

\$5 toll plan to cut Lion Rock jam-up

Easing sought until Tate tunnel ready

By Jessie Yim

MOTORISTS may have to pay at least \$5 to use the Lion Rock Tunnel during peak hours, if a Transport Department plan to impose the toll is found feasible.

The plan, aimed at deterring motorists from using the tunnel during rush hours, is one of the options before a consultancy firm which has been asked to study ways to ease the traffic congestion at Lion Rock until Tate's Cairn Tunnel opens in early 1992.

Another option under consideration seeks to convert a section of Tai Po Road, that links Sha Tin with Kowloon, into one-way traffic during peak hours.

Assistant Commissioner for Transport Richard Meakin told *The Standard* that a peak hour toll could be one of the most promising measures to ease tunnel congestion.

"It makes very good sense to have a peak hour toll to encourage people (who have a choice) to travel off peak hours," Mr Meakin said.

The assistant commissioner said that a toll of more than \$5 during peak hours will be more effective than just raising the toll for the whole day.

According to past experience, he said, a \$2 increase may see a 10 percent reduction in demand, which will help only marginally.

He also admitted that as traffic grows every day, the effect of an all-day toll increase could be maintained only for a short time.

There has been a suggestion recently that the current all-day toll of \$3 be raised to \$5 to discourage people from using the tunnel.

According to the latest estimates provided by the Territory Development Department, Sha Tin's current population of 400,000 will rise to 710,000 by the mid-1990s.

Mr Meakin said the consultants will conduct a comprehensive review of all possible solutions and are likely to come up with a package of measures early next year.

Other options under consideration include the further widening of Tai Po Road to add one more lane to the two-lane road, and a "tidal flow" traffic arrangement in Lion Rock Tunnel Road in which lane directions are reversed to cater to the busier direction.

At present, a bus-only lane to Kowloon has been planned on the Lion Rock Tunnel Road, and work is underway to straighten the weaving Tai Po Road.

Mr Meakin said he is not very much in favour of re-routing in Tai Po Road. "It would certainly cause inconvenience to some people," he said.

Meanwhile, a Transport Advisory Committee member, Dr Stephen Tang, told *The Standard* that he is in favour of a peak hour toll, but rejected an across the board toll increase because the present toll level is already quite high.

The chairman of a joint traffic committee for Sha Tin, Tai Po and the North District, Mr Choy Kan-pui, rejected any form of toll increase.

A Sha Tin District Board member, Mr Wong Hong-chung, who held the same opinion, said any toll increase will only penalise those who are unable to afford high tolls.

"The answer is to make the best use of the road capacity we now have."