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\$3m bill for crumbling road

By C.K. LAU

A \$3 million bill for resurfacing defective sections of the Tuen Mun Highway is to be borne by the Government — for the time being.

But the Government hopes to get the money back from whoever is responsible for the defects.

Tests are under way aimed at discovering the real cause of the defects, although officials acknowledge the culprit will be hard to identify.

The repair work is scheduled to begin on October 22 and is expected to take three months.

The work will inconvenience motorists as sections of the westbound stretch will be restricted to one lane traffic.

The defects were first noticed by the highway project's consultant engineer just three months after the stretch — the second stage of the highway project — opened in May last year.

Engineers believe either a wrong mix of material was used or the material itself was defective, allowing the road surface to disintegrate under the high density traffic.

A 1.5-km stretch between Tsing Lung Tau and Sham Tseng was so badly eroded that one lane had to be sealed off in April.

Surface disintegration was also found on two other long stretches near Brother's Point and Perowne Barracks and other shorter sections.

The affected stretches total about five kilometres.

With other defective sections expect-

ed to come to light, the repair bill may top \$3 million.

Although the Government blames the original contractor for the defects, the contractor has refused to carry out repairs, arguing that the Government accepted the finished product, defective or not.

But highway engineers feel the work can wait no longer and the road must be repaired immediately before further disintegration occurs.

A senior engineer at the Highways Office's research and development unit, Mr Fred Teague, said samples of the material used in the project have been sent to Britain for confirmatory analysis.

Mr Teague said the Government hopes the analysis results will show who should pay the repair bill.

His colleague, senior engineer Mr H.K. Wong of the consultant management division, said the Government's position is that it will take action against those responsible depending on the results of the analysis.

But, added Mr Teague, the interpretation of the results will be a lengthy exercise — and he was doubtful whether a firm conclusion would ever be drawn.

Another section in Chai Wan Kok, just under one kilometre long, was also found to be defective, but the work there was carried out by another contractor.

Mr Teague said the Highways Office is negotiating with this contractor, who

is likely to carry out the repair work.

The Tuen Mun Highway repairs will be Hongkong's first ever major maintenance work on a high speed road and as such poses particular problems, said Mr Graham Bamber, an engineer with the research and development unit.

Traffic congestion and safety are the main areas that will need special attention.

The work will be carried out in one-kilometre sections in which two lanes will be closed — one for repairs and the other as a safety buffer zone separating workmen from the remaining lane left open for traffic.

Motorists will be advised to use Castle Peak Road as an alternative route, which will siphon traffic off the highway and thus reduce congestion, said Mr Bamber.

He said police found during a trial closure that traffic was delayed for about 15-20 minutes on the first day.

But the congestion was self-regulating and the delay shortened as motorists switched to Castle Peak Road on subsequent days of the trial closure.

An alternative was considered involving using one of the eastbound lanes for westbound traffic but this idea was dropped as the eastbound and westbound lanes are on different levels along much of the highway.

This option would also have required the erection of a large number of traffic signs and motorists might have had difficulty adjusting to the diversion, Mr Bamber said.