

Thurrock Business Board – requests of Highways England (Draft)

Representatives of Highways England's project team for the Lower Thames Crossing recently presented to the Thurrock Business Board.

The requests of Thurrock businesses centred around two key areas.

- Firstly that the network was better managed up to any new crossing
- Secondly that any new crossing was able to benefit the local Thurrock economy – through jobs and an improved economy – as well as genuine improvements to transport.

Network Management up to 2027

HE stated that – whilst this scheme would not have the impact a crossing at Dartford would have done. There are interventions that will happen on the A13, on the M25 in and around Thurrock and on the A2 and M2.

- Against a backdrop of 38% increased traffic between now and 2027 more is needed to manage the current crossing and adjacent roads
- Intu stated “245 stoppages on the crossing”
 - The precise cause of each incident and an understanding of how these occurred and might be better managed in future were key
 - HE suggested work already completed in Dartford might be applied in Thurrock ‘collective traffic management’ and better signal management.
 - A new Wind Speed Model had been devised to understand how to minimise the closure
 - A better clearance plan must be established... bodies on the ground to clear blocked junctions.
 - Traffic Officers and Police must play bigger role in re-opening roads and managing flows.
- There must be no distinct between the Strategic road network and those junctions and roads that create the network people and business use (i.e. J30 & J31) and all the key roads across West Thurrock / Lakeside.
 - Traffic management with neighbouring councils was essential
- Key and historic pinch points in the area needed to be addressed.
- East Facing Slips continues to be a massive priority and need urgent remedy.
- HE study into Short / Medium term measures must be practical and tackle long standing operational and capacity issues – prior to any new crossing.
- Construction impacts between 2021 and opening in 2027 must safeguard the current network.

Lower Thames Crossing

- HE stated that “This is the biggest project in Highways England ‘by some margin’”.
- It was welcomed and was to be hoped that any new crossing would genuinely improve network conditions and not simply spread the gridlock across the Borough
 - Assurance was sought that queues up to Dartford (that back up J29) will not fowl the operation of the LTC.
 - TBB stated that were not in a position to comment on any proposed Road changes or indeed classification changes until such times as we all have a better understanding of the consequences positive or negative.
- Procurement process – how do local business get on the list? Plant, construction, training, colleges, universities.
- The supply chain arrangements must not be left to a ‘Main Contractor’ and ancillary elements that local suppliers are restricted to
- References to the Olympics “compete for” were welcomed (with some positive involvement) but local experiences are that tendering can be a foregone conclusion in contrast to issues seen with the lack of transparency and the Thames Tideway and M25 DBFO.
- Regional involvement in the works was welcomed but local supply chain was far more important in supporting local businesses and reducing travel impacts.
- In respect of “it is a little bit early to be involved in this first step of initial market engagement” Thurrock Businesses emphasised their desire to be involved at the earliest opportunity.
- Local Supply Chain opportunities must be embedded at every tier of the supply chain

Skills, Training and Apprenticeships

This was recognised by all as being very significant and a number of contributors called for more detailed discussion on how we formalise and embed these for the local community.

- Contractors often give generic statements of how many apprentices and instead they must state how many local apprentices
- All supply chain tiers must seek to train, and then recruit from, local people.
- Local Schools and Colleges have already started to raise awareness but they need to be aligned with the procurement route of Highways England.
- Apprenticeships and courses need to have approaches to learning and skills that will support innovation and changes to construction over the years and decades to come (e.g. off-site construction techniques) and ever changing demands “we are guessing at the moment but if it takes 5-6 years to train civil engineers we need HE to be supporting us now”.
- Despite the uncertainty on delivery models Thurrock students must be able to pay their part in the future pipeline major construction leading upto LTC including HS2, Thames Tideway, nuclear
- The ‘Rules and regulations as to how the market can deliver the project’ risk reducing the ambition and potential of the local community.

Need for Rail

A final challenge included the need to consider the potential for rail which continues to be overlooked in adding yet more lanes for cars. “This is a real opportunity being missed and you should make the tunnel a little bigger to accommodate future rail services”