

**ROADS**

# New tollway may be open for Songkran

**THODSAPOL HONGTONG**

A section of a new tollway linking Ayutthaya and Nakhon Ratchasima may be open for a trial run during Songkran next year, according to the Highways Department.

Department chief Sarawut Songsirilwilai said while much of the construction involving the Lam Ta Klong section is completed, there are still safety risks the department needs to evaluate.

He said the section will not be open for use during the New Year festival as many motorists had hoped, but said it may be ready for traffic during the Songkran festival in April next year.

"For safety reasons, the section will

not be open for use during the New Year holiday. We have some concerns and we'll evaluate again to see if it is ready for Songkran," he said.

According to Mr Sarawut, the construction of the Bang Pa-in (in Ayutthaya)-Nakhon Ratchasima highway is 82% completed and the department is seeking some design changes.

The proposals will be submitted to the Transport Ministry for approval and then to the cabinet, he said, adding the planned revision will not affect the budget. The entire route is scheduled for completion in 2022, he said.

The operation and maintenance contract of the highway is expected to be signed in February, he said.

The 84.6-billion-baht motorway, the country's third inter-city tollway, will address severe traffic congestion along Highways 1 and 2, particularly during the long holidays. Tolls will be based on the distance travelled. Each motorist's entry onto the road will be recorded and the toll amount charged at the exit point.

It starts 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 Mitrpharp Highway) and will end at the Nakhon Ratchasima bypass in Muang district.