

\$20m tax plan for China trips

By Wilson Wong

FERRY passengers to China may have to pay a \$15 embarkation fee when the new Hong-kong-China terminal is completed.

The fees, which could total \$20 million a year, will help meet the cost of stationing a large force of Immigration and Customs officers there.

All China and Macau routes now using the Tai Kok Tsui Pier will transfer to the new terminal in Tsim Sha Tsui when it comes into operation early next summer.

The embarkation fee plan is not official yet, but government sources speak of it as a reality. The current thinking in the Transport Branch is that the fee will be \$15 per journey, the same as is paid by passengers leaving for Macau.

The Marine Department is to work out the details of the fee and the timing of its implementation.

It will hold talks with the ten

\$15 a head for new terminal passengers



operators already scheduled to use the new terminal, primarily to work out the procedure for adding the embarkation fees to the cost of tickets to China.

The Government will collect the fee payments from the shipping companies at the end of each month, similar to the prac-

tice for collecting Macau embarkation fees.

The Secretary for Security, Mr David Jeaffreson, revealed at a Legislative Council meeting two years ago that the Government planned to collect embarkation fees from China-bound passengers. It was later decided to delay the plan until the new Tsim Sha Tsui pier was completed because it would provide more facilities for passengers.

But shipping operators are worried about the planned fees. They fear the additional expense will reduce travel to China by Hongkong people.

Boat passengers from Hong-kong to China totalled 1,407,526 last year and there were already 1,110,201 in the first eight months of this year. The Government does not think the embarkation fee will cause the figures to drop.

Passengers to Macau already pay a \$15 departure tax, and the fee to leave Hongkong by air is \$120.

But there is no likelihood at present of travellers to China by land having to pay a fee.

A plan for a \$10 levy on people crossing at Lo Wu was dropped last year after China objected.

Under that scheme, Hopewell Holdings — a partner with China in developing the Lo Wu terminal — wanted to charge the levy to help recoup its investment.

But China, which objected to a private company levying a toll at a government checkpoint, eventually bought out Hopewell's share.