

Bus firm angry at extra seats

THE China Motor Bus Company (CMB) yesterday issued a strongly worded statement condemning the Government's decision to allow another two seats in public light buses.

A spokesman for the company described the move as "yet another step in the progressive erosion of CMB's exclusive franchised operating rights".

He said the bus firm would lose a substantial slice of its patronage as 70 per cent of the 46 franchised mini-bus routes on Hongkong Island duplicated the company's franchised bus runs.

The additional seating would increase the authorised capacity of mini-buses by a total of 8,700 seats - the equivalent of the carrying capacity of 90 conventional buses.

"The Government has again succumbed to the clamour of pressure groups and now proposes further unilaterally to whittle away at the obligations the Government solemnly undertook in granting CMB a statutory franchise," he added.

The CMB spokesman warned that the decision would inevitably result in an increase in bus fares.

Commuters would also suffer with greater travelling times, because public light

buses took longer to load and unload passengers.

The spokesman said the company was still seeking legal advice on whether the situation warranted a claim for substantial relief from the Government.

The Kowloon Motor Bus Company also criticised the mini-bus decision, made on Tuesday by the Executive Council.

Spokesman Miss Brenda Lee said KMB might lose some \$95 million in patronage to the bigger mini-buses.

The Commissioner of Transport, Mr James So, said earlier that the franchise granted to the two bus companies was only on a route-to-route basis but did not cover the whole region.

He said the bus companies would have no basis to claim for compensation because the mini-bus routes did not overlap those of the bus companies and thus did not infringe the route franchise.

He said if the companies suffered losses, they could apply for a fare increase under the existing profit control scheme for the franchisees, but it would be hard for the companies to prove they had suffered losses because of competition from mini-buses.