

S.A.M.P.

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A second man needed to find the 'faults'

A second expert should be called in to weigh the pros and cons of electronic road pricing (ERP), it was suggested yesterday.

Mr Chan King-wong, speaking at a meeting of Kowloon District Board, said the extra consultant should concentrate on the disadvantages so that "a more balanced picture" could be obtained.

The meeting was one of series organised by the Government to talk over the controversial scheme with district boards.

Those attending included the Secretary for Transport, Mr Alan Scott, and the ERP project director, Mr John Dawson.

Members watched a video stressing the merits of ERP but most still said they had their doubts that the \$350 million scheme would help ease traffic congestion.

Mr Scott said he was interested in the idea of bringing in a second consultant and would like to know if there were any professionals who would volunteer to do the job.

He denied that the Government was telling the public that one solution was better than another.

He said the "technical feasibility" of the scheme and

its "acceptability" were yet to be proved.

Mr Scott said the capital cost of introducing ERP — an average of about \$60 million a year — was much less than the annual expenditure of almost \$2 billion on new roads and flyovers.

Mr Dawson said he had discussed details of the scheme with five University of Hongkong academics and had tried to give them all the information they needed.

Board member Mr Wong Sik-kong said that if the system proved a success, taxis, which are exempt from charges, would crowd out the ERP zones.

Mr Scott said that although taxis would not be charged at the beginning, the exemption might be lifted later if necessary.

Another member, Mr Ng Siu-pang, said he thought Central was the only zone in which the system could be justified.

He said this was a political as well as transport issue in that the Government was anxious to win support of the district boards.

Due to the tight schedule of the meeting, Mr Scott accepted the chairman's advice to provide Mr Ng with a written reply afterwards.