



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to the Editor

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IMPLEMENT ALL 51 ACCIDENT PREVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) is disappointed with what happened near the 'Menora Tunnel accident' on 10 July 2016 because needless lives could have been lost when an express bus rammed into 10 cars. Conversely it could have been prevented with proactive participation by all parties. However, this did not seem to be case.

We have never been short of road accident prevention measure proposals over the years. In fact, after the Genting Highlands bus crash on 21 August 2013, an independent advisory panel to the Minister of Transport was established. The crash was described as "the worst in the country's fatal crash" that involved 37 fatalities including the driver. The panel subsequently submitted its report complete with 51 recommendations to the Minister in January 2014. How many of the recommendations have been implemented so far?

Among its recommendations is the installation of speed limiter for public service and goods vehicles. It also included the proposal for the speed limiter to be tested for its functionality and performance during vehicle roadworthiness inspections. Was this ever implemented?

In December 2013, the Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) encouraged public buses to be equipped with the global positioning system (GPS) to prevent them from speeding. However, the monitoring of the speed limit of their vehicles were left to the respective companies.

Six months later, in May 2014, only 112 of the 164 express bus operators in Peninsular Malaysia installed GPS devices. During the audit by SPAD it was found that some companies only installed the GPS devices to meet licensing requirements.

In 1998, the Cabinet wanted to make it mandatory for the installation of black boxes on buses to reduce road accidents. Eventually RTD backed down when bus operators opposed, saying that it was too expensive.

CAP still cannot understand why RTD backed down. Are human lives worth less than the cost of installing the device? In fact, bus operators would not be monitored like unruly kids if they had toed the line.

Initial reports claimed that the bus went out of control owing to brake failure. Vehicles going out of control and crashing is frequently in the news these days. Has any study been done on this?

There is also the SPAD Industrial Code of Practice (SPAD ICOP), started in 2012, which has a "pre-journey safety inspection by supervisors and drivers for every journey based on daily checklist prescribed

by SPAD”. Initial investigations revealed that the ‘Menora Tunnel accident’ was due to brake failure. How is the “pre-journey safety inspection” going to account for this? Moreover, 63 summonses were issued to 25 drivers of the express bus involved in the ‘Menora Tunnel accident’ between 2011 and 2015. The driver who was involved in the crash has 9 summonses to his name.

The Road Transport Department (RTD) and SPAD were blissfully unaware of this when such traffic offenses are supposed to be accessible online in the RTD system. Drivers would not be allowed to renew their licenses and the vehicle owner to renew the road tax and permit, particularly when they have such an impressive list of traffic offenses.

According to Deputy Transport Minister Datuk Ab Aziz Kaprawi, the three major enforcement agencies – the police, RTD and SPAD – are not linked to a common system to share information on offenders, including drivers of commercial vehicles. Each is working on a different platform and hence there is no system to synchronise the information of traffic offenders.

It is nothing new because the 2013 Genting Highlands crash report highlighted this weakness.

So, why was the setback not rectified? This lack of cohesion between government departments allow people who are unfit to operate public transport services and drivers who are not supposed to helm the steering wheel to take busloads of passengers for years.

Currently RTD personnel are going undercover to nab errant bus drivers flouting traffic rules but this is not a permanent solution when the perennial problems involving bus companies, their drivers and the questionable road worthiness of the vehicles are not addressed.

CAP is also keen to know when SPAD will make it mandatory for the express buses and their drivers to adopt the Safety Star Grading system. This will allow commuters to decide which express bus they wish to choose, much like the grading system that we see in coffee shops.

According to SPAD’s 2014 statistics, there were 4,534 express buses; 5,158 tour buses; and 736 chartered buses operating in the country. There were 198 express bus operators, 141 chartered bus companies, and 896 tour bus businesses. With such a big fleet of buses and number of companies, it is a ticking time-bomb for another accident to happen unless the government has the political will to rectify whatever is ailing the bus transport industry.

CAP demands the implementation of all the 51 recommendations found in the 2013 Genting Highlands bus crash report by the Ministry of Transport so as to stop unnecessary and preventable deaths on the road.

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