

## All set for a 1741 second crossing

A second harbour crossing for both the Mass Transit Railway and vehicular traffic has always had a high priority, and the news that Executive Council has approved this venture will be widely welcomed. Many may feel that the Western part of the harbour would have been a more logical location for the tunnel, bearing in mind the position of the major industrial town of Kwai Chung-Tsun Wan and the container terminal. But the prohibitive cost and the technical complications all but ruled out this option.

It will be recalled that the Government originally considered a bridge across Lyemun for vehicular traffic. But the interference this would have caused to the instrument landing system at Kai Tak dictated that the crossing would have to be submerged. And it makes good financial sense to undertake a combined venture for both rail and road so that significant savings can be achieved.

The rail link will now ensure Hongkong has a "Circle Line," like the London Underground, which will give people in East Kowloon and the new town of Junk Bay, now being developed, far speedier access to eastern and central areas of Hongkong. This should do much to improve land values in this area.

The road tunnel will also bring far more traffic to the Island Eastern Corridor and will compel the Government to give closer attention to a Central bypass road for traffic heading west.

The popularity of the MTR has been clearly seen with the opening of the Island Line and more and more people will be drawn to live in Shauiwan and Chaiwan because of it. The building of a second cross-harbour tunnel will have much the same effect on Yau Tong, Junk Bay and other areas of east Kowloon.

The road tunnel will also benefit the industrial areas. And, most important, it will help to ease congestion on the existing vehicular tunnel by diverting traffic heading for the eastern districts and even attracting some heading for Tsun Wan which will use the fast bypass roads in north Kowloon.

There have been complaints from contractors that the original tender notice stipulated only a four-lane road tunnel and that some bidders tendered only for that. The notice did, however, invite innovations including a rail link and most contractors would have covered both options either separately or in a single submission. In any case the Government had made fairly clear in recent months that it favoured a rail tunnel.

It is hoped most contractors rose to the challenge and proposed an imaginative solution involving road and rail. It will be interesting to see how the costs of the project will be split between the MTR and the second tunnel operators. Logically, the Cross-Harbour Tunnel Company should have a strong foothold at the door because of the expertise it has demonstrated in operating the existing tunnel. It also seems hardly justifiable having three vehicular tunnel authorities. And an important consideration will be toll levels proposed for the latest venture.

Hongkong welcomes the announcement because it demonstrates a firm conviction in our own development which must surely impress outsiders that we have faith in our long-term future. It will also confirm Hongkong as one of the most modern cities in the world with a transport system that will be the envy of many of its rivals.