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A cry from the hills for better transport

PATIENCE is wearing thin as the queue for maxicabs at Baguio Villas in the Mid-Levels stretches farther and farther.

As the weary wait for maxicabs gets longer and longer, the residents are calling for an improvement in public transport services. Long waits have become common for the residents who have only the maxicab for a direct service to and from Central.

The wait can last up to 20 minutes on weekday mornings, depending on the traffic conditions.

Most of the residents have their own cars but many do not drive to work because of inadequate parking facilities in the Central area.

There is only one public bus service - No. 47 - running through the area from Saiyingpoon to Wahfu Estate, but it cannot provide a suitable service to the residents of Baguio Villas.

This is because they have to change buses or take other means of transport from Saiyingpoon to Central.

The No. 47 buses are usually crowded during the peak hours.

There is a private coach running from the estate to Central but it only operates six times in the morning with three more runs in the evening.

After 7 pm the maxicabs go off service leaving the residents only taxis or their own cars for transport.

There are signs that the queues for maxicabs will

by
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stretch farther as more people move into the estate which has four more blocks ready for occupation.

Most residents want more public transport services to and from Central. However, it is likely that they will have to tolerate the existing situation for some time before the Transport Department and China Motor Bus Company make arrangements for new bus services.

BUS

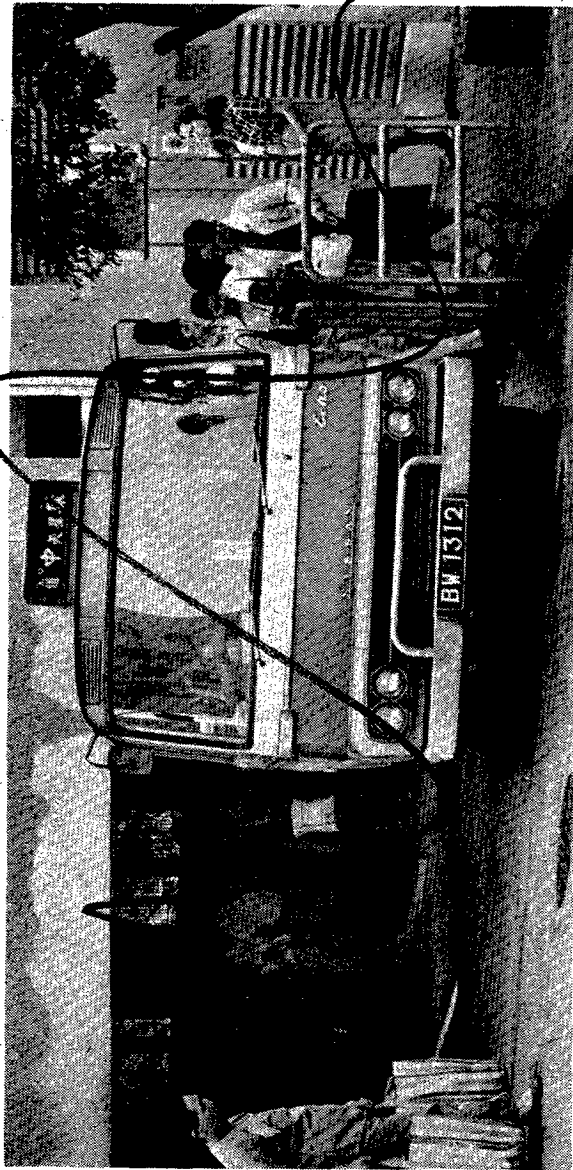
Hongkong University student Diana Ng said she had to wait for at least 15 minutes every morning to take a bus to school.

"Although the bus runs at a 15-minute schedule, it usually takes longer, and sometimes I have to wait for as long as 30 minutes before I can get a bus to school," she said.

"I think it will be much more difficult to get a bus because more people are moving into the new blocks on the hill which are not served by any sort of public transport.

"People living up there will come down to our station to take buses," Miss Ng said.

"I hope there will be more bus routes in the area. At least some of the buses serving the Pokfulam area



RESIDENTS boarding a maxicab after waiting for more than 10 minutes in a long queue. Pictures: JOHNNY LAM

should be rerouted to run through Victoria Road. Another resident, Mr Ho, said: "I think the situation will improve if there is some extension or rerouting of existing routes such as the one serving Chifufayuen and Central."

He said it was very difficult to get public transport when both the private coach and the maxicabs go off service in the evenings.

P.J.M. Prain, another resident, said there should be more buses in the area. "The queues are longer now than they were six months ago. There is always more than 14 people in the queue," he said.

"It usually takes 25

minutes to wait for a maxicab," he said, adding that he would rather leave his own car at home because of the parking problem in Central.

Another resident, Domingo Lopez, who has been living there for several years, said the maxicab service was inadequate. "It takes about 20 to 30 minutes to wait for a maxicab and it is even worse on Sundays or public holidays. There should be more maxicabs serving the route," he said.

"Also, I think the maxicabs should extend their services in the evening, say to 9 pm or 10 pm. Because after the maxicabs stop we have to take taxis," he said.

Mr Lopez said he has a

car but liked to leave it at home because of the lack of parking facilities in Central. He said he could not take the No. 47 bus because its destination was too far from his place of work.

"The only way to get to Central is by maxicab but its service is inefficient," said Mrs Carole Hughes who is currently taking some study courses in Central.

"It takes about 30 minutes or longer to get a maxicab on Saturday mornings," she said. "I'm sure it would help to have a bus route serving the estate," she said.

There are more than 2,000 people living in Baguio Villas.

But the population is

expected to rise to more than 5,000 when the new blocks are fully occupied. And, as suggested by the residents, one maxicab route is certainly far from sufficient for their transport.

The Transport Department said yesterday it was making every effort to improve public transport services in the Wahfu and Victoria Road areas.

Extending existing bus routes is one option that can be taken, it said, adding that an evening service of the maxicab was introduced in June.

ROAD

"Other means of improvement are also being considered," it said.

But it noted that part of the access road to the estate is owned and controlled by the estate and estate management must agree to allow the buses into the area.

A private company applied to run a coach service from Central to Baguio Villas about a year ago, but no decision has been made yet.

It is understood that any approval to run a bus service other than by China Motor Bus Company will contradict the firm's franchise.

CMB officials were not available for comment yesterday on the introduction of bus service from Central to the estate.