

2 March 2016		ITEM: 3 Urgent Business
Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Lower Thames Crossing Consultation		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Key
Accountable Head of Service: Ann Osola, Head of Transportation and Highways		
Accountable Director: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on additional evidence gathering to inform Thurrock Council's response to Highways England's Route Option Consultation on the Lower Thames Crossing which has taken place since Scrutiny Committee's last meeting on the 9 February 2016. It also updates the Committee on actions taken in response to the resolutions of the Committee at that date, and seeks Committee endorsement of recommendations to Cabinet to support the Council's representation of stakeholder interests.

1. Recommendation(s)

That the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1.1 Notes actions taken in response to resolutions of the Planning, Transportation, Regeneration Committee at its meeting of 9 February 2016 as set out in paragraph 3.1.**
- 1.2 Note the views expressed by attendees at the public meeting on Lower Thames Crossing at Tilbury Cruise Terminal on Thursday the 25 February 2016 as summarised in paragraph 3.2.**
- 1.3 Note the views expressed at the meeting of Thurrock Business Board of 29 February 2016 to discuss highways England's Lower Thames Crossing proposals as set out in paragraphs 3.3 & 3.4.**
- 1.4 Call upon Cabinet to pursue the establishment of a Congestion Task Force comprised of Highway Authority, Emergency Service and business partners on both sides of the existing Dartford Crossing to**

develop measures to alleviate the unacceptable levels of network disruption which result from incidents or closures on that Crossing.

- 1.5 Note the Draft Evidence Gathering Report (see Appendix 1) which is being developed to reflect the representations made to this Committee on Lower Thames Crossing, and which will be finalised following this meeting.**
- 1.6 Agree to recommend to Cabinet at its meeting of 9 March 2016 that the final version of this Committee's Evidence Gathering Report be incorporated as an appendix to the Council's Formal Consultation Response to Highways England.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 In 2009 the Department for Transport (DfT) examined five locations where an additional crossing could be built. The report found that the most easterly of these (Locations D and E) would bring very limited congestion relief to the existing crossing. Both were also shown to encourage a low level of traffic demand, which, when coupled with their relatively high scheme costs, meant that they would be unlikely to provide value for money.
- 2.2 In 2013, further analysis of the three remaining options (Locations A, B and C) together with an option known as C Variant (which would involve widening of the A229 between the M2 and M20) was carried out. In 2013 the DfT ran a public consultation on the need for a new crossing and invited views on:
 - Location A (at the existing crossing)
 - Location B (connecting the A2 and the Swanscombe Peninsula with the A1089)
 - Location C (east of Gravesend and Tilbury)
 - C Variant (widening of the A229 between the M2 and M20)
- 2.3 Later that year the Government announced its decision not to proceed with Location B due to limited public support, the potential impact on local development plans and limited transport benefits.
- 2.4 In 2014, the Government published its response to the consultation, confirming the need for an additional crossing between Kent and Essex. The response acknowledged that there was no preference at that stage on location, and that further work would be carried out to develop and appraise route options for both Location A and C before choosing where to site a new crossing.
- 2.5 The Council held a public meeting on Monday the 25 January 2016 at Orsett Hall in anticipation of a consultation on the remaining routes. On Tuesday the

26 January, Highways England commenced the new consultation, which is due to run until the 24 March 2016. The consultation document included route options for Corridors A & C and recommended Corridor C / Option 3 as the preferred solution. The Council has held a further 3 public meetings, including a Witness Session of Planning, Transportation, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny (PTR O & S) and a special meeting of PTR O & S on the 9 February 2016.

3. Matters Arising Following Scrutiny's Last Meeting of 9 February 2016

Actions Taken in Relation to Resolutions of PTR O & S at its Meeting of 9 February 2016

3.1 The resolutions of PTR O & S have been actioned as follows:

- i. The Committee noted all representations from interested parties these are included in the Minutes provided for Item 2 of this Committee.
- ii. The then Director of Planning and Transportation has liaised with Highways England to ensure that Lower Thames Crossing consultation materials and maps are made available to Thurrock Council, members of the public and Councillors. All members were contacted to ascertain the needs of their wards and 22,000 questionnaires and 2,000 maps were requested of which, at the point of writing this report, Highways England supplied half of the requirement.
- iii. The Chair of the Committee in agreement with Group Leaders prepared a letter to the Secretary of State for Transport. The letter challenges the evidence on which the case for a crossing is made and requests an extension to the consultation period due to concerns over the inadequate information and consultation resources. It also requests the names and addresses of the 300 Thurrock residents and property owners who have received letters from Highways England informing them that their properties may be required for the new Crossing. No response has yet been received from the Secretary of State. However, Highways England has advised that they are unable to supply this information as it is covered by the Data Protection Act.

Public Meeting 25 February 2016

- 3.2** The Council facilitated a public meeting at the Tilbury Cruise Terminal on the 25 February 2016 which was attended by approximately 1000 people. Presentations were received from Highways England, Jackie Doyle-Price MP, Stephen Metcalfe MP, Cllr John Kent and George Abbot representing Thurrock Residents. The meeting was vocal in opposing any new crossing in Thurrock. A common theme in points raised by the audience was a desire to revisit Corridor Option D (a crossing to the east of Thurrock at Canvey Island).

Meeting of the Thurrock Business Board 29 February 2016

- 3.3** On the 29 February 2016, a meeting of the Thurrock Business Board was convened to consider Highways England's proposals in relation to a Lower

Thames Crossing. Board Members were broadly in favour of a new crossing, but expressed concerns that further work was needed in relation to proposed junctions, and that further information was required to give comfort that the proposed solution would alleviate rather than add to congestion in Thurrock.

- 3.4 Businesses also expressed concern that the current congestion issues arising in Thurrock when problems arose on the Dartford Crossing could not wait ten years to be addressed. It was proposed that a Congestion Task Force should be established, bringing together business stakeholders with Highways England, and their contractors, Local Highway Authorities on both sides of the crossing and Emergency Services to develop and progress a programme of mitigation measures to alleviate the problem.

Draft Evidence Gathering Report (Appendix 1)

- 3.5 Subsequent to PTR O & S's meeting of 9 February 2016, the growing body of stakeholder comments, including the initial findings of technical experts engaged by the Council to review Highways England's consultation materials, have been captured in a Draft Evidence Gathering Report (Appendix 1). The intention is that this will continue to be developed over the next two weeks, and a finalised version could be available to support Thurrock Council's formal consultation response to Highways England. Key points in the draft document can be summarised as follows:

- 3.5.1 It is apparent that a number of the issues raised by the Witness Session participants are also picked up by the technical experts – specifically that the environmental impacts have not been adequately captured and could outweigh the benefits of a new crossing, and that further traffic flow modelling is needed using more up-to-date information; and that there are a number of other procedural and technical issues which merit mention. The Witness Sessions highlighted the serious flaws in the consultation process which need to feature highly in the Council's consultation response. These issues have been reinforced by members of the public at the meeting on the 25 February 2016.
- 3.5.2 The strength of feeling of residents across the Borough largely against any Lower Thames Crossing through Thurrock should be noted. Business views are broadly in favour of a crossing, with specific representation received from the Port of Tilbury in regard to the importance of a new crossing in the east of Thurrock in supporting Port expansion (with an associated request to ensure improved local access to Tilbury Port).
- 3.5.3. Base traffic origin/ destination information from 2001 even if improved by validation data from 2009 does not produce a traffic model with sufficient confidence on its accuracy for a scheme which may start construction in

2021, at the earliest. An accurate traffic model is essential to provide a valid basis for assessment of a scheme of this national importance.

- 3.5.4 The Highways England proposal' preferred option only takes 14% of traffic from the Dartford Crossing. There is a strong case for government to consider the national interest by undertaking a full strategic road network review for a wider area and make it clear what it is trying to achieve.

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 This report details extensive consultation with residents, Members and businesses.

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

- 6.1 The Council's objections to Highways England's Lower Thames Crossing proposals are aligned with Council's corporate plan priorities of "improving health and well-being" and "promoting and protecting our clean and green environment".

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Chief Accountant

Any direct costs arising from the recommendations of this report will be absorbed within existing service budgets.

7.2 Legal

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

The statute of Local Government Act 1986, Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity requires that the Council's consultation response 'provides a balanced and factually accurate view in a fair manner'.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
**Community Development and Equalities
Manager**

There are no direct equality implications resulting from this report. Any final decision regarding the Lower Thames Crossing will need to be informed by an equality impact assessment with due consideration to the health impact of the proposal on all people with protected characteristics.

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

None

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):

- Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview & Scrutiny 9 February 2016 report: Lower Thames Crossing – Highways England's Options
- Cabinet 10 February 2016 report: Lower Thames Crossing – Highways England's Options
- 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- Draft Evidence Gathering Report

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