

10 February 2016		ITEM: 15 (Decision 01104350)
Cabinet		
Lower Thames Crossing - Highways England's Options		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Oliver Gerrish, Portfolio Holder, Highways and Transportation		
Accountable Head of Service: Ann Osola, Head of Service, Transportation and Highways		
Accountable Director: David Bull, Director of Planning & Transportation		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Highways England has published options for a Lower Thames Crossing and the consultation is taking place between 26 January and 24 March 2016. Their preferred scheme is a dual carriageway connecting Junction 1 of the M2 to the M25 between Junctions 29 and 30, crossing the Thames via a tunnel at a site just east of Gravesend and Tilbury. The consultation seeks views on three routes north of the river and two routes south of the river. In Highways England view this proposal "best matches the objectives and balances the need of road users, the community, the environment and business".

This report asks Cabinet to note the preferred route from Highways England, reiterates the Council's opposition to any Lower Thames Crossing route passing through Thurrock and asks that funding is identified to keep residents informed of the proposals and for legal and technical advice on the transportation and economic impacts of all the options on Borough residents and Thurrock's Growth Agenda.

1. Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Notes Highways England's proposals as set out in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.7 of this report.**
- 1.2 Reaffirms its policy on the Lower Thames Crossing, most recently agreed in Council on the 25 November 2015, that we should oppose any new crossing in Thurrock.**
- 1.3 Requests that officers prepare a draft Council Consultation Response to be agreed by Cabinet and Council in March, and informed by:**

- (i) the evidence heard at Planning, Transportation, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 9 February 2016
- (ii) expert advice on the implications for business, growth and transportation of the three options
- (iii) dialogue with all parties interested in a Lower Thames crossing through Thurrock, including Gravesham District Council.

1.4 Requests that up to £30k of funding be identified in 2016/17 for community information and for technical and legal studies to support Thurrock's response to the Options, to be confirmed by Council at its February meeting.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 For over 50 years, the Dartford Crossing has provided the only road crossing of the Thames east of London. It is a critical part of the UK's major road network carrying local, national and international traffic.

2.2 Current Crossing has a typical daily traffic flow of 137,000 vehicles with the highest throughput for 2015 recorded in May of 162,140 vehicles when the original design capacity was 135,000 vehicles. The Crossing suffers a high level of incidents and delays and is highly unreliable in comparison to other routes on the strategic road network.

2.3 The recent removal of toll booths and introduction of electronic payments in peak time shortens the queue over the bridge, although problems persist travelling north through the tunnels. The widening of Junction 30 on M25 will further improve capacity and help to alleviate the delays.

2.4 Throughout the process of public consultations, Thurrock Council's policy towards another Lower Thames Crossing has been "*opposed to government plans for a further river crossing in Thurrock and committed to continue campaigning, alongside residents, on this issue*". This was agreed on 28 November 2012 and unanimously reaffirmed on 25 November 2015.

2.5 A public meeting at Orsett Hall on 25 January 2016 attracted around 400 people and included representatives of all three political parties. The next public meeting to discuss the proposal is scheduled to be at the Culver Centre, South Ockendon on Thursday 25 February.

2.6 An extended Planning, Transportation, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny meeting took place on the 9 February 2016, and its findings will be reported to Cabinet in March.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

Highways England's Consultation

- 3.1 Highways England has completed its evaluations and recommended a new road crossing at Location C, at a site just east of Gravesend and Tilbury. The proposed scheme has a dual carriageway connecting Junction 1 of the M2 to the M25 between Junctions 29 and 30, which crosses under the River Thames.
- 3.2 This report contains only broad information on the consultation and the Members are advised to visit Highways England website for further details.
- 3.3 The option proposed would provide a 70mph motorway to motorway connection with the greatest improvement in journey times and it would alleviate congestion at the existing crossing. The new road would be 15 miles long and consist of a twin bored tunnel as illustrated in Appendix 1.
- 3.4 The scheme would cost between £4.3 and £5.9 billion and subject to funding and planning process, the new crossing is anticipated to be opened in 2025 (public funding) or 2027 (private funding).
- 3.5 The benefits to the road users in journey times include 12 minutes reduction in journey time between M2 Junction 4 and M25 Junction 28. The economic assessment indicates that UK's GDP could benefit from this option by over £7 billion and that over 5,000 new jobs nationally could be created. The adjusted benefit cost ratios (BCRs) for the preferred option range from 2.5 to 3.4 which presents high value for money.
- 3.6 A bored tunnel solution has been preferred over a bridge and an immersed tunnel because it is the least environmentally damaging solution. A bored tunnel would generate the least of noise and visual impact during both, construction and operation, and would have the least impact on the protected habitats and species in Thames Estuary and Marshes Ramsar sites.
- 3.7 The analysis of the three routes north of the river proposed in this consultation indicate that Route 3 would provide the shortest route with the lowest environmental impact which would be constructed with the least disruption to existing traffic routes. Route 3 presents the greatest improvement to journey time and, being an entirely new road, would deliver a modern high quality 70mph road (see Appendix 2).

Council Policy on a Lower Thames Crossing Through Thurrock

- 3.8 Thurrock Council first recorded its opposition to any Lower Thames Crossing at its meeting of 28 November 2012 when it resolved to oppose any corridor for a new crossing. On the 25 November 2016, the Council passed a Motion opposing any proposal for a Lower Thames Crossing passing through the Borough.

Preparation of a Draft Consultation Response

- 3.9 At its extended meeting of 9 February 2016, Planning, Transportation, Regeneration Overview & Scrutiny Committee heard representation from Thurrock residents, businesses and community groups, as well as political representatives, who gave views on the materials put forward by Highways England for consultation.
- 3.10 It is also proposed that officers seek expert advice on the implications for business, growth and transportation of the three options. Cabinet is therefore requested to ask that appropriate funding be allocated for this purpose from Council budgets.
- 3.11 In addition, the Council has a duty of care to its residents, particularly those who could be directly impacted by one of the proposed crossing routes. It will seek to ensure that residents are adequately informed and, where possible, supported and that they are adequately represented throughout the scheme development process.
- 3.12 The Council will work with all interested parties in opposing a Lower Thames Crossing through Thurrock, including local authorities and organisations south of the Thames.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The recommendations support an effective and integrated Council response to Highways England's proposals for a Lower Thames Crossing.

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

- 5.1 An extended PTR Overview & Scrutiny Committee was held on the 9 February 2016, and its recommendations will be incorporated in the Council's draft Consultation Response, which will be brought to Cabinet at its March meeting.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The scheme proposed in the consultation will affect all residents of Thurrock, the communities, the environment and businesses. Highways England's analysis show a positive impact on the regeneration of national economy however the negative externalities produced in the process of construction and in operations is considered to be greater and long lasting for the local environment.
- 6.2 The new crossing is considered to have negative impact on our corporate priorities, especially that of improving health and well-being and promoting and protecting our clean and green environment.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**
Director of Finance and IT

Funding is required for an Economic Impact Assessment, additional capacity in Communications and ad hoc costs for consultation meetings. Whilst every effort will be made to meet costs from existing budgets, this request could call on an additional £30k of funding that will add to previously reported pressures. At this stage of the year, it is unlikely that mitigating savings will be possible although every effort will be made.

Going forward, the 2016/17 budget proposals includes a provision of £50k per annum to meet various costs of consultation and support to residents.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Vivienne Williams**
Planning & Regeneration Solicitor

There are no specific legal implications for the Council of this report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development Officer

A robust programme of consultation and community engagement will be completed with all communities in Thurrock during this Lower Thames Crossing consultation with a focus on ensuring that groups with protected characteristics are represented. Responses from the consultation and engagement programme will provide a greater understanding of the implications for communities which will be set out in full in the final response to government.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

The proposed scheme 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.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Highways England consultation documents are available at: <https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/cip/lower-thames-crossing-consultation>
- The consultation is also available through Thurrock Council's website at: <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/thames-crossing/thames-crossing-campaign>

9. Appendices to the report

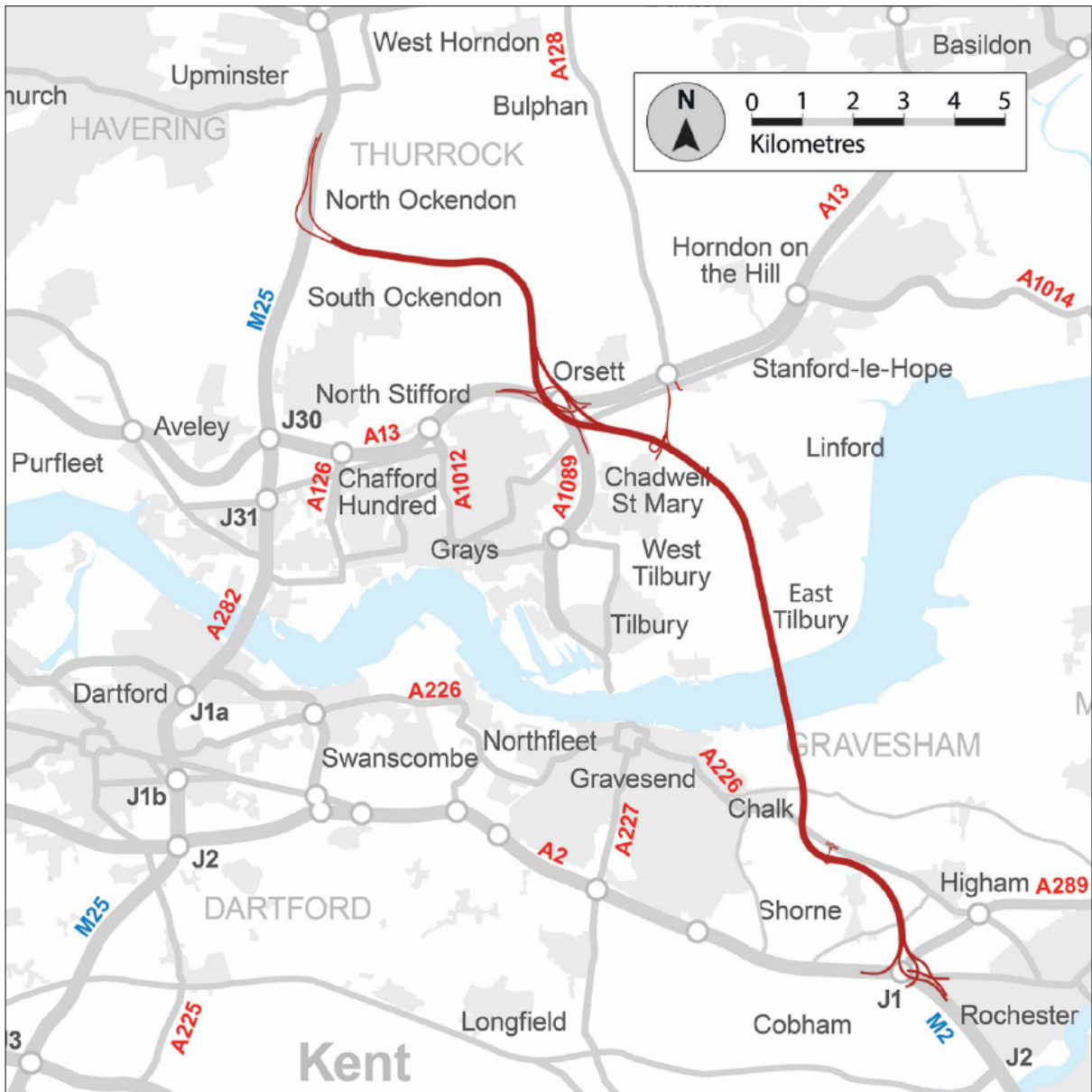
- Appendix 1 Highways England's Preferred Route
- Appendix 2 North of the River Routes

Report Author:

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Appendix 1- Highways England's Preferred Route



Appendix 2 - North of the River Routes

