

J.C.M.P.

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Another red light for ERP scheme

By FRANK CHOI

The Government's controversial Electronic Road Pricing scheme ran into another red light yesterday when officials explained the proposal to the North District Board.

It was the second straight "no" after the scheme was given the red light by the Wanchai District Board on Tuesday.

Yesterday's outcome was a surprise to many analysts and Government officials as New Territories district boards were previously supporters of the scheme.

North District Board members voted 13 to one against the plan at a special meeting. Two members abstained and three were absent.

The only support came from Mr Cheung Yan-lung, who is also an Unofficial member of the Legislative Council. He pledged his support before he made an early exit.

But his pledge was made on condition that the implementation should be delayed to allow more public debate.

Most members felt the public still had doubts about the scheme and suggested the Government delay a decision until 1987-88 pending another review.

They said the opening of the Mass Transit Railway Island Line would take some pressure off the busy roads.

Apart from human rights and privacy concerns, members' biggest worry was that the Government had failed to commit itself on whether the scheme would be extended to the New Territories in the future.

They also thought the scheme was not fair to motorists living within the ERP zone, leaving them with no option but to pay the charges.

One member, Mr Yuen Tak-tim, said the transport authorities were contradicting their own policies by curbing private car ownership in the past and now introducing the ERP scheme to "allow more people to enjoy owning a car."

Another member, Mr Cheung Hon-chung, doubted that the scheme could reduce the number of vehicles on the roads.

He said the scheme might help to remove 10 to 15 per cent of private cars, but a survey by the Crown Motor Co found that only 26.3 out of every 100 vehicles on busy roads are private cars, and a survey by another group found a level of 28.23.

"After taking 10 to 15 per cent of private cars off the roads, traffic would still be

congested as other modes of transport would quickly fill up the spaces," he said.

A Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport, Mr Michael Clancy, said after the meeting he was not surprised at the outcome as members were free to make their own judgments and they apparently opted for car ownership restraints instead of ERP.

Mr Clancy said some district board members still had misunderstandings about the scheme and some objected because they feared the unknown.

Earlier, he told the board that, with the implementation of the ERP scheme, annual licence fees for private cars could be greatly reduced, for instance, from the present \$3,750 to \$2,000 for cars with engine capacities of less than 2,000 cc.

He said the Government did not envisage extending the ERP scheme to the New Territories before 1991 as there were other means to cope with their problems, such as district traffic control and more new roads.

If car ownership continues to grow unchecked, he said, the Government would have to spend \$10 billion more on roads and traffic management on top of current commitments to accommodate the additional vehicles.