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6 DECEMBER 2018**

**LOWER THAMES CROSSING - SECOND CONSULTATION**

1. Summary

1.1 Highways England is consulting on detailed proposals for the Lower Thames Crossing, following announcement of the preferred route for the crossing between east of Gravesend and Tilbury in 2017. This report suggests a response to the consultation.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That the response to the consultation questions, as set in Appendix A to the report, be agreed as the Council's response to this second consultation on the Lower Thames Crossing.

3. Background and Discussion

3.1. Reports on progress on the implementation of the Lower Thames Crossing have previously been presented to Cabinet and Council. The most recent of these was to General Assembly of the Council (15.2.2016, Minute No.84) with a proposed response to Highways England agreed by the GAC. The response strongly supported locating a new crossing east of Gravesend, referred to as Location C. Following this consultation, in 2017 the Secretary of State announced the preferred route as Location C.

3.2. Since that announcement, Highways England (HE) has been progressing the design of the scheme at Location C and firming up details of the precise route, holding detailed discussions with the affected authorities and other parties, carrying out updated transport modelling as well as a range of further assessments. Some details of the routeing and construction of the previous identified scheme have been amended as a result of the further work.

3.3. The main focus of this second consultation is on the details of the scheme, including the precise routeing, design of junctions, structures proposed, connections with the surrounding road network and environmental impacts and how they can be reduced. The consultation also asks about charges for using the new crossing.

3.4. The proposed crossing will link Kent, Thurrock and Essex through a tunnel beneath the River Thames. On the south side of the Thames, the new road will link the tunnel to the A2 and M2 in Kent. On the north side, it will link the A13 and junction 29 of the M25 in the London Borough of Havering. The new crossing will have approximately 23 km of new roads connecting the tunnel to the existing road network. There will be two tunnels underneath the Thames with three lanes in each direction, each 4 km in length and 16 metres in diameter. There will be improvements to the M25, A2 and A13 where the Lower Thames Crossing connects

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with these roads. The project will be one of the largest single road investment projects in the UK since the M25 was completed more than 30 years ago, it will be the longest road tunnel in the country and it will be one of the largest bored tunnels in the world.

- 3.5. The most recent traffic modelling predicts that when the new crossing opens, there will be a reduction in traffic (measured in passenger car units or pcus) using the Dartford Crossing by up to 24% in 2026 and up to 19% in 2041 in the peak hours, as compared to the situation without a new crossing. The proportion of vehicles which are HGV's using the crossing will fall from 18% to 14% in 2026 and will remain at this level at 2041. This is an improvement over the previous traffic modelling which had suggested an overall traffic decrease of around 14% at opening.
- 3.6. The latest modelling is considered to be a more sophisticated exercise, using more recent base traffic data with information on journey patterns derived from analysis of a vast number of mobile phones. The model is used to predict how people will react to changes in the time and cost of their journeys and the routes they will use as a result of the new crossing. The forecasts for overall traffic growth over the period modelled are based on the most recent DfT forecasts, published in February 2017. The model has applied growth rates which address higher forecast growth levels in the south east. Local adjustments have been made to the model with respect to new housing and other development which have been identified through the planning system. However, future growth which has not yet been progressed through the planning system is not included.
- 3.7. In spite of the higher traffic growth forecasts used, there is a possibility that the forecasts will not fully reflect future levels of development in the wider Kent area. There will be a need to continue to work with Highways England, Kent Highways and our neighbouring authorities to monitor development and traffic levels, forecast future traffic levels and respond with appropriate measures to ensure the road network continues to perform adequately.
- 3.8. The consultation is supported by a range of documents including:
  - Your Guide to Consultation
  - The Case for the Project
  - Approach to Design, Construction and Operation
  - Map Books
  - Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)
  - Preliminary Environmental Traffic Forecasting Report
  - Traffic Forecast Non-Technical Summary

These documents are available online at [www.lowerthamescrossing.co.uk/haveyoursay](http://www.lowerthamescrossing.co.uk/haveyoursay) . A copy of 'Your guide to Consultation' has been placed in the Members Room.

- 3.9. The consultation closes on 20 December 2018. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, Highways England will submit its application

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(referred to as a Development Consent Order, (DCO)) to the Planning Inspectorate for examination. The DCO is expected to be examined in 2020 with a decision in 2021. The currently estimated opening date of the Lower Thames Crossing is 2027.

### 4. Response to the Consultation

- 4.1 The proposed response strongly supports the need for the Lower Thames Crossing, its proposed location, as well as some of the changes to the preferred route which have been made since the last consultation. However, it is acknowledged that the new crossing will place pressures on other parts of the network. If these are not addressed, it will reduce the effectiveness of the new crossing as an alternative route, particularly between the Channel ports and Thurrock/Essex and a resolution of these issues is sought.
- 4.2 More specifically, the Council's proposed response (Appendix A) strongly agrees that a Lower Thames Crossing is needed. The need is well documented in the consultation documents and very familiar to those who live, work, or travel through Dartford and its surroundings. The need arises from lack of capacity and lack of resilience at the Dartford Crossing, as well as the age of the tunnels and their physical constraints. The design capacity of the Dartford Crossing is 135,000 vehicles a day, yet it regularly carries more than 180,000 vehicles.
- 4.3 The preferred route east of Gravesend is strongly supported. It is considered that a genuine improvement in the resilience of the strategic and local road network and its ability to respond to incidents and congestion can only be achieved if the new crossing is a good distance from the existing one and can provide an alternative route when incidents occur. The preferred route meets this requirement. Moreover, the proposed route will provide a faster, more reliable route to the Midlands and North from the Kent ports and will be particularly attractive to long-distance freight traffic. It will boost British business and the national economy, and enhance transport connectivity and resilience between Kent and Essex, as well as nationally and internationally.
- 4.4 There are changes to the design of the route made since the last consultation which are of overall benefit to the scheme and reduce the negative impacts of the scheme on our neighbouring authorities. These changes include three lanes through the tunnels in both directions which will future-proof the scheme and ensure adequate capacity well into the future; extension of the tunnel 600m further back at the southern tunnel entrance which will reduce the impact on the environment and adjacent communities; and revised proposals at the junction with the M2/A2, with design of a new dedicated and simpler junction, west of the previous proposal. This will improve resilience at this junction. There is, however, disappointment that it is not proposed to provide a link from the Lower Thames Crossing onto the A13 westbound and towards the Port of Tilbury. This reduces the connectivity between Kent and Essex with a consequent reduction in economic benefits.

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- 4.5 As noted in the Study, road conditions result in a high level of incidents at the Dartford Crossing and its approach, resulting in injuries and fatalities to road users and have a disproportionate impact on congestion on the surrounding road network. Local experience is that the regular instances of congestion and lack of predictability of road conditions places a significant constraint on economic growth in the local area. This is supported by the study findings.
- 4.6 The consultation documents provide outputs from the traffic modelling showing which areas will experience a reduced or increased level of traffic. This shows that large areas of the surrounding network will experience reduced levels of traffic at 2026 as compared to current conditions, with the new crossing. This includes the M25 between Jct 3 heading north through the Dartford Tunnel and up to the new junction with the Lower Thames Crossing, as well as the A2 west of the southern junction with the Lower Thames Crossing. Some parts of the network experience a deterioration in traffic conditions. To the south of the river, this is particularly in the area to the west of the new A2 junction and the link roads between the M20 and M2. However, from the outputs provided, it would appear that the increased flows forecast are the result of factors other than the Lower Thames Crossing and most likely the result of growth. The response urges Highways England to address issues on those parts of the network that will experience pressures and identify the locations where further improvements will be needed. This particularly relates to the links between the M20 and the M2/A2, including the A229.
- 4.7 There are likely to be significant traffic impacts over a wide area during the construction period. It is understood that it is difficult to provide accurate information about routing of construction vehicles in advance of contracts being let and waste sites etc being identified. However, the response urges Highways England to continue ongoing liaison with relevant authorities as more information becomes available, so that the impacts can be minimised.
- 4.8 With regard to charging, a free-flowing e-charging system is supported as is differential charging. It is considered these will make most effective use of the new Crossing. Easy payment for the new Crossing at the ports, publicity and information at the ports and clear signage for the new route starting at the ports is also encouraged.
- 4.9 It is evident that traffic levels will continue to increase in advance of the new crossing being opened. It is emphasised in the response that the new crossing should be implemented as soon as is possible, so that the opening date can be brought forward. Highways England is also urged to bring forward mitigations to improve the flow at the Dartford Crossing and its approach in the meantime.

5. Relationship to the Corporate Plan

ED4 Ensure the timely delivery of transport infrastructure.

ED3 Improve the economic performance of the town centre

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HW2 Reduce overall health inequalities in the Borough  
ET1 Reduce carbon emissions.

6. Financial, legal, staffing and other implications and risk assessments

Financial Implications	None
Legal Implications	There is a risk that other parties who are opposed to the proposed location of the Lower Thames Crossing will take legal action against a potential positive planning decision. This could delay the implementation of the scheme.
Staffing Implications	None
Administrative Implications	None
Risk Assessment	The risk with the greatest impact on Dartford would be any delay to implementation of a crossing, whether due to legal interventions (see above), for financial or other reasons. The lack of additional traffic capacity, away from the existing crossing and serving as an alternative to the Dartford Crossing, would have severe impacts on traffic conditions, the local economy and the health and well-being of the local community.

7. Details of Exempt Information Category

Not applicable

8. Appendices

Appendix A: Response to Lower Thames Crossing Consultation, December 2018

BACKGROUND PAPERS

<u>Documents consulted</u>	<u>Date / File Ref</u>	<u>Report Author</u>	<u>Section and Directorate</u>	<u>Exempt Information Category</u>
		Teresa Ryszkowska Head of Regeneration 01322 343631	Strategic External Services Directorate	N/A