

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force scheduled for 19 September 2022, and reconvened on 17 October 2022 at 6.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Fraser Massey (Chair), John Kent (Vice-Chair), Gary Byrne, Sara Muldowney, Augustine Ononaji and Kairen Raper
- Apologies:** Councillors Terry Piccolo and Sue Sammons
Westley Mercer, Thurrock Business Board Representative
- In attendance:** Colin Black, Assistant Director Regeneration and Place Delivery
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer
- Laura Blake, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Robert Quick, Resident Representative
- Chris Stratford, Senior Consultant Stantec, engaged by Thurrock Council
- Tim Wright, Head of Consent, National Highways
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded and livestreamed, with the recording to be made available on the Council's website.

8. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting from the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 20 June 2022 were approved as a true and correct record.

9. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

10. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

11. National Highways Presentation (to follow)

The National Highways (NH) Representative gave his presentation, which can be found at the following web link: [\(Public Pack\)Item 5 - National Highways Presentation Agenda Supplement for Lower Thames Crossing Task Force, 19/09/2022 18:00 \(thurrock.gov.uk\)](#)

The Chair questioned the impact that the LTC could have on the local road network, and asked if NH would commit to monitor the local roads, and

provide funding if traffic on local roads were to increase. The NH Representative explained that although traffic would increase in some areas, there would be an overall improvement in traffic flows on a wider level. He added that NH would be introducing a traffic monitoring plan on a series of roads, which would be determined using feedback from Thurrock Council. He stated that the traffic monitoring plan would be shared at a later date after it had been approved by the Secretary of State. The NH Representative commented that the monitoring would be in place one year before the route opened, although Thurrock would be consulted with before monitoring began. He stated that the monitoring would be in place for one and five years after route opening. He commented that no funding would be given by NH for any mitigation or local road improvements as central government funded the local and strategic road network through the Department for Transport. The Chair queried if monitoring one year before road opening would be long enough, as this would not take into consideration the impact of construction on the local road network. The NH Representative explained that monitoring would also be taking place during the construction period, and NH would be working with Thurrock Council to identify appropriate locations. He added that NH would also be identifying areas where construction traffic could have an adverse impact on the condition of the road. He explained that NH would be improving these areas to ensure they were in a good condition before any works would begin on the route.

Councillor Muldowney highlighted data from the impact consultation in 2020, and felt that Chadwell St Mary would be surrounded by roads such as the A1089, A128 and the proposed LTC, which would increase traffic by approximately 50-80% in the area during operation. She asked how NH would be reducing the impact of this traffic in areas such as Chadwell St Mary. The NH Representative stated that an air quality assessment would be carried out, and although areas very close to the road would see increased levels of pollution, the proposed road would improve air quality in other areas as traffic flow improved and vehicles were moved onto the LTC and away from the local road network. He added that he did not have specific figures regarding Chadwell St Mary, but traffic on the A1089 and A128 could reduce due to the LTC. The Senior Consultant Stantec added that Thurrock Council had been given a briefing presentation last week on this issue, but no detailed information was provided. Councillor Muldowney asked if there would be negative health impacts because of the proposed route. She stated that no health data had yet been shared with the Council, and asked when this would be available. The NH Representative explained that health data had been published as part of the last Development Consent Order (DCO) submission in 2020, which included air quality data. He explained that this had been updated since the change in the route alignment and the previous consultation had included the updated outline data. He highlighted that it was normal practice to submit data at DCO submission, but explained that the process continued past this point to examination phase whereby Thurrock Council and individuals could interrogate the data and ask questions.

Councillor Kent queried if NH had modelled how traffic would migrate between the two Thames crossings, if one crossing had an incident. He highlighted that

there were currently approximately six-hour delays due to the closure of the Dartford Crossing. The NH Representative replied that it was highly complicated to model incidents at the LTC or the Dartford Crossing as every incident was different. He stated that on an operational level traffic patterns would evolve over time as strategic road networks changed, transport changed, and the government's net zero carbon target was developed. The NH Representative added that the NH team were currently looking at how incidents could be modelled and what operational plans could be put into place when incidents occurred at either crossing. Councillor Kent questioned how NH had modelled traffic capacity on both the Dartford Crossing and the LTC, as he felt that the proposed LTC would not reduce traffic significantly at the Dartford Crossing. The NH Representative explained that the traffic modelling undertaken by NH covered the Southeast of England and considered residential areas, commuter journeys and freight patterns to forecast and analyse traffic. He stated that the team forecast traffic scenarios without the LTC, and then with the LTC, to compare the difference between the two models. He added that the model was then validated by using real life traffic data, and the output produced showed the nature of the changes in traffic.

The Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) Representative stated that the proposed LTC would only reduce traffic over the Dartford Crossing by approximately 4%. The NH Representative replied that they were predicting lots of network growth on the Dartford Crossing by 2030, so the NH team felt that the LTC would remove traffic in this area by approximately 20%. The TCAG Representative asked if this would bring Dartford back below its capacity, and if so for how long. The NH Representative replied that this 20% reduction in traffic was modelled against peak time traffic flow rather than design capacity. The TCAG Representative stated that some roads in Thurrock were already busy with traffic and asked if NH were concerned regarding the local road impact, and if so, which junctions were NH most concerned about. The NH Representative stated that the Orsett Cock junction formed a key part of the LTC scheme, and this had already had capacity increased due to recent works, some of which could be lost by the LTC scheme. He explained that NH utilising some of the local road network was normal practice, as there would be an overall benefit on a wider Thurrock scale, for example at junction 30 of the M25, the A128 north and at A1013 Daneholes roundabout. He felt that the LTC could make roads such as the A13 more robust, resilient, and safer. The TCAG Representative disagreed and felt that the LTC lacked adequate connections and would increase traffic in the borough. She felt that NH should consider a different crossing in a different location.

Councillor Muldowney questioned how the LTC would improve lives in Thurrock, as traffic could increase on the local road network because of the LTC. The NH Representative explained that the LTC could create new job opportunities, as it would improve traffic flow, road capacity and journey times. He stated that this would be beneficial as Thurrock residents could look for jobs in areas such as Kent, and Thurrock based businesses could employ people from further afield therefore expanding their business. He felt that

overall, the scheme would be beneficial for the region and local communities. Councillor Muldowney highlighted the government's commitment to stopping climate change through a net zero target, which included stopping road building. She felt that as the proposed route ran close to schools, a care home, and vulnerable communities, they could experience air quality issues, particularly regarding PM2.5 which was emitted even from electric vehicles in brake dust and tyre wear. She asked how NH were planning on mitigating this issue. The NH Representative replied that electric vehicles were core to the net zero target, and the government were working to combat challenges such as producing electric HGVs. He felt that the Dartford Crossing put a constraint on economic growth in the region and across the UK, and the proposed LTC would improve economic growth. He stated that NH had shared data regarding air quality and noise, and as the project was a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) any adverse effects would be acknowledged at DCO submission.

The Resident Representative felt that the proposed LTC would not make a significant difference to problems and traffic flow at the Dartford Crossing. He asked if NH could share their traffic modelling data. The NH Representative explained that the traffic modelling recognised issues as people from London and Essex would utilise the LTC, but added that the traffic model had forecasted a reduction in overall traffic flow and congestion. The NH Representative added that the model had been shared with Thurrock Council and had formed part of the consultation. The Senior Consultant Stantec clarified that Thurrock Council had seen the operational cordon model in May 2022, and a report had been drafted on this for Council review. He added that the construction cordon model had been shared with the Council in June 2022 and the team were still analysing results from this data. He confirmed that every local authority received a different cordon model, and were not allowed to share data, so it was hard to get a full picture from the traffic modelling. He stated that Thurrock Council had requested the full model, but this had been refused by NH. The Assistant Director Regeneration and Place Delivery added that the Council and NH also disagreed on the outcomes of the model. He stated that Thurrock had asked for reassurances that NH would get the proposed route right by design, as modelling could be inaccurate, and Thurrock did not want to see another crossing proposal in 15 years' time or traffic worsen across the borough. He added that there had been over 300 incidents over the past year where traffic had been delayed by 29 minutes or more at the Dartford Crossing, and Thurrock needed to understand better how incidents at Dartford would affect the LTC. The NH Representative added that although only the cordon models had been shared with Thurrock, the traffic results from the full model across all of Thurrock had been shared. The Resident Representative asked why the full model had not been shared. The NH Representative explained that it was standard practice to share the full model at the end of the DCO process.

Councillor Kent stated that current building cost inflation was approximately 20%, and asked for the current final building estimate cost. The NH Representative stated that he did not have these figures, but committed to sharing this information outside of the meeting in writing. Councillor Raper

asked if the Treasury had increased the budget for the LTC, and if NH were confident that the budget would be sufficient. The NH Representative stated that the budget envelope had remained the same, but NH were confident that this would be sufficient. Councillor Raper felt that the LTC would only improve connectivity for the ports such as DP World and Tilbury Port, and asked if NH could explain how the scheme would contribute to government growth and growth within Thurrock. The NH Representative explained that the LTC would benefit growth for the ports as they would be able to flow freely up the LTC onto the M25, and would improve traffic flow at the Dartford Crossing. He added that NH recognised Thurrock's successful bid for the Thames Freeport, and explained that NH would be considering a Tilbury Link Road as part of the government's RIS3 funding. He added that the Department for Transport and the Department for Housing, Levelling-Up and Communities supported the need for a Tilbury Link Road, but felt it needed to be a separate scheme. Councillor Raper asked for the current figure for economic growth because of the LTC. The NH Representative replied that he would provide this figure after the meeting in writing.

The Chair stated that when NH had developed their business case, the Thames Freeport had not been agreed, and asked if the business case had been amended because of the Freeport. The NH Representative explained that the team were not currently considering the Freeport as part of the business case because a planning application had not been submitted, but felt that both schemes would benefit each other. The Chair queried if the Thames Freeport was included as part of the traffic modelling. The NH Representative commented that the Thames Freeport was not currently included in the traffic model, but the model did allow for growth in the number of freight and passenger journeys in terms of specific developments such as Tilbury 2, Purfleet regeneration, and the Thames Enterprise Park. He stated that once the Thames Freeport had a planning application submitted, it would be included in the traffic modelling. The NH Representative added that the team could run a sensitivity assessment to understand the difference that the Freeport could have on traffic in the area.

The TCAG Representative asked if the NH Representative could provide the latest benefit cost ratio figures, and queried why NH had not shared the outline business case (OBC) for the scheme with Thurrock. The NH Representative replied that the OBC could not be shared with the Council as it was still in draft format, but the team were considering lodging an appeal following Thurrock Council's request to the Information Commissioner's Office and ICO's confirmation that it should be shared with the Council. He added that the economic information contained in the OBC had been superseded by information that had been provided to the Council approximately two years' ago. The TCAG Representative highlighted that the LTC would be an all-purpose trunk road, but was being built to smart motorway standards. She queried if the route would be safer if classified as a motorway and if NH had any concerns regarding the safety of the proposed route. The NH Representative stated that NH were concerned with the safety of all their roads, and there was strong internal direction to improve safety across the network. He added that the LTC would be an all-purpose trunk road and

would be designed to the highest safety standards, including well spaced emergency areas, and messaging systems for lane closures. He felt that the LTC would be safer than other roads, including the Dartford Crossing. The TCAG Representative explained that the government were currently reviewing smart motorway data, and asked what the difference would be between a smart motorway and the technology used for the LTC. The NH Representative clarified that the government were currently reviewing the conversion of standard motorways into smart motorways, but LTC would be a smart motorway by design. He added that NH had taken learnings from smart motorways, and this would be built into the scheme, and would have capacity for any future smart motorway requirements. He stated that the LTC control centre would be integrated into the wider road network control centre, as he felt it would be better to have one operating centre. The TCAG Representative disagreed and felt that the LTC would put additional pressure on the control centre, and this could lead to the LTC being a dangerous road and increased fatalities. The NH Representative felt that the LTC would reduce the number of fatalities, and NH were working towards zero fatalities on their roads by 2040.

Councillor Byrne asked how the LTC would impact areas in the east of the borough, such as Stanford-le-Hope. The NH Representative stated that this area was a challenge due to the parallel road that ran alongside the A13 from the Orsett Cock to the Manorway. He stated that the team were concerned about increased traffic on the A1013, and the subsequent performance of the A13. He added that NH were considering a proposal to trunk the A13 and bring it within the NH road network, which could lead to more investment in the road. Councillor Muldowney stated that the government had recently changed how it calculated the carbon cost of projects such as the LTC. She stated that the current carbon cost of the scheme was approximately £150million, but this could increase to £500million under the new calculation method, and asked how NH would finance this. The NH Representative explained that the carbon cost was not directly spent by NH, but was considered as part of the route. He added that the carbon cost could make the economics of the route more challenging, but the LTC was a designated pathfinder project, so NH would work with communities and local businesses to mitigate carbon. He added that the carbon footprint of the scheme was calculated based on the actual carbon released, and NH were working hard to reduce carbon within the scheme by implementing new processes and procedures within the DCO; and by incentivising contractors to measure and offset their carbon production. He added that NH had gone to market recently and were trying to experiment with new ideas to reduce carbon, such as hydrogen. Councillor Muldowney asked if NH would investigate other modes of transport, such as rail and bus provision/facilitation, within the scheme. The NH Representative explained that this had been considered in 2009 and 2016 as an alternative and a complimentary addition, but the team had found that there was no need for a north to south rail link, and the rail network would need to dramatically change to be able to facilitate this. He added that a rail link directly between Essex and Kent had also been found not to reduce traffic on the Dartford Crossing.

Councillor Ononaji felt concerned regarding the impact on local roads in Thurrock, particularly regarding emergency incidents and operational pressures. The NH Representative commented that incident modelling had been undertaken and this would be shared with the Council in the next few months. He added that the economic benefits of the scheme would also be shared alongside DCO submission. The TCAG Representative thanked NH for attending the meeting, but stated that she still felt concerned regarding the scheme and asked if NH could delay submitting the DCO until concerns and issues were resolved. The NH Representative thanked the Task Force for inviting him and felt it was good to have open conversations and debate. He stated that NH were not able to delay DCO submission as traffic conditions at Dartford continued to worsen. He felt that it was not in the public interest to delay as a process was in place for residents and interested groups to voice their concerns at examination. He stated that this process was designed to handle differences in views, all of which would be considered by the Secretary of State before a decision was made. He added that the team had shared information via the consultations and the previous DCO submission documents, which was more than had ever been shared by any previous scheme of this kind.

The Chair felt that there remained a layer of frustration regarding data sharing, but thanked National Highways for attending the meeting.

The NH Representative left the meeting at 8.03pm

The meeting was adjourned at 8.03pm

The meeting was reconvened at 8.06pm

12. Development Consent Order Process Overview: Verbal Update

The Senior Consultant Stantec explained that NH were aiming to submit their DCO by mid-November, and if this was 'accepted' by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) then the scheme would enter into the pre-examination phase. He explained that this phase would last between 3-5 months as five inspectors needed to be appointed and the likely approximately 60,000 pages of DCO documentation needed to be considered. He stated during this phase the inspectors would possibly request further information, would formulate questions for NH and key stakeholders, and the Council would prepare their Local Impact report and Relevant and Written Representations. The Senior Consultant Stantec explained that if the DCO was not agreed, there could be another delay of approximately one to two years. The Senior Consultant Stantec explained that if the DCO was agreed by PINS a Rule 6 letter would be issued that would outline when the process would start and the timetable. He mentioned that there was no flexibility in the timetable and the Council and other stakeholders would have to attend when called and would have three weeks to respond to any written questions. The Senior Consultant Stantec added that it is likely that there would be a number of topic specific hearings, such as compulsory land purchase, air quality, noise, traffic modelling, and

there would also be open floor hearings where members of the public, if registered, could make a statement and ask questions.

The Chair queried who could register as an interested party. The Senior Consultant Stantec explained that a group, individual or business could register. Councillor Byrne if a document outlining the process could be provided to councillors, so they could share with local residents and forums. The Senior Consultant Stantec agreed to produce a document and circulate via Democratic Services.

13. Health Impact Assessment: Verbal Update

The Stantec Senior Consultant explained that NH had refused to give information such as air quality, noise, and health data to Thurrock Council until DCO submission. He stated that officers had recently attended NH DCO briefings on a number of environmental topics, such as: landscape; biodiversity; geology and soils; materials and assets; road drainage and water; cultural and heritage; air quality and noise; health; and climate and carbon. He commented that the presentations from the briefings could be shared with the Task Force. The Assistant Director Regeneration and Place Delivery highlighted that even after the briefings, Thurrock Council still required technical data and information.

14. Work Programme

The Task Force did not have any items to add to the Work Programme. The Chair stated that an urgent item of business may be added to November's meeting, depending on when NH submitted the DCO.

The meeting finished at 8.25 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**