

\$364m expansion planned at Lo Wu

BY JUANITO CONCEPCION

A MAJOR \$364 million expansion of the Lo Wu immigration point facilities has been planned by the Government before traffic to and from the mainland grinds to a complete halt.

The Government has been concerned with the danger of having large crowds stuck in Lo Wu, particularly during holidays like the Chinese New Year, and last weekend's Mid-Autumn Festival.

The move also came in the wake of mounting complaints from travellers over the lack of facilities and shortage of Hongkong Immigration and Customs officials, who have to process an average 78,000 people each day.

Immigration Department figures said a total of 14.77 million people passed through Lo Wu in the first six months this year.

Last Sunday alone, 31,037 people entered Hongkong through Lo Wu while 48,670 left for the mainland.

Assistant Secretary for Security John Dean said the Lo Wu development would cost \$364 million.

He said the project's objective was to expand the existing complex and make room for additional Immigration and Customs processing facilities, as well as new government offices and a canteen.

The planned second floor expansion into the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corp concourse would provide new ticket counters and passenger waiting areas.

Mr Dean said construction

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Lo Wu checkpoint last year handled 27.14 million people moving between Hongkong and the mainland.

was scheduled to start later this year and should be completed by 1994.

He was not able to put a figure on the additional capacity that would be handled by the complex after completion of the expansion as details were still being worked out.

But a consultant to the Shenzhen municipal government warned that Lo Wu would not be able to cope with projected demand.

"If the passenger volume continues to increase by about 12 per cent a year, we're talking about 50 million people going through Lo Wu within the next few years. This is a huge number that could not possibly be handled given its current capacity," said Francis Lau, executive chairman of Raine Horne and Lau (Surveyors) Ltd.

Immigration Department figures showed a total of 12.94 million people arrived in Lo Wu from China in 1989 and a total of 12.16 million people exited Hongkong, bringing the total to 25.10 million for the year.

This figure increased to 27.14 million last year, which comprised 13.97 million arrivals from China and 13.97 million departures. The number is expected to rise further this year. A total of 14.77 million already passed through the checkpoint in the first half of this year.

Mr Lau said the single railway line that carries passengers through Lo Wu was inadequate. He said a new rapid mass transport system should be set up between Hongkong to Shenzhen to speed up passenger traffic.