

**ENVIRONMENT**

# New tollway hits speed bump

**POST REPORTERS**

The opening of a new 196-kilometre intercity motorway project worth 84.6 billion baht linking Ayutthaya's Bang Pa-in district and Nakhon Ratchasima will face delays as some sections will be subject to design changes to avoid encroaching on forest reserves, a senior transport official said yesterday.

Apirat Chaiwongnoi, deputy director-general of the Department of Highways (DOH), said that surveys by contractors have found that some sections of the project cut through pristine forest areas in Nakhon Ratchasima. As a result, designs under 10 construction contracts will have to be changed, he said.

For example, Contract No.11 must be changed from a normal road on the ground to a flyover for ecological reasons, Mr Apriat said.

On some routes where pavements have been planned, it has been found

that the areas are rough rocky ground which require blasting, Mr Apirat said.

On other routes, land expropriation was planned eight years ago but is no longer possible, Mr Apirat said.

Of the 84.6-billion-baht budget allocation, 77.97 billion baht was earmarked for construction, while 6.63 billion baht was allotted for land expropriation, Mr Apirat said. The project got off the ground in 2016 and construction is scheduled to be complete in 2022.

The project is divided into 40 separate contracts. Of these, 17 have already been completed while 10 need design changes and 13 are under construction.

Mr Apirat said that some contractors have asked that their construction deadline be extended until the end of 2022, before adding construction should be complete in time for the opening in 2023.

However, Mr Apirat admitted that contracts that need design changes will cause delay to the construction of some

routes that must be finished next year.

Due to the design changes, the DOH will have to seek additional budget in discussion with DOH director-general Sarawat Songwilai. The matter is expected to be concluded next month before being forwarded to the cabinet for consideration, said Mr Apirat.

The 84.6-billion-baht motorway will be the country's third inter-city tollway and aims to alleviate some of the severe traffic congestion along Highways 1 and 2, particularly during the long holidays.

The new motorway will start at the Bang Pa-in interchange, where Highway No.9 (Bangkok's eastern ring road) adjoins Highway No.1 (Phahon Yothin Road) in Ayutthaya, and runs parallel with Phahon Yothin and Highway No.2 (the Mitrapharp Highway) and will end at the Nakhon Ratchasima bypass in Muang district.

Each motorist's entry onto the road will be recorded and the toll amount charged at the exit point.