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Bid to cut down on mini-bus numbers

By **KENNETH KO**

Transport officials want to reduce the present fleet of 4,350 mini-buses to 3,300 in three years.

They are at present studying various approaches to achieving this target.

It is believed that the curb on the number of mini-buses has been recommended by the Public Light Bus Working Group in its recently-completed report to the Government after a year-long study.

The group was apparently convinced that demand for mini-buses would decline considerably due to the just

opened Modified Initial System of the Mass Transit Railway — and more so after the tube's Tsun Wan extension starts running in 1982.

It also saw the need to make the maximum use of roads to keep Hongkong's traffic flowing.

This has led to the Government's declared intention to introduce more "bus only" lanes.

Officials are now pondering over different proposals to reduce the size of the mini-bus fleet.

Among them are offers to operators to swap their licences for those of taxis,

omnibuses and maxicabs.

It is likely that offers would be made to 400 mini-bus operators to change their operations to maxicabs.

This is because officials believe that when fully developed, the maxicab service — which operates on defined routes — should have room for a maximum of 500 vehicles.

The present size of the maxicab fleet is slightly over 100.

They also feel that omnibuses could prove attractive to some mini-bus operators due to the considerable success of existing omnibus licensees who charter their coaches to factories and schools as well as clubs for outings such as trips to Shatin racecourse.

Officials are also considering the number of taxi licences that can be offered to mini-bus operators, bearing in mind that the Executive Council has set a ceiling of 10,000 taxis in the urban areas.

At present, there is room for another 1,500 taxis — but the Transport Department has plans to fill it up by calling tenders.

Apart from proposing a reduction, the group has also suggested a "zoning" of all mini-buses into four districts — Hongkong, Kowloon, Kwan Tong and the New Territories.

A final decision on the proposals is expected to be made by the Executive Council in two months.