

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 16 March 2020 at 5.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Gerard Rice (Chair), John Allen, Fraser Massey, Sara Muldowney and Sue Shinnick
- Apologies:** Laura Blake, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Peter Ward, Thurrock Business Representative
Westley Mercer, Thurrock Business Board Representative
- In attendance:** Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Transport Infrastructure Projects
Mat Kiely, Transportation Services Strategic Lead
Scott Morrow, Communications Strategic Lead
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

46. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from the Thames Crossing Action Group Representative; the Thurrock Business Board Representative; and the Thurrock Business Representative.

47. Minutes

The Democratic Services Officer, on behalf of the Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) Representative highlighted page 13 of the minutes, and stated that the capacity of the Dartford Crossing was 135,000, rather than 125,000 as written.

With this amendment, the minutes from 10 February 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

48. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

49. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

50. LTC Supplementary Consultation Response

The Assistant Director LTC introduced the report and stated that the supplementary consultation response was provided for Members to agree, and was to respond to the latest Highways England (HE) consultation, which was running between 29 January 2020 and 25 March 2020. She commented that this was a targeted consultation on specific design changes, based on the 2018 statutory consultation feedback. She outlined the major changes in the route for Thurrock which were:

- Removal of the Rest and Service Area (RaSA);
- Removal of the proposed Tilbury junction;
- Relocating the route approximately 60m north and closer to Linford;
- Changes to junctions between the LTC and the A13, A1089 and A1013;
- Reinstating Rectory Road, so the road did not cut through the Orsett Showground;
- Removal of one lane southbound between the M25 and A13 junction, which was due to traffic modelling predicting that there would be no need for an additional lane;
- Increasing the length of the Mardyke Viaduct by 50m and changing the alignment.

The Assistant Director LTC stated that officers had been working hard with consultants on the response, which totalled 466 pages, but highlighted that a non-technical summary had also been provided. She commented that the response was very detailed, but that the main themes regarded the impacts to the environment; health; and the community. She added that the response also looked at the impact of construction of the route, traffic modelling, the route design, and land sterilisation. She clarified that one of the main changes in the new consultation was related to utilities diversions, particularly around the A13 junction. The Assistant Director LTC added that the proposed route did not have regard for Thurrock's regeneration plans, as well as the development of the Local Plan, but an economic report had been commissioned and circulated to Members, as well as being included in the consultation response, as it quantified the impact of the route. She stated that the report sought delegated authority to make necessary changes in the consultation response until submission, and also considered the Council's response as a landowner, as a report would be produced that outlined the landowner impact on a plot by plot basis. She mentioned that the Council rejected any compulsory purchase of Council land by HE, and the Council's position remained the same as in December 2018, and were rejecting the route on an in-principle basis due to the harm it would cause the borough.

The Chair opened the debate and asked how HE had the authority to dig in areas of the borough, even though planning permission had not yet been granted for the route. The Assistant Director LTC responded that HE were currently working north and south of the Thames undertaking intrusive and non-intrusive survey works, such as trial trenches, archaeological trenches, and bore holes. She stated that the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act allowed agencies to undertake necessary works to facilitate a project, such as the LTC. She stated that she had received a number of complaints regarding

HE access routes to the survey sites, and officers had met with HE to discuss remediation works. She added that damage had also been caused to a bridleway near Fen Lane by HE survey works, but this damage had been repaired within five days of HE being notified of the problem, and new processes had been put in place. Councillor Allen asked if any items of archaeological interest had been found during the survey works, and the Assistant Director LTC responded that no findings report had been published yet. She added that part of HE's legacy plan was to display any significant findings, and a Service Level Agreement was in place with Essex County Council who employed experienced historic advisors, who were often onsite monitoring the works and potential finds.

Councillor Muldowney stated that there were a number of repeating themes throughout the supplementary consultation response, one of which was a lack of detail being provided by HE, and the impact this had on providing an informed response. She felt that the consultation response could not address major concerns because of the lack of HE information, and asked if the Council would get the opportunity to do this before Development Consent Order (DCO) submission. The Assistant Director LTC replied that the Council had a work programme in place with HE, and although this was currently behind schedule, she was expecting environmental information from HE soon, which would be submitted for technical approval. She stated that for large schemes such as the LTC a limited amount of information could be provided before DCO submission. She clarified that if the programme was met then a substantial amount of information would be provided, which would be difficult to analyse with current resources. She stated that HE's current timeline would mean that DCO would be submitted by late summer 2020, and at this point officers would have 14 days to provide an adequacy of consultation response. She added that once the DCO was submitted, the Council and its consultants would have thousands of pages of information to analyse, so Council and external consultant's resources would need to be increased.

Councillor Shinnick asked when the Health Impact Assessment (HIA) would be provided by HE, as this was a concern across Thurrock due to the increased rate of COPD. The Assistant Director LTC replied that the team were working hard on this, and quarterly meetings had been set-up between HE, Thurrock's health team and other local authorities. She stated that Thurrock and other affected local authorities had written to HE to express their concern regarding the HIA and asked for this to be presented pre-DCO submission. She added that the route had to be compliant with the National Policy Statement, and therefore HE were not legally obliged to produce an HIA, but the Council were still pushing for one. She stated that there was a presumption in favour of development from the government, and the Council were at the stage of trying to identify potential mitigation, unless there was a National Policy Statement review.

Councillor Massey asked if the Council or HE had considered the number of construction workers that would be entering the borough, and where they would be housed. The Assistant Director LTC stated that at the peak of construction there would be approximately 1200 construction workers, and the

plan was to build some Porta-cabin accommodation on site at Tilbury, similar to the accommodation currently being used on the A14 works. She added that an accommodation study would be completed by HE, which the Council would be able to access and review. The Assistant Director LTC stated that she felt concerned as HE also believed there would be enough housing within the borough to accommodate LTC construction workers. She also felt concerned about the construction workers need to travel into the borough, as roads were currently already congested and this could increase the problem. She stated that the supplementary consultation response needed to be strategic, so could not include this level of detail, but would be addressed by officers.

The Resident Representative asked if the traffic modelling had proven that the LTC would provide traffic congestion benefit. The Assistant Director LTC responded that the traffic model had used data from 2016, but had now been updated with more recent data. She highlighted that the Council had asked for the updated traffic model, but this had not yet been received. She clarified that traffic modelling was only a prediction, and not an exact science as you could not model people's behaviours. She stated that the proposed route would provide some level of mitigation, and explained that the capacity at the Dartford Crossing was 135,000 vehicles per day, but was currently operating at 155-160,000 vehicles per day. She stated that once the LTC was opened the number of vehicles at Dartford would be reduced to 135,000 vehicles per day, but this was still at capacity. She mentioned that HE predicted 30million vehicles would use the LTC within its first year of opening.

The Chair then asked if cut and cover could be provided along the route, as he felt the route passed close by residents houses and they needed some level of protection. He asked if there were exact figures relating to the cost to add cut and cover along the route. The Assistant Director LTC responded that although cost was one factor in refusing cut and cover along the entire route, there was other factors too such as land conditions, flooding and contamination. She stated that if the entire route was put into a tunnel there could be no future growth, as junctions could be not be added.

Councillor Allen felt that the HE should get the route 'right by design' and highlighted the contamination at Linford from a Victorian landfill. He asked if the Tilbury Link Road would be added to the proposal, now the RaSA had been removed. The Assistant Director LTC clarified that the Tilbury Link Road was not part of the LTC funding, but the published RIS2 had included funding for the road. She stated that it would be delivered as part of RIS3, which would be delivered between 2025 and 2030, and she hoped that one contractor would be used, as the opening date for the LTC would be 2028.

Councillor Muldowney highlighted figures from the economic report and stated that although the economic impact on the borough could be £200million, this did not include social development being lost, loss of land, or blight. The Assistant Director LTC stated that the economic report was a study that had been commissioned by the Council, and driven by enquiries from key stakeholders, such as the Port of London, who had needed quantified economics. She stated that Hatch Regeneris had quantified the impacts on

the borough, which had been summarised as four main themes: community and health impacts; economic impact; growth impact; and the environment. She stated that this report had put a monetary value on these impacts, such as loss of open space or increased rates of COPD, and the next piece of work would look into how the design of the route could be changed to deliver benefits for the borough.

The Chair asked if Coronavirus would have any impact on the route. The Assistant Director LTC replied that the Council and HE were currently unsure of the impact that COVID-19 would have on the scheme. She stated that HE consultation events were still going ahead as of the 16 March, but felt concerned for vulnerable residents who wished to attend. She highlighted that the Council were following Public Health England's advice, but that the adequacy of consultation response could consider the impact of COVID-19 and the public's ability to attend events. She added that although Coronavirus could delay the scheme or lead to further consultation, only one DCO had been refused at submission, and this was because of environmental factors, rather than inadequate consultation.

Councillor Allen felt there would be few benefits to the residents of Thurrock, but asked if profit made from the tolls could be given to Thurrock's healthcare system to help residents with respiratory issues. The Assistant Director LTC responded that as part of the supplementary consultation, HE had promised a residents discount scheme, which would run in conjunction with the discount scheme for the Dartford Crossing. She added that HE were also considering a percentage of the tolls being transferred into a sinking fund for community benefit.

The Chair highlighted potential problems with the removal of the third lane southbound at the A13/M25 junction, and felt this would create a bottleneck and problems on the strategic road network. The Assistant Director LTC replied that the third lane currently being added to the A13 would also be used as a slip road to the LTC, so would remove any additional capacity. She added that HE had to demonstrate that compulsory land purchases were proportionate, adequate and necessary, and as the traffic modelling showed the additional lane was not necessary, HE would not be able to provide the additional lane. She stated that as compulsory purchase of land interfered with a person's human rights, there was very strict criteria to be met before the purchase of any land.

The Resident Representative questioned whether any remedial works would be carried out at the Dartford Crossing to allow for unescorted tanker movements, as otherwise the LTC would become the focus for HGV movements, which would increase pollution. The Assistant Director LTC responded that it would not be possible to alter the Dartford Crossing to allow unescorted tankers through, due to the size of the tunnel. She added that she had attended a meeting on the LTC tunnel safety, but the detail had not been clarified yet. She felt that the blue light emergency responses were currently being stretched with the recent Coronavirus outbreak, but she had spoken to Essex Police regarding the impact that the LTC could have on the service.

She felt that funding to the emergency services would need to be increased to deal with the added pressures stemming from the LTC.

Councillor Muldowney questioned what potential benefits the route could bring to local businesses. The Assistant Director LTC responded that there were tangible benefits to the route which were the increase of Public Rights of Way, and the supply chain school which had been set-up by HE. She mentioned that the supply chain school benefitted local businesses as it equipped them with the knowledge to apply for contracts with HE. She stated that it benefitted smaller businesses such as caterers, stationers, and clothing shops, rather than Tier 1 contractors, but recent supply chain events had not been well attended. She felt that if HE could get the message to local businesses, then this could boost the local economy. She added that HE also wanted to increase skills training for local residents, and that she had been in contact with South East Essex College regarding new courses such as project management. She added that HE were behind on this work, as it needed planning and lead-up time to prepare. She felt that if HE upskilled residents and increased training resources, it would ensure residents were ready to be employed when the route entered the construction phase. She added that HE could not be un-competitive, and if there was a skill shortage in Thurrock then HE would need to go elsewhere.

Councillor Rice then read a note from the HE Local Government Lead as below:

In the case of the Gammon Field Travellers' Site, which will be impacted by the Lower Thames Crossing, we are consulting on two replacement sites. We are currently consulting on these proposals and we want to hear people's views on them. After consultation closes, we will consider the responses and take an informed position on how to progress. It may be the case that the locations proposed during the supplementary consultation are not final. We will continue to engage with interested parties about the locations. If there are changes that require further consultation, then we will consult.

The Assistant Director LTC commented that this statement was as a response to enquiries from residents and Councillors, and that she had spoken to HE who had stated that no decisions had been made. She highlighted that Thurrock Council were landlords to the residents of Gammon Fields, and they had to ensure their tenants were looked after. She added that there were two sites currently being considered, both of which were off Long Lane. She clarified that discussions would be held between HE, residents of Long Lane and Gammon Fields before any decision was reached, and a needs assessment would be undertaken. The Assistant Director LTC then ran through the proposed timeline for the LTC and clarified that any member of the public could register as an interested party and make a representation to the Planning Inspectorate at the examination phase.

51. Task Force Priorities List

There were no updates to the Task Force Priorities List.

52. Work Programme

There were no updates to the Work Programme.

The meeting finished at 6.30 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

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