A green light for faster firemen

HONGKONG Fire Service is to install a $90 million computerised control system that will cut the time taken to reach fires.

Tenders will soon be put out and the system should be operational by 1990.

The Director of Fire Services, Mr Robert Holmes, said yesterday: "The new computer mobilising system should reduce the time taken in getting to a fire. At present it takes about six minutes in urban areas but that depends on the traffic."

The computerisation of traffic control signals would help ease the traffic problem. Mr Holmes said it would enable signals to be changed to green along the route of fire vehicles.

The senior divisional officer responsible for the computerisation project, Mr K.P. Hsu, said that at present fire control operations were based on manual systems. The software for the new system would give recommendations for the best route to fires and recommend what types of fire fighting appliances would be needed.

Mr Holmes was speaking after inspecting the passing out parade at the Fire Services Training School for the last time before he retires in December after 30 years in Hongkong.

Mr Holmes' successor has not been named yet. However, it is believed likely to be the Deputy Director of Fire Services, Mr John March.

Asked when a local director was likely to be appointed, Mr Holmes said there were now only five expatriates in senior positions and this was likely to be reduced to one by 1992, by which time there could be a local director.

He said that the Fire Services Department was respected throughout the world and that he had been frequently invited overseas to speak about the Hongkong organisation.

Mr Holmes, 57, plans to retire to his native Scotland. Although he has been offered a number of positions as a consultant on fire services, he said he planned to make a complete break and go into genuine retirement.