

11 minibus groups meet on future of trade

A NEW committee formed by 11 minibus associations will meet this week to discuss the future of the minibus trade.

Chairman of the committee Lai Kwok-ming said yesterday it was essential for minibus operators to unite and fight for their rights.

"As the Government is putting more and more pressure on us there is little we can do without joint effort and united opinion," he said.

The committee will negotiate with the Transport Department over the restricted areas, maxicabs and vehicle inspection regulations.

Another concern of the committee is the exchange of minibuses for single or double-decker buses.

"On the whole, we dislike the idea of changing minibuses for buses," said Mr Lai. "But if we have to do so, we will struggle for more favourable terms rather than blindly fight against the proposal," he said.

Mr Lai said operators must find out the routes open to them; whether they would be restricted to a specific passenger group such as workers and students; and whether they would need to get another driving licence.

"We can continue business even after the metro goes into full operation, if the Government does not impose so many restricted areas," he said.

He said that since there would be areas that the metro could not reach the minibuses could function by linking different areas together.

"But our immediate concern is to ask for lifting of bans concerning restricted areas. We want to enter all housing estates," said Mr Lai, who also complained about the long waiting period for vehicle inspections.

When asked about the exchange programme of the minibuses for buses the Transport Department spokesman, Mr Tommy Hahn said: "Nothing is confirmed. It is only

discussion, not a definite proposal."

He said there would be a detailed discussions at a meeting in September when the associations had more time to consider the suggestions.

"We are not trying to make their lives more difficult. We only prohibit them to enter the centre of six to seven housing estates where there are already bus services. Minibuses can still enter nearly 40 housing estates," he said.

Meanwhile, rumours that the Government will increase taxi fare were denied by both the Transport Department and taxi associations.

A spokesman for Hongkong and Kowloon, Taxi and Lorry Owners' Association said the four taxi associations had sent a letter to the Transport Department recently, but were still waiting for a reply.