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\$18b reclamation faces long delay

By Rosa Ocampo

THE reclamation in Central/Wan Chai faces indefinite delay as some components of the \$127 billion port and replacement airport may be shelved for lack of time and money.

A delay would deal a big blow to the property market as there are practically no more free sites in core Central for new buildings and recreational facilities.

Secretary for Planning, Lands and Environment, Graham Barnes, said yesterday the 160-hectare reclamation depended on the progress of the planned port and replacement airport at Chek Lap Kok.

But one of the project components - a railway linking Chek Lap Kok Airport with Hongkong Island - could be scrapped or postponed for one year. This would mean a corresponding de-

lay in the \$18 billion Central/Wan Chai reclamation.

Mr Barnes said the railway was still being designed and the decision to proceed with the project would hinge on demand for it.

He also said some construction programmes related to the Port and Airport Development Strategy (PADS) would be delayed and ongoing ones slowed, including a home ownership scheme (HOS) in Junk Bay.

The "timetable for the reclamation has never been firm in any case", he said.

The reclamation project has been hit by delays but a new schedule has been set for middle of next year. However, Mr Barnes said the timetable "depends very much" on the decision whether to push through with the railway linking Chek Lap Kok to Hongkong Island.

The reclamation would be "much slower than we're originally thinking if PADS does not go ahead", he said.

He added the delay in the reclamation would be due not only to resource constraints, but also to the fact other reclamation works were going on at the same time.

As planned, the \$18 billion reclamation would create more than 160 hectares in Central, Wan Chai and Causeway Bay - beefing up supply of prime land in the three districts.

The Central/Wan Chai project has a lower priority compared to the West Kowloon reclamation, which is to start soon. The latter would create 320 hectares to support PADS-related projects, including a proposed Western Harbour Crossing, the Central-Lok Ma Chau Route 3 trunk road,

and a cross-harbour link of the airport railway.

"If we don't go ahead with the West Kowloon reclamation as a result of PADS, then the Central/Wan Chai project will come in higher in priority," Mr Barnes said.

"But things are bound to go ahead with West Kowloon roads and railways in connection with the new airport."

Mr Barnes said the Government would make sure the ongoing construction projects to be held back would not lead to losses.

It was "a question of making sure our existing expenditures was not wasted, and this depends on the stage of the project you are developing", he said.

But another problem for Hongkong is China's reservations on the enormous capital needed for projects under PADS.