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# Bid to protect minibus service

By Jessie Yim

THE Transport Department will impose restrictions on the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) to protect minibus operators.

One measure is to curb the KCRC's free feeder bus services.

The department feels that the Government-owned transport giant could easily interrupt the existing balance of the transport network, and put smaller transport operators in jeopardy.

Transport officials plan to require the KCRC to seek prior approval from the commissioner for transport before it introduces new feeder bus services along the railway line.

"This is to ensure no duplication of service," said Assistant Commissioner for Transport Mr Richard Meakin.

He said the Transport Department was drafting guidelines approving the KCRC's new bus route applications.

Conditions of service such as ensuring proper notification of introduction or termination of a service would be imposed

on the KCRC's public service licence, he said.

He pointed out that the KCRC was not actually providing free bus services for the public.

People paid their fares when they bought train tickets, he said.

Commuters who did not need to use the feeder buses might have to subsidise those who needed the service, he added, responding to an argument that commuters welcomed the feeder service.

Mr Meakin felt that regulations were needed to maintain a stable transport network.

He quoted as an example the Tai Po railway station, where the KCRC suddenly introduced two additional feeder bus services, pushing the number of routes to four.

The KCRC only informed the Transport Department of the routes five or six days before it began the services, he said.

"A green minibus service at the station was hit very hard," he said, adding that the Kowloon Motor Bus (KMB) had

also complained about duplication of its routes.

Mr Meakin said the KMB was such a big company, it needed no Government protection.

"But green minibuses are very vulnerable to KCRC's competition and can be killed overnight," he said.

He added that the KCRC would not be asked to withdraw services already in existence.

In response to a possible infringement of the KCRC's autonomy, Mr Meakin said passengers' interests should also be protected.

He said just as the KCRC could introduce free feeder bus services any time, it could also take them away immediately.

"How about if they take away the service overnight ... Passengers who have been patronising it will find it very inconvenient," he said.

The KCRC operates two feeder routes in Sha Tin and four feeder services in Tai Po.