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## Sai Kung council won't extend talks on wider highway

By Amy Nip

Residents' demands for more public consultation on expanding part of Hiram's Highway into a four-lane road were turned down by Sai Kung District Council yesterday.

The expansion is part of a HK\$303 million government initiative to improve transport links from Sai Kung to Ta Ku Ling.

More than 70 people - including Sai Kung residents and concern group members - turned up at yesterday's council meeting to lock horns over the development of the highway.

Groups opposing the expansion questioned whether more traffic would lead to overdevelopment in Sai Kung, while villagers supporting the project said they needed a solution to a traffic congestion problem that had been troubling them for more than a decade.

Hiram's Highway runs from Sai Kung's town centre to Clear Water Bay Road at Ta Ku Ling. The four-lane part ends at Ho Chung at the moment, and the Highways Department plans to extend it to Pak Wai, past the Marina Cove estate, in the first stage of the improvement project.

Construction work is scheduled to begin at the end of next year and be completed in 2013.

Council members who vetoed a proposal for a reassessment of the first stage of the expansion project said more consultations would simply delay construction work.

The Highways Department is still considering different options for the second phase of the project - from Pak Wai to Sai Kung's town centre.

Marina Cove residents said they saw no point in widening the highway when the public remained divided over whether the four-lane highway should continue straight into the town centre.

The chairman of the estate's incorporated owners corporation, Cheng Shui-tai, said the extension would move the traffic bottleneck from Ho Chung to Pak Wai if the four-lane highway stopped there.

"There is no justification. Even if we sacrifice our rights, I can't see how traffic can be improved," he said.

Friends of Sai Kung, an organisation which opposes the four-lane project, said the district's low-density environment would be destroyed by the inflow of traffic.

"What we are concerned about is the possibility of over-development," group vice-chairman James Wong Ming said.

"If we fail to preserve the environment here, how can we develop ecotourism?"

District Council chairman Ng Sze-fuk said the expansion work was crucial for developing the district's tourism and economy, and improving the transport network in the Eastern New Territories. "Sai Kung is an attractive place. If more people are coming here but there aren't any supporting facilities it could be a big problem," he said. "You can't stop people visiting Sai Kung."

Mr Ng said the council had consulted residents living along Hiram's Highway, but it was impossible to fulfil everyone's wishes.

Mr Shek, a villager who attended the meeting, said the project should go ahead to ease traffic congestion. "For an elderly person who is seriously sick, a traffic jam could stop him from going to a hospital outside Sai Kung," he said.