

Cargo transport links need improvements 5.6

By OLIVIA SIN

HONGKONG'S transport and shipping services should be developed in a co-ordinated manner to better serve the increasing cargo flow between the territory and China, a transport specialist said yesterday.

Gerry Fields, deputy general manager of Hongkong Air Cargo Terminals Ltd, said the presently weak linkage between rail and port facilities was proving to be an increasing obstacle to the expansion of bilateral trade.

He said a container terminal with direct rail and road transport links and within easy reach of the port should be set up in the New Territories, where congestion is not yet a major problem.

He said the Kowloon Canton Railway Corp's plan to redevelop its Hunghom yard and its studies into providing a rail link with the container port were praiseworthy.

But he said the densely populated Hunghom area

was not suitable as a centre for railway operations.

"Any development of rail-head facilities would lead to an increase in trucking operations on roads which are already overcrowded," he said.

Mr Field said a working group comprising government officials and representatives of the various sectors of the transport industry should be set up to develop better integrated surface operations in cargo transport.

He also urged the Hongkong and Chinese governments to take a closer look at the serious congestion at the border checkpoints, where customs inspections on both sides had seriously hampered the flow of traffic.

Mr Fields said Hongkong and China could draw on the experience of Europe in facilitating cargo flow among various countries.

He said that despite massive increases in the number of flights between major cities in Europe in 1970s, cargo capacity was actually limited.

The emergence of express trucking services was what solved Europe's problem.

In particular, he said the TIR Convention to which most European countries are signatories set the rules for bonded vehicles that cross borders in Europe, permitting free movement of goods and avoidance customs controls en route.

Under the system, goods are checked by customs in the so-called inland clearance depots instead of at crowded border checkpoints.

Mr Fields said those depots also pave the way for the formation of integrated transport operations by providing convenient links between rail, port and road traffic.

He said KCR's Hunghom redevelopment should be transferred to the New Territories, and a container terminal should be included in the scheme to provide a better link between rail and port facilities.

Should Hongkong and China agree to ease the cus-

toms process, some kind of inland clearance depot could be housed in the KCR building for cargo discharge and customs formalities, he said, adding that the border working group comprising representatives from both governments should start studying the issue.

Sea links remain the most important for trade between Hongkong and China.

Last year more than half the cargo traffic between the two was shipped by sea.

Official figures show that incoming cargo via railway last year totalled 1.38 million tonnes, whereas outgoing cargo reached 203,273 tonnes.

He said this indicated an imbalance in cargo flow between the two regions and that cargo space in the railway system heading towards China had not been fully used.

About 3.63 million tons of cargo were transported between the two areas by sea last year, while 2.684 million tonnes travelled on roads.