

\$120m deal to 'pacify residents'

By KATHY GRIFFIN
and S. Y. YUE

RESIDENTS affected by excessive traffic noise from the proposed Western Harbour Crossing will be compensated with double-glazed windows and air conditioning, in a package expected to cost up to \$120 million.

But the measures are unlikely to satisfy the residents of 2,200 flats, some of whom yesterday petitioned to also be compensated for their electricity bills.

The measures announced at an Environmental Pollution Advisory Committee (Epcom) meeting yesterday stop short of those offered last year to Ma Wan Island's 700 residents over work on the Lantau Fixed Crossing.

The Ma Wan package included double-glazing, air conditioning and payment of power bills until 1997, or the cash equivalent, although residents wanted another \$1,000 a month "health money" during the construction period. The cost of the compensation was not released.

Epcom chairman, Dr Wang Gung-wu, said the Western Harbour Crossing package was considered the only practical way of handling the noise problem, although committee members urged the Government to be generous and to consult the Central and Western District Board.

But it may not satisfy residents in the affected flats on Connaught Road West, who live about 30 metres from the proposed site of the crossing.

Before the Epcom meeting, the Concern Group on the Construction of Western Harbour Crossing petitioned members demanding

payment for their electricity bills and tests on noise levels in flats once the windows were double glazed.

The Government package entails only a single payment, to which Epcom agreed, and the amount could vary according to the needs of each flat; for instance, those with air conditioners might need only double glazing on their windows.

Dr Wang said: "We recommended to the Government that the calculations they are proposing take into account all the complications and that they be generously calculated."

Epcom's acceptance of the conditions was in contrast to its rare rejection last November of the environmental impact report on the Western Harbour Crossing, which it said did not contain sufficient mitigation measures for the noise.

Dr Wang said they were now satisfied with the measures and the fact that they will be written into the tender application requirements and funded by the franchisee.

The maximum cost for the compensation will be about \$120 million, but this may be reduced because many of the affected flats are for commercial or industrial use and therefore not disturbed by night-time noise.

Epcom secretary, Dr Patrick Hase, said a proposed noise barrier had been rejected because it would have been too costly and ineffective.

A five-storey wall would have had to be built and the road area covered, costing \$240 million but not blocking out all the noise, he said.

Meanwhile, the franchise on the Western Harbour

Crossing will be considered by the Airport Committee under the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group early next year, Deputy Secretary for Transport, Mr John Telford, told the Airport Consultative Committee yesterday.

By February next year, the Government is expected to draw up a shortlist of bidders and submit this to the Chinese side before the contract is granted.

It is known that Transport Department officials have already briefed members of the Chinese side of the Airport Committee informally in the past months to help them to understand the design of the third cross-harbour tunnel.

Under the Memorandum of Understanding on the new airport signed between the British and Chinese governments, the Airport Committee is to consider airport-related franchises or contracts straddling 1997 before they are granted.

During the committee meeting yesterday, Mr Telford said the crossing would be privatised on a "build, operate and transfer" basis and under an open and competitive bidding process.

Tenders will be invited early next month, with a three-month deadline, to bid for a franchise to construct and operate the crossing in return for a right to collect tolls over a period of 30 years. After that period, the tunnel would become government property.

Members of the consultative committee queried if 30 years would be too long because the Western Harbour Crossing, linked to the Chek Lap Kok airport, would be profitable.