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## Advisers seek more proof on lower drink limit call

By Norma Connolly

THE Transport Advisory Committee (TAC) has asked the government to provide more proof that the drink-driving limit should be reduced.

This follows administration suggestions that it might revise motorists' legal alcohol levels from 80mg per 100ml of blood to 50mg.

Hong Kong first introduced drink-driving laws in December, 1995, before which drivers who consumed a large amount of alcohol could not be penalised.

"The government considered there had been some improvements in the accident rate (since the laws were introduced)," committee chairman Raymond Ho Chung-tai said yesterday.

But he said the decrease in road accidents began before the drink-driving laws were enforced.

The government is examining Australia's and South Korea's drink-driving laws, which limit drivers to 50mg of alcohol to 100ml of blood.

The advisory committee also wants the administration to examine drink-driving laws and their impact in Britain and Singapore, where the limit is the same as Hong Kong's.

"If the government is able to support this with more detailed information related to the practice of other cities, the TAC would consider this proposal further," Dr Ho said.

The Road Safety Council also advocates lowering the limits.

Dr Ho said his committee would also require more information from the government before it considered advising the introduction of random breath-testing.

Only motorists involved in accidents or suspected of being drunk at the wheel can be breathalysed.

Last year 9,066 drivers were breathalysed. Of those, 8,834 were involved in accidents and 499 were found to be over the limit, while 7,892 were found to have taken no alcohol.

First-time offenders face a maximum fine of \$25,000 and a prison sentence of up to three years.

For a subsequent conviction, drivers face an identical fine and prison term, but their driving licences will also be suspended for two or more years.

Meanwhile, structural engineer Dr Cheng Hon-kwan will take over from Dr Ho as TAC chairman on 1 April.

Dr Cheng is a member of the Land and Building Advisory Committee and the Airport Consultative Committee.

The TAC committee also said yesterday it would sit on a working group which will be set up to examine taxi practices, including the escalating prices of taxi licences, which have shot up from \$2 million to \$3.5 million in the past year.