

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 20 March 2023 at 6.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Fraser Massey (Chair), John Kent (Vice-Chair), Sara Muldowney, Augustine Ononaji (*arrived 6.36pm*), Kairen Raper and Sue Sammons
- Apologies:** Councillor Terry Piccolo
- In attendance:** Mark Bradbury, Director of Place
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Laura Blake, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Robert Quick, Resident Representative
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Before the start of the meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded, with the recording being made available on the Council's website.

14. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2022 were approved as a true and correct record.

15. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

16. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

17. Thames Crossing Action Group Presentation

The Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) Representative introduced her presentation which can be found at the following weblink:

<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s37884/Thames%20Crossing%20Action%20Group%20Presentation.pdf> .

The TCAG Representative explained that the group had been founded by residents to represent those opposed to the scheme, including residents in Kent and across the country. She explained that in 2017 TCAG had been refused a question at Full Council, and there had been much media and press attention surrounding this. She stated that the LTC Task Force had then been set up to improve communications between officers, Members, and residents. She explained why TCAG were fighting the scheme, such as problems on the

Dartford Crossing that would not be improved by a new crossing, problems during construction phase, and increased pollution. She explained that issues with the design of the LTC, such as a single lane on the A2 slip road and the 'Stanford detour', as well as a lack of traffic migration data during design phase, could also increase problems for users of the road and residents. She added that a new crossing could also increase cross-river traffic by 50%, and would have a negative impact on nearby homes, farms, greenbelt land and the solar farm.

The TCAG Representative moved on and stated that in 2016 the cost of the scheme had been approximately £4bn, but this had now risen to £10bn and meant that the Benefit Cost Ratio had fallen from 3.1 to 1.22. She explained that the recently announced two-year delay would continue to increase costs and therefore reduce the Benefit Cost Ratio. She added that additional mitigation projects originally proposed by National Highways such as the Tilbury Link Road, Blue Bell Hill, and A2 dualling had also been dropped. The TCAG Representative explained that the Accounting Officer Assessment had been published in January 2023, but this document was using cost data from August 2020, which was now outdated. She added that this document contained references to an independent assessment review which had been carried out, and TCAG had entered a Freedom of Information Request to see this document. She stated that the request had been refused by Cabinet. She stated that TCAG had therefore instructed solicitors and were currently waiting on a response.

The TCAG Representative moved on and felt that if the LTC did go ahead, carbon output would increase both during the construction and operation phase. She explained that a legal challenge had recently been put to the government's Net Zero policy, and the government had a deadline of 31 March 2023 to respond to this challenge. She added that other legal challenges were also ongoing. She felt that, if the project went ahead, more green mitigation needed to be included in the Development Consent Order (DCO), as well as limits on PM2.5. The TCAG Representative explained that the World Health Organisation had recently set guideline limits on the levels of PM2.5 that could be released, but these had not been accepted by the government. She added that electric vehicles could still emit PM2.5 through brake dust, tyre wear and road wear, but that National Highways were still in the process of assessing the impact of PM2.5. She commented that the government were also in the second hearing phase of Ella's Law which discussed people's right to clean air. She added that the proposed expansion of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) could also affect the LTC, as the northern part of the proposed route entered the London Borough of Havering by the M25 junction. She commented that she had spoken with Transport for London who had confirmed they would be attending and making representations during the LTC examination phase.

The TCAG Representative explained that although the proposed scheme would not be a smart motorway, she felt it would be an all-purpose trunk road designed to smart motorway standards, as it would have an incident detection system, lane control, and variable speed limits. She commented that the

government had recently paused the smart motorway scheme, and felt that the LTC should also be paused for this reason. She commented that the scheme could also affect local wildlife habitats and populations, such as water voles in the Mardyke Valley, bats, and the recently re-discovered ruby-tailed wasp. She added that the LTC would also have a negative impact on The Wilderness, and the TCAG team were working on having this area designated as a Long-Established Woodland by the Woodland Trust. She stated that the LTC would also reduce the number of farmland acres, which could reduce food security and increase pollution further through increased air miles for food imports. The TCAG Representative explained that the proposed scheme did not encourage public transport use or active travel, as there would be no increased rail links or cross-river trams, which could reduce the amount of cars and freight on the road. She summarised and explained the process now the DCO had been submitted, and the current pre-examination phase, but highlighted that even if the DCO was accepted, the scheme would be subject to a two-year delay.

Councillor Ononaji joined the meeting at 6.36pm.

The Chair thanked the TCAG Representative for her presentation and her continued work with the Task Force. He questioned if any work had been undertaken on fire safety within the LTC tunnel, particularly fires in electric vehicles. The TCAG Representative explained that electric vehicles could have issues as fires were more difficult to put out and could reignite, but the fire service were aware of this. Councillor Muldowney echoed the Chair's thanks and felt that the recent legal challenges were good news. She felt that the government needed to work on a coherent Transport Policy to address climate change, bring about a modal shift regarding public transport, and active travel. The Resident Representative questioned where the examination phase would be taking place and how individuals could impact on this process. The TCAG Representative explained that anyone could register as an interested party and could attend the examination phase, either virtually, in-person or by making a written submission. Councillor Kent thanked TCAG for their hard work and good presentation. He felt that the proposed scheme would not stop congestion at the Dartford Crossing, or congestion on the local or regional road networks; and would not meet the required Benefit Cost Ratio level.

18. Verbal Update: Council's Position - Examination

The Director of Place updated the LTC Task Force and stated that he had started at Thurrock Council in July 2022, and had become Director of Place in October 2022, and therefore the LTC response fell under his remit. He stated that he begun his work by seeking clarity on the LTC, the cost to the council, and how the government intervention in September 2022, and subsequent S114 notice in December 2022, would affect the project. He explained that at no point had funding been withdrawn, but the Council had to understand the full cost of the project and confirm there was sufficient money in the budget under the S114 notice to progress a compliant response. He stated that some of the design team had paused some of their work in the meantime.

The Director of Place explained that the Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) technically stopped at DCO submission, so no formal funding structure had been in place and the current Council funding was not sufficient. He explained that therefore the team had sought a better deal from National Highways and had got this in writing, so work on the response was now progressing. He explained that as Thurrock Council was a host authority, it was automatically registered as an interested party, but the Council had confirmed with the Planning Inspectorate that they would be making representation at the examination phase. He stated that the team had asked the Planning Inspectorate to consider extending the pre-examination phase by three months to ensure all information is correctly considered, and the Council were currently waiting on a response to this request. The Director of Place explained that there had also been a change to project management staffing, as the planning and transport teams within the Council were now more engaged with the process, although consultancy experts remained involved. He thanked the consultants for their hard work throughout the process.

Councillor Ononaji questioned how much the project had cost the Council to date. The Director of Place explained that it was hard to find an exact figure due to the nature of the project, but estimated that consultancy cost and officer time had cost approximately £1.4-1.5m, although 40% of this had been covered by the PPA. He stated that more was now covered by the PPA, and this meant that cost would approximately be between £400,000 and £500,000. The TCAG Representative questioned if legal representation was covered by the PPA, and if the LTC administration team were still working and reviewing the DCO documents. The Director of Place explained that legal representation costs had been included in the Council's budget, but were not covered by the PPA from National Highways. He added that administration had previously been supplied through an external team, with no oversight from council officers, but now additional Council administration officers would be used to support the external team, and would be tasked with processes such as checking invoices. He added that consultants engaged through Stantec still remained working with the Council, and work reviewing the DCO would begin before the end of March 2023.

19. Work Programme

Members did not have any items to add to the Work Programme.

The Chair thanked Members, officers, and co-opted members for their hard work on the Task Force throughout the 2022/23 municipal year.

The meeting finished at 7.10 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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