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All aboard for an improved service

By FRANCIS LI

The number of rush-hour trains serving Sheung Shui and Taipo will be increased from Sunday.

And the long-awaited joint stored-value ticket system, which will enable holders to use Hongkong's two railways with one ticket, is scheduled to start in October.

The moves were announced by the acting managing director of the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corp'n, Mr Gordon Graham, yesterday.

He told a press conference that peak train frequencies between Sheung Shui, Taipo and Kowloon will be increased by up to 50 per cent from July 1.

Up to 12 trains per hour will operate between Sheung Shui, now the second busiest station behind the Kowloon terminal, against six at present.

The number of rush-hour trains operating between Taipo and Kowloon will be increased to 16 per hour, compared with the current 12.

Off-peak services will remain unchanged, Mr Graham said.

He also revealed that the joint stored-value tickets usable both on the KCR and the Mass Transit Railway system could be on sale from October 25.

The cost of introducing the system will be \$3 million — the major portion of which will be shouldered by the KCR Corp'n for modifying its computer software to handle the new tickets.

However, Mr Graham ruled out the possibility of introducing discount fares during off-peak periods for holders of stored-value tickets — a tactic used by the MTR to attract more passengers.

He said the KCR does not have a high level of passenger loading difference between



Mr Graham

rush hours and off-peak times, as does the underground system.

The introduction of such a scheme would be unlikely to result in a rise in revenue.

However, Mr Graham said commuters will still be able to enjoy a discount purchase price for stored-value tickets, as under the present MTR scheme.

He said a \$50 joint stored-value ticket will entitle the holder to travel worth \$54.

The introduction of these tickets may also result in the disappearance of monthly tickets now sold by the KCR to regular commuters at a price equal to the fares of 40 journeys between two fixed destinations.

About 20,000 monthly tickets, which do not limit the number of trips made on each day, are sold each month.

But Mr Graham said the KCR Corp'n had not made up its mind whether a last-ride bonus would be awarded to holders of these joint tickets.

Purchasers of MTR stored-value tickets, from which is deducted the cost of each trip, can enjoy a ride

regardless of distance even if the residual ticket value is less than the fare required.

Referring to the new timetable, Mr Graham said the improved peak-hour frequencies have been made possible by extending the service of trains from Shatin to Taipo Market, and Taipo-bound trains to Sheung Shui.

As a result, no trains will terminate at Shatin.

To cater to New Territories residents who work in urban areas, Mr Graham said from Sunday the first train will leave Sheung Shui for Kowloon at 5.48 am, instead of 6.03 am.

The last train departing from Kowloon to Sheung Shui will also be 20 minutes later — at 11.52 pm.

Mr Graham said the introduction of the new timetable will coincide with the inauguration of the third through train between Hongkong and Canton.

The number of non-stop electric express trains to Lowu will be raised from one to two on Sundays and public holidays. Each weekday, there will be one express.

Mr Graham revealed that the KCR's daily patronage currently stands at 200,000 passengers, compared with 40,000 a day prior to the full electrification of the line last July.

The extra trains, he said, is just one of the steps being taken by the corporation to provide a "good value for money" service, in addition to a 95 per cent punctuality rate.