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for information

INFORMATION PAPER **FOR THE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE ENVIRONMENT**

West Rail - Phase I

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to inform Members of the gazetting of Phase I of West Rail in stages, and the arrangements for consulting ACE on the Initial Assessment Report (IAR) of the relevant Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Background

2. In December 1996, the Executive Council decided that the construction of West Rail should proceed in two phases - with Phase I, comprising the domestic passenger line from West Kowloon to Tuen Mun to be built first, and the cross border passenger and freight services (Phase II) to be built at a later date. The project programme provides for Phase I to be completed to Yuen Long by the end of 2002 and to Tuen Mun by September 2003.

3. Phase I of West Rail will include the following nine stations:

- Yen Chow Street
- Mei Foo
- Tsuen Wan West
- Kam Tin
- Yuen Long
- Long Ping
- Tin Shui Wai
- Tuen Mun North
- Tuen Mun Centre

Scope of the EIA

4. The EIA provides information on the nature and extent of the environmental impact arising from the construction and operation of West Rail, and suggests measures to mitigate that impact. The Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) is currently undertaking an EIA of the alignment of Phase I, which covers the following key areas:

- construction noise
- operational noise
- air quality
- water quality
- landscape and visual issues
- land use issues
- archaeological and cultural resources
- ecology
- waste
- land contamination
- hazards

Progress of the EIA

5. The EIA commenced in November 1996 when KCRC appointed ERM-Hong Kong as the consultant for this assessment. The Initial Assessment Report (IAR) is being finalised and the Final Assessment Report (FAR) will be completed in December 1997.

The most critical milestone: the construction of the Tai Lam Tunnel Section

6. West Rail is urgently needed in order to relieve the traffic problems of Northwest New Territories (NWNT). As explained in paragraph 2 above, the Administration is committed to completing the construction of the West Rail to Yuen Long by the end of 2002 and to Tuen Mun by September 2003. These target completion dates can only be met within a very tight project programme. The timely completion of West Rail hinges upon the construction of the Tai Lam Tunnel Section - the most critical milestone in the whole project programme. It is imperative that the construction of the Tai Lam Tunnel Section commence by August 1998. Any delay in handing over this site to KCRC will cause serious delay to the whole construction programme.

Gazetting West Rail in Stages

7. The Railways Ordinance stipulates that a scheme for the construction of a railway must be gazetted and subject to objections from members of the public. The Administration has to deal with these objections and has committed to conducting public hearings. The scheme and any unresolved objections must be submitted to the Executive Council for consideration after these procedures are complied with. If the construction of the Tai Lam Tunnel Section is to commence by August 1998, the scheme must be gazetted no later than August 1997, hence our decision to gazette West Rail in stages, with the Tai Lam Tunnel Section gazetted first on 25 July 1997. The remaining sections of the alignment will be gazetted as soon as practicable thereafter. ACE will be consulted on the findings of the IAR prior to the remaining gazettals.

Environmental implications of the Tai Lam Tunnel

8. The Tai Lam Tunnel Section passes deep below Tai Lam Country Park and is 5.5 km long. The preliminary findings of the IAR show that the construction activities associated with this part of the railway have no insurmountable environmental problems. Construction work will commence at the two tunnel portals where appropriate mitigation for noise and dust from the tunnelling operations and from soil removal will reduce predicted impacts to within the established criteria.

9. The Tai Lam Tunnel Section will not have any access tunnels within the boundaries of the Tai Lam Country Park. KCRC already confirmed to the Country and Marine Parks Board on 24 June 1997 that the West Rail project would have no direct impact on the Tai Lam Country Park.

10. Although the north portal is located at the head of the Kam Tin valley, no woodland is affected and no protected plant species have been recorded in the area. As a result of grave-sweeping activities, the area has been regularly burned and is considered of little ecological importance to flora and fauna.

11. In short, the construction of the Tai Lam Tunnel Section will not present any insurmountable environmental problem. Detailed assessment on the environmental impacts and mitigation measures will be provided in the FAR.

Consultation with ACE

12. The IAR of West Rail is scheduled to be completed by August 1997 and will be submitted to ACE. ACE will be fully consulted on the EIA.

Transport Bureau
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