

\$1.5m tunnel traffic study not necessary, say police

By BRIAN WONG

NEW Territories police have criticised the Government's decision to spend \$1.5 million on a study of traffic problems in the Lion Rock tunnel, and dismissed plans to extend a bus lane through the congested link.

A confidential memorandum prepared by the Sha Tin district police headquarters urges that the Transport Department abolish the southbound bus lane between World-Wide Gardens and the toll plaza, which was introduced in May in a bid to ease traffic snarl-ups.

The document, a copy of which has been obtained by the *South China Morning Post*, warns that a proposal to lengthen the bus through-way down Hung Mui Kuk Road and into Che Kung Miu Road at a cost of \$1.2 million would be expensive and unworkable.

It says: "The existing bus only lane scheme, implemented on a trial basis, has been a negligible success for the bus companies but caused yet further delays for other tunnel users.

"Other schemes must be experimented with. Above all it must be accepted that no scheme will solve the problem. The best that can be achieved is an alleviation, but there is no reason why this cannot be substantial."

The August 26 memorandum to the police Traffic Wing also recommends that southbound toll booths be



Traffic queues as usual at the Lion Rock tunnel.

Picture by SAM CHAN

abolished in favour of a higher levy - set at \$5 - on northbound traffic. The existing charge is \$3 per journey.

The police argue that any revenue losses would be offset by the cost-effectiveness of smoother traffic flow through the tunnel.

"Abolition of the toll would result in traffic approaching the tunnel from the north not having to split into so many lanes at the booths and then merge to enter the tunnel," the memo says.

"Vehicles travelling north would not be held up at

all once they left the tunnel. The Transport Department would not need so many staff to operate the tunnel, thereby engendering savings on staff salaries and on-costs."

Other major features set out in the police traffic control plan included:

- Restricting traffic from Tolo Highway to the tunnel's southbound three lanes to two, which would be segregated by double white lines, directing highway traffic into the outer lane and traffic from Lion Rock Tunnel Road, to the inner.

- Closure of the turn-off

from Hung Mui Kuk Road on southbound lanes.

- Closure of the Hung Mui Kuk Road entrance to southbound lanes slightly beyond the tunnel car park entrance.

Police sources familiar with the tunnel situation said yesterday their recommendations would remove the need for the \$1.5 million consultants' report on the tunnel congestion, commissioned by the Government.

Although traffic would move more slowly, hold-ups would generally be reduced.

The sources said the ad-

ministration was reacting too hastily in order to be seen to be "doing something" about the problem.

Initiatives such as the bus lane were ill advised, the source warned, and had proved to be largely ineffective.

Police strongly oppose extension of the bus lane along Hung Mui Kuk Road, the nearest access link to the tunnel, because the channelling of the heavy bus traffic into a single lane would create even more disruption.

They believe that there would be more advantages in limiting the number of access roads.

The Sha Tin police say that much of the congestion at World-Wide Gardens, where Hung Mui Kuk Road joins Lion Rock Tunnel Road, could be prevented by re-routing all traffic wishing to use the tunnel via Che Kung Miu Road.

However, sources said considerable reluctance could be expected from the Transport Department to abolish the bus lane as the scheme was the department's main hope of solving some of the tunnel's problems.

Transport Commissioner Mr James So confirmed yesterday a proposal to waive the tunnel toll would be submitted to the Executive Council for discussion in the next few weeks.

But motorists would have to put up with the delays until the new Tate's Cairn tunnel was completed in 1992.

Goods vehicles to face new annual inspection

ALL cars over five years old will have to pass the Government's annual vehicle inspection from next year.

Light goods vehicles, blamed recently for the sharp rise in accidents, will also have to undergo the annual inspection for the first time.

The Transport Commissioner, Mr James So, said yesterday the long-term objective of the Government

was to inspect all cars over three years old, but with limited resources this would have to be introduced gradually.

At present all cars over six years old have to pass the inspections that test roadworthiness and safety aspects.

Mr So said it was necessary to inspect light goods vehicles because they had contributed to almost one

quarter of total traffic accidents.

The number of light goods vehicles with laden weights of up to 1.9 tonnes numbered 68,000, making one third of the total number of licensed vehicles.

Mr So said he expected inspections on the light goods vehicles to be implemented by the middle of next year after the Transport Advisory Committee and the

Executive Council had endorsed them.

He said agreements with Government-designated private garages had been reached to include the annual inspection of light goods vehicles.

The scheme of car inspections by private garages, introduced early last year, had been successful and about 42,000 inspections had been carried out last year.

Mr So said that when the new computerised car testing centre at Kowloon Bay was operational in 1990, it would enable the department to fulfil its objective of examining all goods vehicles.

He told a Kowloon West Rotary luncheon that the objectives of vehicle examination were to improve road safety, to aid the smooth traffic flow and contribute to environmental protection.