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24 million passengers a year is Kai Tak limit

THE passenger capacity of Kai Tak Airport could probably be boosted by 20 percent to 24 million a year but that would be the limit.

Capacity has recently been raised to 20 million passengers a year with the completion of the Stage V extension of the airport's passenger terminal, the airport manager of the Civil Aviation Department, Mr Chan Bing-sing, said yesterday.

He was speaking after a press tour of the newly completed Stage V extension, which becomes operational tomorrow.

Mr Chan said the airport was already operating beyond its designed maximum passenger capacity of 12 million.

By the end of the month, 15 million passengers will have passed through the airport this year.

However, even with the increased capacity resulting from the completion of the Stage V extension, the airport would reach saturation in the mid-1990s, he said.

The Government is looking for ways to deal with the situation before the saturation point is reached.

These include plans for a replacement airport and the commissioning of a consultancy study for better air traffic management.

The Governor, Sir David Wilson, said in his annual address in October that the Government would decide before the end of next year when and where the territory's new airport would be built.

The Hongkong Standard had reported that West Lantau and Chek Lap Kok were the two prime sites for the second airport.

The air traffic management consultancy study has been completed and would be submitted to the Executive Council for consideration very shortly, a spokesman for the Civil Aviation Department said.

Mr Chan said yesterday it was almost impossible to further ex-

pand Kai Tak due to physical constraints.

"The Stage V development is already at the eastern extremity of the airport.

"Beyond there is an oil farm. Unless we move it, it is not possible to extend the passenger terminal further east," he said.

It was also difficult to expand the airport westward, as a transport terminus was already there, he added.

Mr Chan said with the completion of the Stage V development, the hourly throughput of the passenger terminal would be increased by half to 5,300 passengers.

Two check-in islands with 60 counters are provided in the new extension, boosting the total number of counters to 176.

Immigration control positions will also be nearly doubled to about 200.

The Stage V expansion took three years to complete at a cost of \$273 million.