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AA gets ready to fight for right to drive

By RENU DARYANANI

The Automobile Association is preparing to do battle with the Government if the traffic flow in the Eastern District is not improved.

The AA's executive director, Mr Phil Taylor, plans to form one huge pressure group, comprising taxi, public light bus and goods vehicle drivers, against the Government's "bloody-minded" approach to traffic problems.

He also said the association will strive to increase its membership by 5,000 to 18,000 this year with a 30 per cent annual increase after that until it had 50,000 members.

"The more members we have, the stronger our bargaining position," he said.

"The situation where two-thirds of King's Road is taken away from private users for a Public Transport Priority Scheme is totally unacceptable to us. This is anti-motorist," he said.

The association has already contacted several transport operators, including two large goods vehicle fleet owners.

"They all feel as we do. It has become almost impossible for taxis and public light buses to work economically in the area. Goods vehicle owners are seriously affected by the snarl-ups too," Mr Taylor said.

All these operators are not organised at present.

"We'd like to see all these groups getting together to present a broad front against the Government," Mr Taylor said.

"It depends on the Government's attitude. If it continues with its bloody-minded approach to traffic problems, we will consider co-ordinating the various groups. We're not going to give up."

Once formed, the united front will follow through by contacting "a lot of people who have influence."

"And there is the ultimate of going to London for help," Mr Taylor said.

The association is keeping

up the pressure on the Government at every opportunity through the media, he said.

The King's Road scheme is the first of about 50 Public Transport Priority Schemes the Government plans to implement over the next few years.

"These will seriously affect large numbers of motorists. That's why we're digging our heels in at North Point," Mr Taylor said.

The original bus-only lane scheme in Eastern was suspended last week after it not only failed to clear up congestion but caused more snarl-ups. The tram-only lane is still in operation.

But another bus-only lane extended continuously from Taikoo Shing to Causeway Bay will be introduced at the end of the month.

At one stage, there was talk of banning all private vehicles from King's Road.

The Automobile Association yesterday took out an advertisement in a Chinese newspaper to recruit more members. This said:

"To Hongkong motorists. The King's Road scheme is one the first of many similar schemes proposed by the Government to take the road space from private motorists."

"You've paid for the roads you drive on. The Automobile Association defends the interests of motorists. Join the association now. We're on your side."