

Buses to lose their stripes

By NAOMI LEE

A FLEET of new-look minibuses carrying larger and more colourful advertisements will be seen on the streets of Hong Kong from April 1.

The green or red stripes painted on the territory's minibuses since 1969 will go to make way for the larger adverts, which will be four times the size they are now.

The move is good news for the owners of Hong Kong's 4,350 minibuses, because the adverts will bring in extra income that will help meet increased maintenance costs and benefit passengers by keeping fares down.

The Transport Department yesterday urged minibus owners whose vehicles are due for annual examinations in early April to "make urgent arrangements" to re-spray them.

A spokesman said roof panels and areas above the windows of minibuses on exclusive routes would be painted green, and red on all other minibuses. The bodies of both types of vehicle will remain yellow.

The chairman of the Public Light Bus Trade Association, Ng Mau-shing, said the extended advertising space would mean more than \$1,000 a month for the owners.

"We have yet to find out the potential of the new-look minibuses, but I hope it will help reduce the maintenance cost of the owners so that they won't increase fares frequently," said Mr Ng.

According to the managing director of Shun Tat

Maxicab Advertising, Angela Kwong Yuk-lin, minibuses would be able to compete with taxis and buses for advertising revenue.

"Minibuses have fixed routes compared to taxis and cost less to advertise with than buses. This will all appeal to advertisers," said Miss Kwong.

Presently, buses attract most advertisements for products while minibuses only have short-term adverts for newly released movies or new restaurants.

Miss Kwong said: "Many advertisers think that small spaces do not look upmarket and therefore they prefer big buses. I presume the situation would be more balanced in the future.

"The adverts on minibuses will be at eye-level and be more impressive to people in the street."

However, studio manager of Bozell Ltd, Johnny Sung Ka-keung, warned against having "hippie" minibuses.

He said the design of the adverts and where to put them was very important. "If they are not properly arranged, the minibus will just look like a hippie car."

Mr Sung also said the elimination of the centre stripes would confuse the elderly, who are familiar with the designs.

The Transport Department will give minibus owners a year to meet the new requirements.

"Within the transitional period, vehicles that do not comply with the new scheme will be tolerated until they are brought to the Transport Department for annual examination," the spokesman said.