

Approval given for railway contracts

MAY SIN-MI HON

Legislators yesterday gave the go-ahead for \$230 million of consultancy contracts for the Western Corridor Railway.

The nine technical studies will help the Government determine whether it will accept the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation's (KCRC) proposal, the Secretary for Transport, Gordon Siu Kwing-chue, said.

Mr Siu said China would be consulted through the Joint Liaison Group before a final decision was made.

The chief executive-designate, to be elected at the end of the year, would also be briefed on the project.

It is expected the nine consultancy reports will be completed in eight months.

Contracts for a further 11 technical studies are still to be awarded.

Ian McPherson, the KCRC's West Rail Division director, said he was confident of keeping the cost of the 20 studies at \$750 million.

Although legislators gave their support to the awarding of the contracts, some accused the KCRC of supplying misleading information about the costs.

"The contracts were just awarded in phases," Samuel Wong Ping-wai, who represents the engineering sector, said.

But Mr McPherson denied that awarding the contracts in two stages was window dressing.

He said part of the study had to be carried out first to refine the rail alignment which was urgently required to minimise the difficulty in the land resumption exercise.

Mr Siu, who sits on the KCRC board, promised to monitor the awarding of contracts to ensure money was not wasted on unnecessary studies.

He said the Government planned to set up a high-level committee to oversee the implementation of three railway projects including the Western Corridor Railway.

It would be similar to the steering committee headed by the Chief Secretary monitoring the progress of airport core projects.

The KCRC board meeting last Monday agreed to set up a new West Rail Project Committee to supervise the project.

The committee will include the two government directors and three other directors, Frank Pong Fai, Moses Cheng Mo-chi and Eleanor Ling.

Mr Siu said the administration was also considering the establishment of an office similar to the New Airport Projects Co-ordination Office to co-ordinate the construction work.