

Appointment of Operators of Student Service Vehicles

- (1) At present, schools can appoint operators of the following types of student service vehicles to provide school bus services:
 - (i) School private light bus (SPLB), with service endorsement of School Private Light Bus Service; and
 - (ii) Non-franchised public bus (NFB), with service endorsement of Student Service.
 - (iii) If a student service vehicle is found to have provided unauthorised services, Transport Department (TD) may conduct an inquiry against the licence holder concerned under the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374). Once the inquiry has established that the licensee has violated the Passenger Service Licence (PSL) conditions, the Commissioner of Transport may suspend, cancel or vary the PSL concerned.
- (2) In selecting operators of student service vehicles, it is imperative to ensure that the operators have been approved with a valid PSL and their vehicles have been issued with Passenger Service Licence Certificate (PSLC) with student service endorsement. School can request the operators to provide the PSL and PSLC for verification.
- (3) There are at present around 5 537 vehicles (as at 30 June 2023) in the market with relevant licences eligible to provide student service. There is no need for the operators of these vehicles to apply to TD for provision of student services. There is another pool of over 3 500 NFBs in the market which do not have endorsement for providing student service. Their operators need to apply to TD for the relevant endorsement if they intend to provide student services.
- (4) Pursuant to the recommendations of the Transport Advisory Committee, any new supply of NFB, whether it is existing operators applying for additional vehicles or new operators applying for new PSLs and associated vehicles, would be processed in a very cautious and stringent manner to ensure that there are full justifications for the additional requirement. Besides, these applicants are required to source vehicles from the existing NFB fleet in the market for a period of 6 months in the first instance. As a result, the processing time for applications involving additional vehicles to the existing NFB fleet would be longer, and those failing to provide justifications would be rejected.

(5) To tie in with the above measures, all schools are advised to take the following action as appropriate:

- (i) to arrange for early selection of school bus service operators so as to identify suitable prospective operators with adequate number of student service vehicles (NFBs and/or SPLBs) to provide school bus services.
- (ii) to appoint existing operators with adequate number of student service vehicles to provide school bus services as far as possible.
- (iii) to provide the prospective operators with all the necessary and required supporting documents to facilitate the processing of their applications.

To allow greater flexibility for NFB operators in deploying vehicles for provision of student service, TD put forward in July 2012 a new measure that upon request by the operators, student service endorsement would be granted to all eligible vehicles for serving as spare vehicles so as to meet the operational need and public demand. All PSL holders were notified in writing of the application procedures.

(6) To facilitate transport arrangement for students, to alleviate traffic congestion caused by student service vehicles and to achieve better utilization of vehicle resources, TD encourages school principals/management to consider adjusting the school hours and/or adopting flexible school hours arrangements as far as practicable under the principle that the education of students should always come first.

(7) In the event that appointed operators of school bus services would need to pick up or set down students at some no-stopping restricted zones and/or to enter into some prohibited zones or bus lanes for providing the services, schools or the operators concerned may apply to TD for permits seeking exemption from such restrictions. TD will consider each and every application on its own merits. The application may be rejected having regard to all relevant factors. In filing the applications, the applicants are required to complete a prescribed form with provision of relevant supporting documents (including supporting letters issued by the schools). The application form (together with a set of guidance notes) can be downloaded from TD website or obtained from the regional offices of TD. The duly completed application form should be submitted to TD at least 15 working days prior to commencement of the school bus services to be provided in accordance

with the requirements as stated in the guidance notes. In case of late applications or failure to provide the required supporting documents, the applicants may not be able to obtain the permits before commencement of the new school term. For further enquiries, the applicants may contact the respective regional offices of TD. Their enquiry phone numbers are 2829 5814 (Hong Kong Regional Office), 2399 2471 (Kowloon Regional Office) and 2399 2226 (New Territories Regional Office).

- (8) As stipulated in the PSL conditions, student service vehicles for kindergarten or primary students shall be subject to the provision of escort while the service is in operation. ***In recent years, various kinds of extra-curricular activities have been organized by schools keeping the students at school after normal school time. As a result, students would be on their way home at irregular time slots and student service vehicles need to pick up students various times which causes difficulties in deploying escort for every trip. In this light, schools and parent-teacher associations should work in collaboration with operators to agree on several fixed time slots for picking up students. This would not only facilitate operators to comply with the PSL conditions on provision of escort, but also ensure student safety while riding on student service vehicles.***
- (9) The Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374A) stipulates that in every student service vehicle registered on or after 1 May 2009, the vehicle must be equipped with “safer seats”. For details, please refer to “Requirements for Passenger Seats in Student Service Vehicles” at **Annex**. In addition, after consulting the trades, TD adopted administrative measures to require seat belts to be provided on all passenger seats on new student service vehicles with first registration on or after 1 July 2022. Seat belts on passenger seats should observe the seat belt requirements of Part I of Schedule 2 of the Road Traffic (Safety Equipment) Regulations (Cap. 374F). Operators of student service vehicles may select and install suitable and approved seat belts (i.e. body restraining seat belt or lap belt) according to their operation need.
- (10) If you have any enquiries, please contact the Public Vehicles Unit of TD at 2804 2574 (for NFB matters) or 2804 2263 (for SPLB matters).

(English Translation)

Requirements for Passenger Seats in Student Service Vehicles **(Generally Known as “Safer Seats”)**

According to the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374A), every student service vehicle registered *on or after 1 May 2009* must be equipped with “safer seats”. In addition, after consulting the trades, Transport Department (TD) adopted administrative measures to require seat belts to be provided on all passenger seats on new student service vehicles with first registration *on or after 1 July 2022*. Seat belts on passenger seats should observe the seat belt requirements of Part I of Schedule 2 of the Road Traffic (Safety Equipment) Regulations (Cap. 374F). Operators of student service vehicles may select and install suitable and approved seat belts (i.e. body restraining seat belt or lap belt) according to their operation need.

Safer seats are strong and closely spaced, with high and energy-absorbing backs, which can reduce the risk of students being thrown out of their seats and reduce the degree of injury in case of collisions. Overseas research proves that the use of safer seats is effective in protecting students on student service vehicles. Compared with seat belts, safer seats offer protection to passengers without requiring any action, thus they are suitable to be used on student service vehicles.

Definition of Student Service Vehicles

- (1) a public bus authorised for providing student service (**A03**) as specified in section 4(3)(d) of the Public Bus Ordinance (Cap. 230);
- (2) a private bus authorized for providing student service (**B01**) as specified in section 27(5)(a) of the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374); and
- (3) a school private light bus.

Standards of the Passenger Seats

- seats, barriers and their anchorage shall conform to the requirements of any specification or standard specified in the legislation;
- seat backs, barriers and controlled surface shall be made of impact energy absorption material that conforms to the requirements of any specification or standards specified in the legislation;
- no folding table or folding table or folding accessories shall be installed on any controlled surface;
- seats and restraining barriers shall be made of fire resistant material that conforms to the requirements of any specification or standard specified in the legislation;
- every seat shall be forward-facing; and
- space of the passenger seat and the height of seat back should meet the requirement specified in the legislation.

Notes to Applicants for Provision of Student Service

- Any student service vehicle which is registered on or after 1 May 2009 must be fitted with passenger seats of the standard as stipulated in the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374A).

- Any student service vehicle which is firstly registered on or after 1 July 2022 must be fitted with seat belts for all passenger seats as required under the administrative measures.
- Approval will NOT be given for issuance of PSL or student service endorsement to those vehicles which are not in compliance with the legislative requirement on passenger seats and/or the administrative measures on seat belts.

Enquiries

For requirements of passenger seats details, please contact Vehicle Safety and Standards Sub-Division of TD by phone:

Vehicle Safety and Standards Division (Vehicle Examination Centre)

For examination of buses - Tel. no.: **2333 3112**

For examination of school private light buses - Tel. no.: **2759 7573**

For application details, please contact Public Vehicles Unit of TD by phone or fax:

Public Vehicles Unit

Non-franchised Public Bus - Tel. no.: **2804 2574**

Private Bus - Tel. no.: **2804 2450**

School Private Light Bus - Tel. no.: **2804 2263**

Fax. no. - **2865 1227**