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A reprieve for 'school pak-pais'

The Transport Advisory Committee has adopted a temporary measure to enable private vans or cars to continue carrying school children in September.

The chairman of the TAC, Mr T.S. Lo, disclosing this yesterday, said the pak-pais will be put into a special category.

It is understood the pak-pais will be allowed to operate under certain special conditions for the time being and proposals to change the present law will be made later.

Mr Lo said that a two-day meeting of the TAC attended by representatives of the Environment Branch, Transport Department, police and the Legal Department had decided that it was not possible to recommend any changes in the law because of the time element.

He said the main consideration was to enable children to use this form of transport to get to school when the new term starts in September.

However, Mr Lo refused to disclose details of the plan "since the matter is to be put before the Governor in Council."

But he hoped "the TAC can announce the conclusions of the meeting in two weeks' time."

Mr Lo reiterated that "there must be a limit to the number of people carried in these private cars and vans.

"The maximum load for private cars is seven people, or 12 children under three feet tall.

"It is dangerous for cars to be overloaded."

The pak-pai issue arose when police stepped up control over their loading capacity, which is believed to often exceed the legal limit.

Some pak-pai drivers then staged a one-day strike.

They pressed for legal status and urged the Government to legislate to allow them to carry more passengers.

In May, Government sources disclosed that proposals were being made to help these pak-pais.

The proposals are believed to include:

- Using weight rather than height as the criterion to seat a suitable number of passengers.

- Raising the clearance height inside a passenger van from three to four feet.

- Schools forming into groups to allow drivers to operate fleets under school supervision.

On the question of taxi fares, he denied reports they would be increased by 33 per cent.

The issue was discussed at Tuesday's meeting.

"The 33 per cent rise so widely quoted is untrue," he said.

However, Mr Lo said that when taxi fares increase, meters will be changed to the metric system at the same time.

He refused to disclose any other details.

According to the spokesman for Hongkong, Kowloon Taxi and Lorry Ownership Association Ltd, Mr Lo Kwok-wing, the TAC had in principle "accepted the 33 per cent rise" that taxi owners applied for in March.

"We proposed a flagfall charge of \$3 which is equivalent to 1.5 km, and 50 cents for every subsequent quarter km," he said.