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\$6 toll planned to cut tunnel traffic

By Wilson Wong

THE Transport Department hopes to launch a one-way toll system at the Lion Rock Tunnel from April to relieve the worsening traffic congestion.

A \$6 toll will be collected from Sha Tin-bound traffic using the tunnel, while Kowloon-bound traffic will travel free.

The aim is to speed up south-bound traffic by eliminating the toll-paying delay. Officials hope it will also reduce north-bound traffic and allow the morning "tidal flow" period, during which a north-bound lane is allotted to south-bound traffic, to be prolonged.

The plan is expected to receive approval soon from the Executive Council.

Transport officials hope the system will reduce tunnel congestion for two or three years, while work continues on the new Tate's Cairn tunnel.

Completion of the Tate's Cairn tunnel linking Sha Tin and Diamond Hill in 1992 is considered the ultimate solution to

the traffic congestion at Lion Rock.

Mr Richard Meakin, the Acting Deputy Commissioner for Transport, said the department is preparing traffic alleviation proposals to be submitted to the Executive Council (Exco).

"It's up to Exco to decide which option will be the best. It's better not to anticipate the outcome of Exco's discussions at the moment," he said.

The volume of traffic passing through the tunnel has increased to 3,900 an hour, exhausting Transport Department efforts to cope with it.

"The one-way toll system is a possible way out before the opening of Tate's Cairn tunnel in 1992, but it requires the widening of Tai Po Road to make the scheme a success," a senior transport official said.

Tai Po Road is now being widened from two to three lanes. The additional lane is expected to handle 1,000 vehicles an hour after its completion next August.

The completion of the Route 5 trunk road linking Sha Tin and Tsuen Wan in 1989 is another measure which may help reduce congestion.

The one-way toll system was tested in a one-month trial last year. Congestion was reduced, although there were complaints that the reduction was not enough.

Officials believe the combination of the toll and the increased capacity on Tai Po Road and Route 5 will increase the improvement.

The scheme was widely supported by district board members in the eastern New Territories after the experiment last year.

A suggestion that trucks should be banned from using the tunnel has not won the favour of officials.

"It is not fair to prohibit any type of vehicle from using the tunnel. A curb on trucks could also affect the economy of the territory," said one official.