

\$7m trial to find perfect city road

By KEITH WALLIS

A TWO-YEAR \$7 million trial to find the ideal urban road surface – both quieter and safer – will begin in August.

The trial, by the Highways and Environmental Protection departments, will test different asphalt surfaces to find one that is safer, quieter, lasts longer and is suited to slow-moving traffic.

The asphalt will be laid on top of the existing concrete road surface.

"The asphalt has to be durable, skid resistant and lead to a significant reduction in surface noise," said the senior engineer in charge of research and development in the Highways Department, Lau Ka-keung.

Similar asphalt tests in 1987 for high-speed traffic reduced noise by up to five decibels. Mr Lau is hoping the latest tests can also reduce traffic noise.

"But the main aims are to increase the life of the road and improve traffic safety at junctions," Mr Lau said.

He said the Highways Department could not use the asphalt chosen for the high-speed studies in urban areas because it could not withstand the high traffic

loads, steep gradients and heavy braking typical of urban use.

Instead, it planned to mix polymers and other materials into the bitumen to increase durability.

Recycled asphalt is also being considered. This is environmentally friendly in the long-term, reducing the amount of waste in landfills, Mr Lau said. However, noxious gases are produced when it is being removed.

The Environmental Protection Department had proposed about 15 stretches of road throughout the territory for the trials. Final selections will be made jointly by the departments, said a principal environmental protection officer at the department's noise policy group, Samuel Won Wai-hong.

"Each section will be rated according to the durability, safety and noise benefits. The most acute areas will score highest and will be done first," he said.

Once the tests are over, the departments will pool the results, recommend the best type of material and make a list of the most critical stretches of road.