

Backdown on \$100m road pricing study

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Transport officials have backed down over part of a \$100 million study into the proposed use of electronic road pricing.

Assistant Commissioner for Transport Lee Shu-chee said yesterday that a section of the study focusing on technical evaluation of the project would be dropped.

The move follows the department's failure to win support for the study from the Legislative Council transport panel last week, although Secretary for Transport Haider Barma insisted it was economical.

Panel members said that the price would be too high if the system could not go ahead after the study, which has been divided into two

parts - system and pricing strategy, and technical evaluation.

The two separate parts were to be carried out simultaneously in a period of two years by an appointed consultant prior to a period of public consultation.

It is understood that the technical evaluation, which would involve asking contractors to devise a tailor-made system for trial in Hong Kong, would end up costing more than half of the money budgeted for the study.

The department would only propose a study on the system and pricing strategy, which would start at the end of this year and take about a year to complete.

It would then launch a public consultation which would decide whether a tech-

nical evaluation should also be commissioned.

"In this case, the evaluation may not be a tailor-made one but inviting contractors to use the presently available systems and equipment for tests," Mr Lee said.

"By doing so, the Government does not need to shoulder the high costs of testing a brand-new system."

An application for funding from the Legislative Council Finance Committee scheduled for next month might be delayed due to the change, Mr Lee said.

He said the amount of money that could be saved from the revision was expected to be substantial.

Electronic road pricing is a system which monitors the entry of vehicles into certain traffic zones.