

P. C. M. P.

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# All systems go for rail

By BARRY CHOI

The board of the Mass Transit Railway Corp is expected to confirm the commercial viability of the proposed \$2.5 billion light rail transit system which will run from Chaiwan to Western.

A team of financial and technical specialists from the corporation has just completed the viability study.

This study and another one completed by the consultancy firm of Martin Voorhees and Associates which cost \$8.5 million will be jointly considered by the MTRC board on Monday.

The board's comments and decision will then be forwarded to the Government to enable it to submit the package to the Executive Council for a final decision in March.

MTRC chairman Mr Norman Thompson yesterday said he would not divulge the report's findings because to do so would pre-empt the whole board's decision.

But indications are that the board will most likely agree to the scheme, which will mean that the MTRC will run the system when it is completed.

Deputy Secretary for the Environment Dr Richard Butler has in the past several months come out in strong support of the system.

He pointed out that the Government's decision last year to undertake detailed feasibility investigations was based on a transport study which had looked at many possible solutions to the problems of the corridor.

These included, for each solution, an appraisal of the cost of disruption during and after implementation.

That transport study concluded that the introduction of LRVs, leading to the development of an underground mass transit railway, offers the best solution.

It also concluded that construction of a full MTR system is not even the second best solution, principally because of the huge capital investment (involving more than three times the cost of the first phase of the LRT system) and the massive disruption caused by constructing MTR stations.

In the initial phase of the LRT system, LRVs would operate on streets, along a segregated right-of-way, for much of the corridor.

However, in Central District, they would operate in tunnels linking them to the Admiralty and Pedder stations of the MTR.

This phase could be in operation by 1984, when the LRVs would at least halve the journey times and double the capacity of the existing trams.

In the second phase, the Central District tunnels of the LRT would be extended to provide the corridor with a wholly underground railway.

It is not expected that travel conditions in the corridor would require this stage of the LRT to be implemented before the late 1990s.

Dr Butler said a principal advantage of this strategy, which also involves, among other things, bus and traffic management improvements, is that it would result in quite early and significant improvements in public transport in the corridor, at a fraction of the cost of the full MTR Island Line.

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