

S.A.M.?

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AA awaits London's reply on car tax plea

The Hongkong Automobile Association is still waiting for the British Government's reply to its petition against the car tax increases imposed by the local Government in May.

The executive director of the HKAA, Mr Phil Taylor, said yesterday the Hongkong Government told him on August 4 that the petition had been sent to London.

The petition, supported by more than 6,000 people, was delivered to the Government on June 30 for relay to London.

The aim of the tax increases was to check the rise in the number of private cars.

Mr Taylor and the HKAA have repeatedly expressed disappointment in the way the Government handles transport matters, and in its indifference to public opinion.

At the HKAA annual general meeting in June, members were told that the association would urge the British Foreign Secretary to direct the Governor, Sir Edward Youde, to appoint a commission of inquiry to look into their complaints.

Speaking at a lunch meeting of the Kiwanis Club of Kowloon, Mr Taylor again said fiscal measures would



Mr Taylor

never be able to curb the increase in private cars.

With interest rates starting to decline and increases in salary to balance out inflation, Mr Taylor predicted that a "substantial market readjustment" in car sales would emerge next spring.

Since the drastic increase in first registration fees, licence fees and oil duty in May, car dealers have reported a drop of 40 per cent in sales.

But when the readjustment comes, Mr Taylor said, the recovery will exceed expectations.

He accused the Government of gross unfairness in punishing one sector of road users for the chaotic traffic situation, when the Government itself was largely to blame.

An acceptable growth level for the number of vehicles should be measured by the capacity of the road system.

"In Hongkong, average cross-town journey times during peak hours reflect average speeds of 15 mph, which is better than in most big cities, where average speeds of 12 mph are considered acceptable.

"This situation has not significantly changed since the tax increases were introduced," Mr Taylor said.

He pointed out that congestion still occurs at certain places where too many lanes converge into too few.

"These traffic black spots are the direct result of the Government failing to construct the main road infrastructure and other essential road improvement schemes in time to meet the needs of the community," he said.