

By email only to: starferry-franchise@td.gov.hk

Management and Paratransit Branch
Transport Department
Room 4036, 40/F, Immigration Tower,
7 Gloucester Road
Wan Chai, Hong Kong

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Response to the public engagement on a New Franchise for The “Star” Ferry Company, Limited

Introduction

The Star Ferry is a wonderful way of crossing the harbour and part of Hong Kong’s identity. I use it about twice a month and also enjoy watching it.

I am, however, appalled by the heavy pollution it gives out. In particular the SO₂ which is not visible but damages our health. When I ride the ferry I always sit on in the front part of the ferry that is up-wind so I’m less subjected to the pollution.

The consultation document advises:

10. On environmental protection and sustainability, Star Ferry has been working with the University of Hong Kong since 2012 to develop a device, known as seawater scrubber, to reduce air pollutants from the exhaust gas of ferry engines. In 2012, Star Ferry invested some \$1.3 million to install, on a trial basis, the device on a ferry serving the franchised route. Results of the trial running from 2012 to 2014 indicated that the device could effectively reduce sulphur dioxide by around 90%. Star Ferry plans to invest \$2.5 million per annum in installing such water scrubbers on five ferries over the next five years, i.e. from 2017 to 2021. Separately, Star Ferry is going to explore the adoption of diesel-electric propulsion system for its existing ferry fleets with a view to reducing the emission of dark smoke, sulphur dioxide and hydrocarbons. To this end, Star Ferry is conducting trials on its ferry serving the non-franchised routes. The trial is expected to be completed within 2017. If found technically feasible under the trial and its financial situation allows, Star Ferry will consider whether it could adopt the diesel-electric propulsion system for its franchised ferry fleet.

Views and requests

The Star Ferry operates is right in the middle of our city. The pollution its vessels give off damages our health. It also looks and smells bad to tourists. In the past we were ignorant of the health damage so this was not a high profile issue. Now we know about the health damage the problem is becoming as unacceptable as subjecting people to second-hand smoking.

I appreciate that pollution control will cost money and that this must be paid for either by higher fares or by lower profits. I also expect most travellers on the ferry would be willing to pay extra to reduce the pollution. Certainly they should pay on the 'polluter pays principle'.

The speed with which this pollution issue is being tackled is totally inadequate and speaks to the lack of a pressure on The "Star" Ferry Company to take action. The new franchise agreement is an opportunity to correct this. **Please do not miss it.** Specifically I suggest:

1. The "Star" Ferry Company is required to report to the Government the amount of pollution it emits every three months. Also to post this information prominently in waiting area of its ferry piers. This publicity will add to public pressure for it to reduce pollution.
2. The "Star" Ferry Company is required to pay the Government a quarterly levy based on the amount of pollution it emits. This levy should come into force at a modest rate with the new franchise agreement on 1st April 2018. The levy rate should then increase significantly annually. The franchise agreement should include rules as to the extent to which the levy can be passed on to customers as a higher ticket price.

Financial and publicity incentives of this sort often greatly accelerate the speed with which companies reduce their pollution.

J Robert Gibson

Adjunct Professor; Division of Environment; HK University of Science and Technology

Fellow; Civic Exchange

Mob: (852) 6077 2975 Email : gibswong@gmail.com rgibson@ust.hk