gap for passengers who are willing to pay more for a quicker and more direct service. Featuring more spacious compartments and seats, and equipped with features such as a free Wi-Fi service and USB chargers, the Premium Bus offers greater comfort and convenience to commuters.

We will continue to optimise bus route planning and develop more bus routes to meet the needs of passengers by, among other things, enhancing night bus services and express peak-hour routes, and introducing more interchange hubs.

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What technological measures are planned to upgrade bus services?

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We will continue to look into ways to progressively adopt technology in our operations and services. As a public transport company carrying more than two million passengers a day, it is important that we strive to meet the needs of our passengers. Current applications of technology include the red “Heartbeat of the City” bus fleet introduced in 2017, which features free Wi-Fi and mobile phone charging points, and App1933, our award-winning mobile phone application that provides the estimated time of bus arrival among other functions.

Looking ahead, we will enhance on-board facilities on our buses by introducing a vacant seat display. By means of infra-red induction technology, passengers on the lower deck will be able to see how many seats are available on the upper deck, saving them unnecessary trips upstairs. We will also strengthen the estimated time of arrival system by indicating the occupancy of the next bus.

As electronic payment systems become more mature and more popular, KMB and LWB will study the introduction of new payment means to give passengers more options, besides cash and Octopus.

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What is your opinion on the Government’s amendment to “the Guidelines on Bus Captain Working Hours, Rest Times and Meal Breaks”?

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We have always been committed to providing a better environment for our bus captains. The new guidelines, revised by the Government, aim for a balance between bus captains’ rest times, remuneration and bus service levels. They also maintain the flexibility of bus operations so that bus operators can respond to changes in passenger demand for bus services effectively.

We understand that the community is highly concerned about driving safety. Bus captains need to be highly focused when conducting driving duties, so we strive to improve duty dispatch arrangements as well as the working environment for frontline staff. To this end, we continue to install lounges where frontline staff can relax.

A number of bus captains have told me that it is not driving itself that is tiring, but that traffic congestion is. Therefore, a smooth traffic flow will improve the quality of the driving experience. The number of private cars in Hong Kong has surged by 50% in the past decade, while the growth in new roads has been slow, which means that traffic congestion is becoming more serious. Traffic congestion tends to lengthen bus captains’ driving hours and increase the pressure on them. It is crucial and urgent that we work to make the traffic flow smoother. I have repeatedly raised this issue with the Government and put forward different proposals, such as setting up “Public Transport Only Lanes”. I will continue to urge that public transport operators should have higher priority on the roads, which will not only benefit large numbers of travellers but also provide a better working environment for frontline staff.

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What is the Group's commitment to environmental protection?

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We have introduced a number of new measures to promote environmental protection, including the in-house developed double-deck bus with a solar power system, which provides a more comfortable compartment for passengers and bus captains by helping to reduce the temperature in the compartment. We have also launched the "Green Bus Stop Scheme", whereby 600 older bus stops without an electricity supply are equipped with solar power devices to power the lighting and mosquito repelling devices. We also installed solar power devices for the ventilation of temporary staff toilets to improve the working environment.

We are committed to reducing emissions. In 2017, KMB introduced the first Euro VI diesel double-deck bus to Hong Kong, leading the local industry to the latest environmental standards. Under the Government's subsidy plan, KMB has put supercapacitor electric buses and battery electric buses into service, and in support of zero-emission green driving we have purchased 20 electric patrol cars to supersede the petrol cars.

At the end of 2017, KMB and LWB had 2,586 air-conditioned buses at Euro V standard or above. Looking ahead, we will examine the feasibility of introducing electric double-deck buses to Hong Kong and will explore more solutions for clean energy use.

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What measures has the Group taken in its human resources policy to maintain good bus service standards in Hong Kong?

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Public transport is a labour-intensive industry, and a tight labour market has brought pressure in relation to hiring across the industry. In addition to the provision of an annual pay adjustment, we have optimised the salary structure of our frontline staff, including bus captains, benefiting some 10,000 colleagues. This arrangement should help enhance income stability and attract recruits to provide quality bus services to the public.

The Group will continue to optimise the recruitment, training, working conditions and emotional support of its bus captains. The group will also look into installing additional safety devices in buses to assist bus captains in performing their driving duties and maintaining safe driving.

The company is also focusing on enhancing staff communication, so that from 2018, in addition to existing communication channels, management will have regular meetings with frontline staff to promote more direct engagement.