

10 July 2013		ITEM: 16 01104228
Cabinet		
LOWER THAMES CROSSING CONSULTATION OPTIONS		
Report of: Cllr Andy Smith, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Highways & Transportation		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Accountable Head of Service: Andy Millard, Head of Planning and Transportation		
Accountable Director: David Bull, Director for Planning and Transportation		
This report is Public		
Purpose of Report: This report provides Cabinet with a summary of the Lower Thames Crossing Consultation options. The report sets out Thurrock Council's opposition to a Lower Thames Crossing in Thurrock and expresses the need for the consultation process to include all potential options, including no new crossing, and to take into account other proposed schemes and investment in the region.		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the 21st May, Roads Minister Stephen Hammond announced the Government's consultation plans for a new Lower Thames Crossing. The consultation is seen as the first step in deciding on the location of a new Lower Thames Crossing and the Government has put forward three corridor options to tackle congestion and capacity issues.

The consultation questionnaire does not include a "no new crossing" option.

Thurrock Council agreed to oppose the principle of a new crossing in November 2012. The DfT's proposals under consideration are not consistent with the existing policy of the Council.

The Council has promoted a constructive discussion on all potential options, including not building a new crossing, and has taken into account other proposed schemes and planned investment to support growth to support inward investment and new jobs in the region.

This report comments on the three options for consultation, covering the pros, cons and Council minimum requirements should the Government decide to choose a preferred option, as planned, later this year.

The report requests the Government to provide full investment to improve the existing highway infrastructure to reduce congestion in the shorter term, including the introduction of free-flow tolling and further improvements to M25 Junction 30/31 and the A13.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Council notes the views of Thurrock residents and, therefore, reaffirms its policy on the Lower Thames Crossing, agreed by Council on 28 November 2012, that we should oppose any corridor for a new crossing in Thurrock.**
- 1.2 In light of the publication of the three corridor options for consultation by the Department for Transport, the Council records its disappointment that the Government has not given a specific option to reject the currently proposed options for a new crossing.**
- 1.3 The Council urges the Government to investigate alternative options to the three under consultation, including options to the east of Option C and to identify highway improvement for investment on the strategic highway network to reduce congestion in the shorter term.**
- 1.4 If the Minister is minded not to consider further options and is intent on making a decision on a preferred corridor later this year, as planned, then he should take note of the views set out in this Cabinet report and the findings of the O&S Regeneration 'Select ' Committee meeting on 1st July.**
- 1.5 The "pros and cons" of the three proposed options, as set out in this report, should be noted together with the related Thurrock requirements, for each option, should the Minister decide to proceed with a decision.**
- 1.6 A joint Council delegation comprising the Leader and Shadow Leader of the Council, with the Portfolio Holder and Shadow Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Highways and Transportation, should meet with the Transport Minister to express the views of the Council and the Borough's residents and businesses.**

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 2.1 The Consultation on options for a new Lower Thames crossing was launched on 21st May 2013 by Roads Minister Stephen Hammond.**
- 2.2 The consultation is the Government's first step in deciding the location for a new lower Thames crossing from three 3 corridor options.**

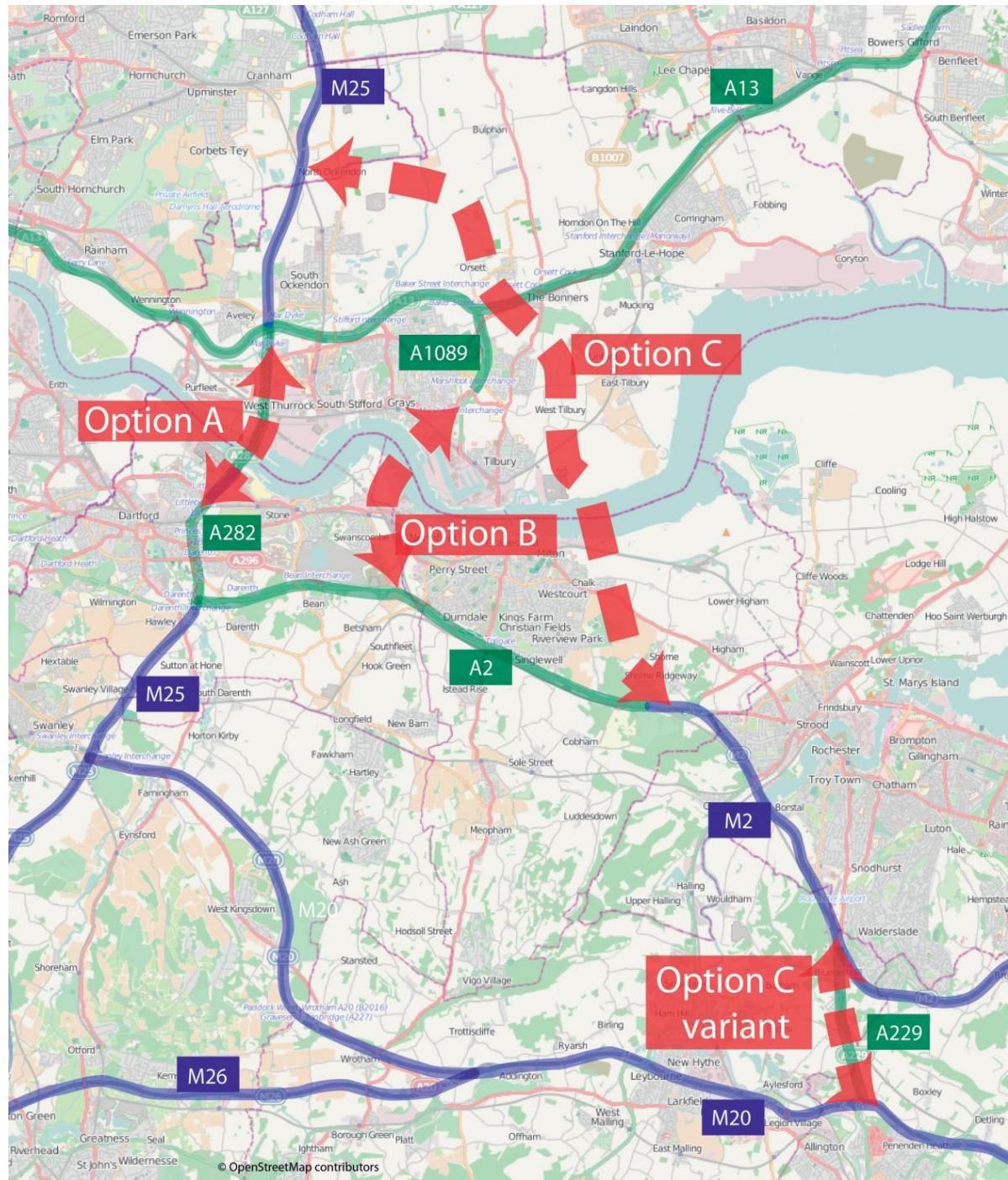
- 2.3 The Government has stated that the existing Dartford Crossing is operating above its design capacity and there is already serious congestion with negative consequences for business productivity and the national economy.
- 2.4 The consultation identifies that the Government is committed to tackling the congestion at the Crossing and will improve traffic flows by introducing free flow charging technology to replace the existing cash charge collection and extensive toll plazas. However, even with these improvements, the Government suggests that there will be a future need for additional river crossing capacity.
- 2.5 The Government recognises the strategic importance of the existing crossing and that the congestion problems currently experienced have serious implications for business productivity and the national economy. Government acknowledged the need for additional crossing capacity in the Lower Thames area in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review announcement.
- 2.6 In addition, there was a commitment to implement short and medium-term improvements at the existing crossing such as a charge suspension protocol at times of severe congestion, and free-flow charging. The charge suspension protocol was introduced in 2011, and free-flow charging is due to be introduced in October 2014.
- 2.7 The Government had identified a new Lower Thames crossing as one of its top 40 infrastructure projects in the national infrastructure plan 2011 and is committed to reviewing and consulting on options for locating a new crossing. The Government has, therefore, proposed that a new Lower Thames Crossing be constructed and the current consultation documents invite views on the relative merits of 3 corridor options plus a variant of one of these 3 options.

3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

- 3.1 Future traffic flows at the existing crossing are forecast to increase by 10–20% southbound and by 2–10% northbound between 2009 and 2041. It is unclear how the implementation of free-flow tolls and improvements at J30/31 will mitigate against this forecast growth. The same data has been used to calculate the impact of air quality and noise but the data provided in the Department for Transport (DfT) Review of the Lower Thames Crossing is somewhat limited and unclear. It is recommended that additional work is progressed to provide more robust evidence in relation to the impact that a new Lower Thames Crossing would have on congestion, air quality and quality of life in Thurrock.
- 3.2 The Lower Thames Crossing consultation document invites views on the relative merits of 3 corridor options for locating a new road based river crossing in the Lower Thames area and a variant of one of these 3 options. The consultation does not include other options including alternative infrastructure improvements or crossing options east of the DfT's Option C.

The 3 options are:

- Option A: at the site of the existing A282 Dartford-Thurrock river crossing
- Option B: connecting the A2 with the A1089
- Option C: connecting the M2 with the A13 and the M25 between junctions 29 and 30
- Variant for option C would additionally widen the A229 between the M2 and M20



3.3 Pros, cons and Thurrock requirements of the three options

Options	Pros	Cons	Thurrock Requirements
A. Adjacent to existing crossing	<p>Greatest impact on relieving congestion at the existing crossing.</p> <p>Least environmental impacts.</p> <p>Most positive impact on air quality of all options.</p> <p>Lowest cost of all options.</p> <p>Highest cost benefit of the three options [Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) up to 2.4]</p>	<p>Least overall economic benefits because it does not open up more sites for development.</p>	<p>Comprehensive improvements to M25 Junction 30/31 and the A13 corridor. Implement scheme before 2021 as planned to reduce congestion in the shorter term to support regeneration and growth in Thurrock.</p> <p>Free use of crossing to Thurrock residents and businesses.</p> <p>Upgrading of the existing M25 motorway service area to increase capacity for lorries.</p>
B. Connecting the A2 TO A1089	<p>Positive impact on air quality.</p> <p>Moderate overall economic benefits.</p>	<p>Significant noise impact on residents.</p> <p>Significant environmental impact.</p> <p>Greatest impact on development sites.</p> <p>Cost benefit (BCR) of only up to 1.7.</p>	<p>Comprehensive improvements to Junction 30/31 and the A13 corridor.</p> <p>If this Option is to be adopted by the DfT then more detailed assessment work must be undertaken and the results provided to enable full consideration to be given to further local infrastructure requirements. Must be in tunnel throughout the Borough to mitigate impact on residents.</p> <p>Free use of crossing to Thurrock residents and businesses.</p> <p>Upgrading of the existing M25 motorway service area to increase capacity for lorries.</p>
C. Connecting the M2, A13 and M25 (and variant linking to M20)	<p>Positive impact on air quality.</p> <p>Greatest overall economic benefits.</p>	<p>Largest noise impact on residents.</p> <p>Greatest environmental impact.</p> <p>Highest cost of all options.</p> <p>Cost benefit (BCR) up to 2.0.</p> <p>Likely to open wide areas of green belt to development.</p>	<p>Comprehensive improvements to Junction M25 30/31 and the A13 corridor as part of a package.</p> <p>If this Option is to be adopted by the DfT then more detailed assessment work must be undertaken and the results provided to enable full consideration to be given to further local infrastructure requirements including the junction with the A13.</p> <p>Majority of route must be in tunnel to mitigate environmental impact.</p> <p>Free use of crossing to Thurrock residents and businesses.</p>

- 3.4 The consultation contains limited data in terms of the potential impact on local roads, businesses and residents, so if a new crossing is proposed in Thurrock, in-depth studies are required. If Options B or C are chosen as the Government's preferred option, there will be a need for further detailed assessment work to be undertaken, highlighting the benefits of tunnel options and the results provided to the Council to enable further consideration to be given to local infrastructure improvements. For Option C this will include a review of any proposed junction with the A13.
- 3.5 Option A appears to negatively impact on Thurrock to a lesser extent than the two other options.
- 3.6 A recent on-line vote involving Thurrock residents identified one overwhelming conclusion **"another Lower Thames Crossing is not wanted in Thurrock"**. Over 610 people responded on-line and 66.4% voted for no new crossing. Voting forms also appeared in the local press. Out of the 210 forms returned, 82.4% voted for no new crossing. The results reflect the views of Thurrock residents.
- 3.7 The charge suspension protocol was introduced in 2011, however, the Leader of the Council has written to the Transport Minister expressing the Council's concerns about the cost to businesses, and the public, from delays to suspending the charges due to the thresholds currently used to trigger this. However, the Minister has responded stating that there are no plans to change the current protocol.
- 3.8 In addition, the Transport Minister is aware that Thurrock welcomes the introduction of free-flow charging and that the Council has concerns that this will not be introduced until October 2014. However, the Minister has advised that the formal processes necessary to introduce such a scheme dictate the earliest date for implementation and the process cannot be shortened. Whilst free-flow charging will reduce congestion, the DfT are unclear of the precise impact and what capacity improvements will be achieved in the short term.
- 3.9 It is important to emphasise the Council's position in relation to the need for greater investment from the Government to tackle and manage issues relating to congestion at the Lower Thames Crossing and junction 30/31 of the M25. Ministers have identified £150m of transport investment for improvements to J30/31. It is unclear if this level of funding will be sufficient to manage and alleviate the issues at J30/31 and the surrounding road network. Thurrock Council considers that enhanced infrastructure improvements are needed at Junction 30/31 and the local highway network including the A13 corridor as a matter of urgency to relieve congestion to the benefit of the Borough, Essex, Kent and beyond.

3.10 The Council's position is that the following interventions should be supported as an alternative to the Lower Thames Crossing options proposed in the formal consultation.

- **Introduce free-flow tolling**
- **Provide the funding required to deliver comprehensive improvements at J30/31 and the local highway infrastructure.**

3.11 Furthermore, it is recommended that a joint Council delegation comprising the Leader and Shadow Leader of the Council, with the Portfolio Holder and Shadow Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Highways and Transportation, should meet with the Transport Minister to express the views of the Council and the Borough's residents and businesses.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- 4.1 To ensure that the Council's opposition to a new Lower Thames Crossing in Thurrock is understood and supported.
- 4.2 To ensure that a sensible and balanced discussion is progressed that takes account of all options, including building no crossing at all, and ensures that any proposals account for other proposed schemes and planned investment in the region.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The Lower Thames Crossing Consultation was made available to the public on 21st May 2013 and was placed on the Council's web page. Anybody interested in commenting on the proposals can complete the online response form on the DfT website or by submitting the response form by email or post. All responses need to be submitted by Tuesday 16 July 2013, when the consultation will close. Decisions following this consultation will be announced in the autumn 2013. The consultation can be found on the Thurrock Council web page www.thurrock.gov.uk or at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/options-for-a-new-lower-thames-crossing
- 5.2 The Director of Planning and Transportation provided a presentation on this subject at the Planning, Transport and Regeneration O&S Committee on 4 June 2013. The Committee recommended the setting up of a Select Committee event for the Transport Scrutiny Committee. This was a one day event on 1st July to gather evidence to support the Council's response to the consultation and explore what investment is needed in the road network. Invitees included a Government Minister, the Department for Transport, Highways Agency, Members of Parliament, elected Members, the GLA, SELEP, other local authorities, business representatives, transport operators and associations, local Forums and residents. Feedback from this event is included at Appendix 1.

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 6.1 The Council's response to this consultation must support its Corporate Priorities to *"Encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity"* and to *"Protect and promote our clean and green environment"*.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Michael Jones**
Telephone and email: **01375 652772**
mxjones@thurrock.gov.uk

Government acknowledged the need for additional crossing capacity in the Lower Thames area in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review announcement and committed to review the options for increasing future capacity at the existing crossing.

The DfT Lower Thames Crossing consultation document indicates that a new crossing, including the roads required to link it into the road network, could cost between £1.2bn and £3.2bn depending on location and whether it is constructed as a bridge or a tunnel. If Option C (widening the A229 between the M2 and M20) were to be provided, the total cost could rise to £5bn. No decisions have yet been made about the financing of a new crossing. Further work would be required on the financing options and the value for money which they offer, once the location has been selected.

It is impossible to calculate the financial impact upon the Council and the Borough as a result of the implementation of any of the proposed options.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Alison Stuart – Principal Solicitor**
Telephone and email: **01375 652040**
Alison.stuart@bdtlegal.org.uk

There are no specific legal implications for the Council relating to this consultation.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
Telephone and email: **01375 652472**
sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk

There are no direct diversity and equality implications arising from the report. Meaningful consultation with all of Thurrock's communities during this and any subsequent LTC consultations will be important.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT,

Each of the three options being considered by the Government will have varying degrees of impact upon the Borough in terms of the environment, economic growth and the delivery of the Council's regeneration agenda.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- DfT Consultation documents are available at:
www.gov.uk/government/consultations/options-for-a-new-lower-thames-crossing
Paper copies are also available for viewing in the Members area.
- A summary of the Noise and Air Quality impacts for Thurrock (available for viewing in the Members area).

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

Appendix 1 – O&S Select Committee 1st July 2013 – Key Points

Report Author Contact Details:

Name: David Freestone

Telephone: x2091

E-mail: dfreestone@thurrock.gov.uk