H.K. Standard 7 Dec. 1983

AA chief says ERP serves vested interests

THE government was accused yesterday of protecting the profits of special interest groups by opting for the electronic road pricing system.

Executive director of the Automobile Association, Mr Phil Taylor said these interest groups included the property owners in Central, the cross harbour tunnel and the two bus companies.

He said the government had originally proposed to build an elevated road along Connaught-road to alleviate the long-standing traffic congestion in Central district. However, the plan was shelved following objections and compensation claims by powerful property owners in Central.

Mr Taylor believes that the concept of ERP is a replacement for the troubled elevated road.

He said that under ERP traffic moving out of Central would seek the alternative route through Mid-Levels, using Kennedy, Robinson, Upper Albert and Bonham roads, and possibly MacDonnell, Magazine Gap and Peak roads.

"These roads essentially serve residential areas, are heavily trafficked now and could not sustain much more.

"ERP would therefore have to be extended into these areas to prevent chaos developing," he said.

Mr Taylor said that discarding the elevated road project would mean that the proposed Route 7, an important part of Hongkong's main road infrastructure, would be impractical and save the government $2 billion.

The government had also tried to protect the interest of the Cross Harbour tunnel which had neither a scheme of profit control nor reserve fund for expansion, he said.

"In spite of massive profits obtained by the tunnel over the last 11 years, the government was preparing to double the toll a year ago until being stopped by public

MR TAYLOR... criticised government.

indignation," he said.

Mr Taylor said the government clearly did not want to build the Eastern Island Corridor Stage 2 or the Lyemun Bridge. Therefore, the ERP could resolve the dilemma between additional cross-harbour traffic and congestion.

He also criticised the government for intending to use the ERP to "getting everyone else off the road to give the bus companies a free run."

Mr Taylor said that the new legislation introduced in 1975, to achieve adequate provision of bus services to the public, had not worked.

And the government was reluctant to change its law to allow inadequate services, he added.

He also said the introduction of ERP was based on the public's lack of understanding of the system.

He compared ERP to squeezing a balloon — "whenever you get the air out of the bit that you squeeze, it only moves to the other parts".

Other governments or city councils have dropped the scheme, probably because they realised the scheme merely transferred problems elsewhere.

The scheme would need to be extended until everyone's movements were being electronically bugged, he said.

Mr Taylor also estimated that the cost of implementing the entire scheme might be between $400 million and $1 billion, compared to the government's estimate of $350 million.