

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF WORKGROUP'S REVIEW

Introduction

1. In March 2008, the then-Minister of State for Transport, Mrs Lim Hwee Hua, announced the formation of a Workgroup to review the safety of workers transported on lorries. This Workgroup is co-chaired by the Land Transport Authority (LTA) and Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and includes representatives from the Ministry of Transport, Defence Science & Technology Agency, Traffic Police, National Safety Council and industry stakeholders comprising representatives from the marine industry, contractors association, logistics association and the transport services associations.

2. The Terms of Reference adopted by the Workgroup are as follows:

- a. Examine the prevalence of the practice of using lorries to transport workers;
- b. Study ways to encourage employers that use lorries to transport their workers to provide a safer mode of transportation;
- c. Promote road safety awareness and instil a greater sense of responsibility in employers towards their workers' safety and welfare while they are being transported from one point to another; and
- d. Assess the impact of using buses and other possible alternatives as the primary mode of transport for workers to enhance their safety and welfare.

3. In the course of its review, the Workgroup conducted surveys to gauge the prevalence of the use of lorries to transport workers, analysed the accident statistics, causes of accidents involving workers transported at the back of lorries and studied the operational and resource impact should such a practice be discontinued. In Singapore, the Workgroup looked at the best practices of local industries, including safety measures adopted by the Singapore Armed Forces for military trucks used to transport soldiers and incentive schemes to promote safe driving by logistics and transport services companies.

4. The Workgroup also actively consulted and considered feedback received from various relevant stakeholders from industries covering a wide range of businesses, including transport operators and safety experts as well as members of the public.

Overview on the Use of Lorries to Transport Workers

5. Lorries have been used to transport workers since the days when Singapore was less affluent. Lorries then served to supplement public transport services. Today, owners and hirers of lorries are allowed under the Road Traffic Act to use their lorries

to transport their workers to their places of work or business. The aim is to help companies manage business costs and be operationally flexible.

6. To enhance the safety of workers transported in the rear of such vehicles, the LTA has put in place several measures over the years. These include limiting the number of workers to be transported on the back of lorries and imposing a vehicle speed limit of 60km/h on such lorries. However, despite the various safety regulations in place, there were still some drivers who failed to comply with them, such as carrying excess workers or carrying workers in a dangerous or precarious manner. Following a few recent incidents involving lorries transporting workers, there were calls for Government to review this practice to ensure workers are transported in a safer manner.

Summary of the review

7. The Workgroup noted that the use of lorries for the transportation of workers across different industries is pervasive¹ and the regulatory agencies take a relatively balanced approach to the issue. The current regulatory measures are taken through engagement with the key stakeholders i.e. the industries and businesses that rely heavily on lorries as the mode of transport for workers. More importantly, safety measures that had been put in place over the years have kept the accident fatality and injury rates of workers so transported lower than Singapore's overall accident rates². Nonetheless, the Workgroup recognised that more could be done to further enhance the safety of workers transported on lorries to and from their places of work or businesses. The Workgroup adopted a fact-based approach in its studies and analysis to recommend measures to further enhance the safety of workers transported on lorries.

8. The Workgroup found that the practice of transporting workers on the back of lorries is adopted by industries covering a wide range of businesses. These include those who rely heavily on lorries to transport workers en masse to those who use their lorries to transport only a few workers to attend to goods, as well as those in the specialist' trades³ that require their workers to move from one project site to another with their goods / equipment within the same day. Given the above, the Workgroup embarked on an extensive stakeholder engagement programme to seek the views and concerns of:

- a. Various associations or groups that represent the interests of the industries and business operators; and
- b. Government agencies and statutory boards that either regulate the related industries and businesses or formulate and undertake measures to advance the interests of these industries and businesses.

¹ A survey conducted by the Workgroup suggests that a significant number of workers (estimated to be more than 200,000) are transported on lorries daily

² Over the past several years, both the fatality and injury rates were about 6 times lower than the annual average fatality and injury rates of all road accidents over the same period.

³ For example, plumbers, electricians, air-conditioning specialists, security system specialists, lift and escalator specialists etc that work on different sites at different timings

The views and concerns raised by the stakeholders were broader and more complex than the Workgroup had anticipated.

9. The Workgroup studied and discussed at length the safety measures adopted by the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to enhance the safety of soldiers transported on their 5-Tonne trucks. It noted that, unlike SAF's 5-Tonne trucks which are built to military standards, commercial lorries are not designed with suitable anchorage points to be retrofitted with safety belts. Doing so would thus be neither feasible nor cost effective for commercial vehicles. It could instead result in a different set of safety risks for workers transported on lorries.

10. The Workgroup also looked at possible alternatives to the use of lorries and the cost and the resource impact of such alternatives. For example, buses would be a natural option for companies currently using lorries to ferry their workers en masse for commute trips. For businesses, including those in the specialist trades, that presently use lorries to transport goods / equipment and workers, the Goods-cum-Passengers' Vehicles (GPVs) such as twin-cabin lorries would be safer alternatives. However, the Workgroup noted from its engagement with representatives of the Specialists Trade Alliance of Singapore⁴ (STAS) that GPVs may not be the solution for the specialists' trades. GPVs could only carry about 4 to 5 workers in the cabin whereas the specialists' trades had indicated that they require vehicles that can carry up to 15 workers and still have sufficient space to accommodate large equipment such as long ladders, etc.

11. The Workgroup, having consulted a wide range of businesses in different industries, acknowledged that the impact to industries and businesses will be significant, should the transport of workers on the back of lorries be disallowed.

12. From the review, the Workgroup concluded that current safety measures and enforcement efforts have generally been effective in keeping the fatality and injury rates of workers transported at the back of lorries low. Evidence from the accident statistics does not warrant a drastic change to the practice. Hence, there is no strong justification to disallow the practice of carrying workers on lorries here. Doing so would have far and wide implications on businesses who use lorries for a wide spectrum of needs. In this regard, the Workgroup has recommended to further tighten the rules not only to make lorries even safer for workers who are so transported but also to impose harsher penalties for contraventions. It will also showcase industry best practices on safe transport of workers and implement measures to enhance the welfare and reduce the risk exposure in the event of an accident, while allowing owners of existing lorries sufficient lead time to comply with the new rules.

⁴ STAS represents 11 trade associations, which in turn represents a total of 13,000 companies in the respective trade. About 90% of their workers are foreign workers.

Recommendations of the Workgroup

13. The Workgroup's recommended measures, which would be phased in over 3 years, are as follows:

To be implemented from 1 September 2009

- a. Lower the maximum allowable height of a seated worker from the current 3.2 metres measured from the road surface to 1.1 metres measured from the carriage deck;
- b. Require the passenger seat(s) in the lorry's cabin to be filled up before workers could be carried at the rear carriage compartment of lorries;
- c. Increase penalties for non-compliance with safety regulations;
- d. Step up enforcement against those who fail to comply with safety regulations;
- e. Open up a Hotline for the public to report any non-compliance with safety regulations;
- f. Showcase industry best practices;

To be implemented from 1 January 2010

- g. Require newly registered lorries used for carrying workers on the carriage deck to be fitted with higher protective side railings⁵ and canopies;

To be implemented from 1 September 2012

- h. Require all existing lorries used for carrying workers on the carriage deck to be fitted with higher protective side railings and canopies; and
- i. Reduce the number of workers allowed to be carried on the decks of lorries by doubling the minimum deck area required from 4 square feet to 8 square feet per seated worker.

Conclusion

14. The Workgroup's recommendations would further enhance the safety of workers transported on lorries. However, ensuring safety remains the shared responsibility of the Government, employers, drivers, workers and other road users. While regulatory agencies will implement and enforce the safety rules, lorry owners have a big role to play in pro-actively taking measures to ensure that their drivers and workers comply with them. Drivers also have to play their part by observing the safety rules and driving in a safe manner to ensure the safety of workers so transported.

⁵ Presently, only light lorries with maximum laden weight not exceeding 3,500 kg are required to be fitted with side railings. The protective side railing requirement will apply to all lorries (including heavy lorries) used to carry workers. The railings should be fitted at a height of not less than 700 mm from the carriage deck (up from 550 mm) and not less than 300 mm (up from 150 mm) from the top of the side-boards.

15. Government agencies such as LTA, MOM, Traffic Police and the various associations will continue in outreach programmes to educate employers and workers on their responsibilities, and to encourage businesses to emulate those who have already put in place practices on safe transport of workers.

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