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\$29b road, rail program unveiled

A COMPREHENSIVE plan to solve Hongkong's chronic traffic congestion was thrown open for public comment yesterday with no promises that traffic jams would go away despite massive road and rail building programs.

The plan envisages a \$29-billion road and rail building program which includes the construction of two more harbour crossings and new trunk roads and rail extensions.

Drastic measures such as higher taxes on vehicle ownership and fuel are also proposed to curb growth in the

number of vehicles and regulate traffic.

A new form of the controversial Road Pricing Scheme, rejected by the public in 1985, has been suggested.

The 45-page document, entitled "Moving into the 21st Century", warns that even with currently committed transport projects, congestion will continue to build up after 1991.

Without further measures to restrict ownership or usage, the number of private cars and motorcycles will increase from 144,000 to 363,000 between 1986

and 2001 while goods vehicles are expected to increase from 84,000 to 202,000 during the same period.

From 1986 to 2001, peak hour traffic speeds in the New Territories, Hongkong Island and Kowloon are projected to reduce substantially, from 33 to 15 kilometres per hour, 22 to 12 kph and 22 to 15 kph respectively.

The major congestion areas would be the cross harbour links, Lion Rock Tunnel, Tate's Cairn Tunnel, Tuen Mun Road and Tolo Highway.

The Green Paper has been drafted based on the

Second Comprehensive Transport Study which was commissioned in 1986 to project the growth in transport demand up to 2001.

The public will be given four months to comment on the document, before detailed proposals are submitted to the Executive Council.

Secretary for Transport, Mr Michael Leung Man-kin, said yesterday the road and rail projects were tailored to meet the anticipated need for linking the new towns

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and the urban areas, and providing additional harbour crossings and cross border routes.

"But we simply cannot build ourselves out of congestion," he said.

Improvements will mainly be in the trunk roads.

"Traffic conditions on local and distributor roads, however, are expected to deteriorate even assuming moderate economic growth and completion of the proposed highway projects," said Mr Leung.

This called for constant upgrading of public transport services and management measures which aimed at more efficient use of road space, said Mr Leung.

Although increasing vehicle ownership and fuel taxes are recommended to manage road use, the actual rates of increase are not suggested in the Green Paper.

Mr Leung explained that the Government had no preconceived idea on any options because the administration wanted to consult the public on the broad principles only.

He said that depending on the future economic development of Hongkong, there could be different combinations of the suggest-

ed measures, and the administration might choose one or more of the options.

Commissioner for Transport, Mr James So Yiu-cho, said the Government would conduct regular review to see which measures should be introduced.

Proposed infrastructure programs mooted in the Green Paper include road projects estimated at \$20 billion for the next decade and rail projects at \$9 billion for the first half of the 1990s.

First priorities will be given to the following road projects:

- The Western Harbour Crossing (WHC), the highest priority project.

- A section of Route Seven on Hongkong Island from Sai Ying Pun to Kennedy Town to provide adequate connections for the WHC.

- The Central and Wan Chai Bypass project which links the Island Eastern Corridor with the new Central-Wan Chai reclamation.

- Route Three, the West Kowloon Expressway.

- Improvements to South Kwai Chung Road which forms part of Route Three.

- The Hunghom Bypass extension and the second airport tunnel.

- The extension of Route Seven from Kennedy Town to Aberdeen.

The proposed railway projects include:

- A Mass Transit Railway extension to Junk Bay.

- A rail link connecting Northwest New Territories and Tsuen Wan.

- A third rail harbour crossing linking Yau Ma Tei and Fortress.

Mr Leung said the Government would conduct another comprehensive study on Hongkong's rail network towards the end of the year.

The study, which will take into account the decision on the Port and Airport Development Strategy and the Metroplan, will look at Hongkong's transport need until the year 2001.

Last night, the consultative document was criticised as "bad, inadequate and highly unlikely" by Mr Phil Taylor, chief executive of the Hongkong Automobile Association, which represents private car owners.

"It only mentions a handful of grandiose projects but doesn't say anything about the overall tackling of the traffic problems," said Mr Taylor.

He said private car owners made up only 19 per cent of the road traffic in Hong-

kong and a tax increase for private car owners to curb the current rapid growth was senseless since private cars were not a major road problem.

Mr Taylor also noted that proposed fuel taxes and tunnel tolls would not deter motorists from using the road and certainly would not solve the traffic problem.

The chairman of the Joint Conference of Concern on Taxi and Minibus Affairs, Mr Choi Kwok-hung, yesterday attacked the Green Paper for being unfair to minibus operators.

He said the Government should not apply further restrictions to red minibuses' servicing area, which was seen by the Government as a solution to the problem of road congestion.

Mr Harry Dimitriou, lecturer on transport policy and urban planning at Hongkong University, said the proposals failed to include possible water transport strategies, a mechanism to gauge public opinion on highway and railway proposals, and concern for environmental consequences.

But he welcomed the increased role of MTR links as a means to further transport decentralisation.