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A \$300,000 sign of the times

The Kowloon Motor Bus Co is said to be spending \$300,000 on testing new easy-to-read fluorescent number signs for its fleet.

The company has so far bought 21 "electronic bus route number indicator units" from Britain for a trial period of six months to a year.

It is the first system of its kind to be introduced in Hongkong.

"And if it proves to be working satisfactorily, we will equip our entire fleet with the system," said the general manager of the company, Mr Lawrence Louey, after receiving on trial a new Volvo double-decker in Tsimshatsui yesterday.

Both Mr Louey and the KMB's spokesman were tight-lipped on the cost involved in the scheme.

But an informed source said it would run to about \$300,000.

"The 21 electronic units were bought at a regular unit price but it is understood the company will be able to enjoy a discount if and when it buys the whole system for its 2,000-strong fleet," the source said.

Mr Louey said one advantage of the system, designed in the US, was that bus captains could change route numbers on the front, back and sides of their buses by simply pressing a button.

"But we still have to test the feasibility of the system in Hongkong where it is humid," he said.

Mr Louey stressed that the unit still had to be improved as so far it cannot show both English and Chinese characters.

"At the moment we have to retain our traditional roller-blinder number indicators to show destinations," he said.

The company has not yet decided which routes will be fitted with the new system.

"Most probably we will put them on the tunnel routes and other more popular routes," Mr Louey said.

The Volvo Bus Corpn

presented a new double-decker to KMB yesterday for a trial run.

The bus is on loan to KMB for a year.

The Vice-President of the Volvo Bus Corpn, Dr Ingmar Andreasson, said at the handing-over ceremony yesterday that the special characteristic of the B10MB was its mid-floor engine design in which all the engines were located at the bottom of the vehicle.

"The system ensures a high degree of stability and weight-distribution resulting in improved passenger safety," Dr Andreasson said.

The vehicle is licensed to carry 120 passengers.