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All KCR journeys to cost more

Lowu rail fare 'to be doubled'

By FRANCIS LI

China travellers will bear the brunt of a new fare increase by the Kowloon-Canton Railway — the doubling of a one-way ticket between Kowloon and Lowu to \$10.

And it has been learned that the KCR Corp'n has also proposed a fare rise for inner and outer suburban train services.

Sources said the Government was informed of the proposed new increases last week and the effective date has been tentatively set for early next month.

The KCR Corp'n's public relations officer, Mr Jonathan Yu, last night refused to confirm or deny the new fare structures.

But he said a fare increase "is inevitable" because of the huge indebtedness of the KCR Corp'n.

He said an announcement will be made as soon as practicable.

While refusing to divulge details of the whole package, sources indicated that a 50 cents rise will apply mostly on inner suburban services between Shatin and Kowloon. The existing fare is \$2.

It is believed that fares between Kowloon, Taipo and Sheung Shui will go up by \$1. The present fare from Kowloon to Taipo is \$3.50 and from Kowloon to Sheung Shui \$4.

But the biggest increase is expected to hit Lowu-bound passengers, with the present \$5 ticket doubled.

The hefty rise is understood to be deemed justified by the KCR Corp'n management because it could hardly be categorised as a domestic service.

Unlike people using the railway to reach their homes in various parts of the New Territories, virtually all people heading for Lowu cross the border into China — rendering it an international railway service.

The railway is the major bulk carrier for China visitors, particularly during Chinese festivals.

About 700,000 used the railway to get to Lowu during a 17-day period over the Lunar New Year holiday.

It is the stated policy of the KCR Corp'n, which has to achieve financial viability through strict commercial practices, that it prefers small annual fare adjustments to a big increase over a longer period.

The KCR Corp'n enjoys the same privilege as the MTR Corp'n in that any fare rise it seeks needs no approval from the Government.

The KCR Corp'n last increased fares by 25 to 85 per cent in June last year immediately after the 34-km double-tracked electrified line fully opened.

It is believed the rapid build-up of patronage — 190,000 people a day at the end of last year, about 18 per cent higher than projected — has already had a positive effect on the railway's financial forecast.