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Billion-dollar improvement plan for ^{17.12}KCR

By TAD STONER

THE Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation has announced a series of billion-dollar improvements and expansions to both its Light Rail Transit (LRT) system and its property interests.

The plans announced yesterday include:

- The construction of 1,900 flats above the Yuen Long light rail terminus, despite the presence of subterranean caverns that discouraged the initial developers of the project.

The project will take two years and cost between \$30 million and \$50 million more than the \$550 million originally estimated.

The go-ahead is expected by the middle of next month.

- The expansion of the goods yard at the Hunghom terminus in an effort to cope with a projected sixfold increase in traffic over the next 18 years.

Approval for the expansion, rumoured two years ago to cost \$6 billion, is expected by the end of the year.

- The elimination of between two and 10 LRT junctions on Castle Peak Road as part of an effort to improve both safety and transit time.

LRT authorities also said yesterday they could not guarantee that another collision of railway carriages would not happen, although they said the chances had been reduced following the implementation of four re-

commendations from an LRT operational review team.

Two carriages collided at Yau Oi Estate near Tuen Mun on October 10, injuring six people and resulting in the formation of the review team.

LRT director Joe Wade said yesterday the team had suggested automated routing control to prevent drivers unconsciously straying into areas not scheduled for service; increased warning signs and speed restrictions at nine junctions where railway carriages cross paths; alteration of the LRT stop lights to accord more closely with highway signals; and refresher training for all drivers every six months.

"All these short-term measures have now been implemented, while broader issues have also been considered," Mr Wade said.

"We are not confident that two light rail vehicles colliding could not happen again, but we are confident the likelihood has been reduced," he said.

Complaints about journey times have become prevalent among the system's 180,000 daily commuters and Mr Wade said reduction of road-rail junctions was vital to redress the problem.

"There are 17 junctions along the Castle Peak Road corridor.

"Some are very minor ones, while others serve individual factories or housing blocks.

"With the provision of

service roads along the west side of the corridor and if we did everything that was reasonable to do, without regard to cost, we could eliminate 10 of them," he said.

Meanwhile, KCRC managing director Peter Quick said Government approval of the corporation's application to begin development of the Yuen Long light rail terminus was expected in two to three weeks.

"One of our major concerns has been the delays involved in the work needed to investigate the caverns, which created some problems and there will be more cost for the foundation work, although that will not really affect the overall cost of the project too much," Mr Quick said.

Development of the site has long been planned, but in August last year the contractor, Leighton-MTA, which also built and tested the LRT, pulled out when it discovered subterranean cavities it said could jeopardise the safety of the project.

Sun Hung Kai Properties took over the partnership and after proposals to drill through the caverns to the rock substrata were approved by the Buildings Ordinance Office, development plans continued.

"The development will be a little larger than the one at the Tuen Mun Ferry Pier — about five blocks with 1,000 flats.

"Construction should begin by the middle of next year," Mr Quick said.