

\$billion price tag on new rail system

Tramways

By **KENNETH KO**

Consultants are putting the final touches to a feasibility report on Hong-kong's light rail vehicle system, estimated to cost between \$1 billion and \$2 billion.

The Government expects the consultants, Martin Voorhees and Associates, to submit its \$8.5 million report either at the end of next month or in early December.

Known as the "Island Corridor Strategy Implementation Studies," the report is being compiled with the assistance of the Public Works

Department, the Transport Department, and the Mass Transit Railway Corpn.

According to the PWD's acting Principal Highway Engineer, Dr Nip Kam-fan, most of the double-track system from Kennedy Town to Shaukiwan will remain on the surface.

Some sections, such as in Central where surface traffic is heavy, will go underground.

"We are not considering putting the track on structures," he said.

"We don't know how many sections will have to be underground yet — we have to strike a balance between convenience and cost."

Dr Nip also said that the system will involve the use of two-car trains which are faster and have a bigger capacity than the present trams, which will be replaced.

"Each two-car train will carry 500 passengers," he said.

If approved by the Executive Council, the system is expected to be implemented in stages.

In the first stage, the light rail vehicles will operate along a track segregated from other traffic and pedestrians for most of its length.

In the second stage, the system will be diverted into a tunnel in Central which will afford interchange with the MTR and release road space on the surface for use by buses.

At this stage, the line may also be extended to Chaiwan.

If circumstances demand a future increase in passenger capacity, further surface sections may be diverted underground, leading ultimately to the creation of the "Island Line" of the MTR.

The Executive Council endorsed this strategy in June last year, subject to the demonstration of its technical feasibility.