

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 15 October 2018 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Peter Smith (Chair), Gerard Rice (Vice-Chair), Qaisar Abbas (*arrived 18.16*), John Allen, Andrew Jefferies, Tom Kelly, Jane Potheary (*arrived 18.03*), and Sue Sammons

In attendance: Steve Cox, Corporate Director Place
Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director for Lower Thames Crossing
Mary Patricia Flynn, Strategic Lead Communications
Mat Kiely, Transportation Development Manager
Luke Tyson, Business Manager
Natalie Warren, Community Development and Equalities Manager
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

Laura Blake, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Linda Mulley, Resident Representative
Peter Ward, Business Representative

Dermot Scanlon, Peter Brett Associates
David Manning, Highways England
Gary Hodges, Highways England
Chris Stratford, Highways England

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.

13. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence received.

14. Minutes

The minutes of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force meeting held on 17 September 2018 were approved as a correct record.

15. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

16. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

17. Election of Vice Chair

Councillor Gerard Rice was nominated and elected as Vice Chair for the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force for this municipal year.

18. Verbal Update: A13/A1089 Traffic Movement Update

The Transportation Development Manager described how at the last Task Force meeting, additional information regarding traffic movement had been requested. He informed the Task Force that the transport team had then gone away and researched traffic flows for 2017 and 2030, including new proposed housing developments around the borough. He stated that the transportation team had predicted an increase in traffic across the borough, but predictions did not include traffic for the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC), as this was not possible until after the Statutory Consultation had finished. Laura Blake, the Thames Crossing Action Group Representative, questioned how recent changes to the LTC design including the removal of the Tilbury link road, would affect the traffic flow predictions. The Transportation Development Manager confirmed that the models did not include traffic from the LTC, so could not confirm.

19. Verbal Update: East Facing Slip Roads

The Transportation Development Manager began by stating how East Facing Slip roads had been an aspiration of the Task Force since its inception, which would help eastbound traffic at the junction of the A126/A13 at Lakeside. He mentioned that at the recent Conservative Party Conference, it was announced that funding had been allocated for East Facing Slips; and this was due to Thurrock Council's funding submission to the Department of Transport. He continued by stating that the scheme would be delivered between 18 months-2 years of construction commencement, and although construction would cause issues it would be beneficial in the long run. Councillor Kelly then discussed how the East Facing Slips and the LTC are connected. He debated that if Highways England had built the A13 correctly in 1986, it would not be an issue now; and the same problems could face the LTC at the A126/Baker Street roundabout.

Councillor Potheary congratulated the Task Force on this achievement, as East Facing Slips had long been an aspiration of the Task Force, because it was a difficult section of road. Councillor Potheary then asked Officers if the problem of the railway line at Chafford Hundred and South Ockendon were still a problem for the East Facing Slips, or if a solution had been found. She also asked if this was still in the application phase or if engineering problems were being resolved. The Transportation Development Manager answered that designs had been drawn up which take into account the engineering problems with the railway line; and that two phases of work would be undertaken for different sides of the road. He then added that additional topographical research was needed, and subject to no further issues being identified as a consequence of the site investigation, an engineering solution had been found.

20. Verbal Update: Statutory Consultation

The Assistant Director for Lower Thames Crossing opened by informing Members that the Statutory Consultation had begun on Wednesday 10 October, and would be continuing until Thursday 20 December. She described how Highways England were holding a number of public information events, beginning on 16 October at 2pm-9pm in the Orsett Hall Hotel. She explained that mobile units would also be travelling around the borough, and the dates for these were available on the website. It was explained that officers were working through thousands of pages of documents on the Statutory Consultation, along with an external consultancy team to be able to formulate the council's response. The Chair asked the Assistant Director for Lower Thames Crossing if Highways England were going far enough in terms of informing the public. The Assistant Director for Lower Thames Crossing replied that there were originally concerns over the number of events, but the number had been increased through the use of the mobile units. She also felt that there were issues in understanding the consultation documents, and felt some members of the public may struggle to comprehend some of the consultation paperwork.

Councillor Sammons mentioned how affected the residents of East Tilbury were by the proposed plans, but a consultation event was not happening in the town, the closest one being held in Linford. The Chair added to this that an information event may be useful in the SS17 postcode area and Stanford-le-Hope as these were also affected. The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative added that an event would be useful in Purfleet and Aveley.

21. Presentation by Highways England

David Manning, the Development Director began by introducing the other Highways England representatives who were, Gary Hodge: Associate Director; and Chris Stratford: Lower Thames Crossing – Stakeholder Engagement and SoCG Advisor. The Highways England Development Director began by stating the presentation would cover the changes to the scheme since November 2017. He reiterated that Statutory Consultation was now open and the first event would be held on 16 October in Orsett Hall Hotel, followed by 59 other events. He explained that the event at Orsett Hall Hotel would be very busy, but 46 members of Highways England staff would be there to assist residents and answer questions.

The Highways England Development Director began by discussing the traffic impact of the LTC and how it would improve traffic management by reducing traffic at the Dartford Crossing by 14% at the opening of LTC, rising to a 22% reduction within 15 years, including a 25% reduction of HGVs. He went on to describe how between September 2016 and October 2017 there had been 1,500 accidents at the Dartford Crossing which, on average, led to the closure of one lane for 15 minutes, which created a ripple effect across Essex and Kent. He described how there was a lot of traffic pressure on local roads including the A127, A128, M25 and A12, which often pushed cars and HGVs onto local roads. He then added that Highways England were predicting that without the LTC, Thurrock would see a 20% rise in traffic at the Dartford

Crossing, and a 40% rise in traffic along at the A1089. In Highways England's predictions, with the LTC relieving traffic, the A13 would improve by 10-20%, and would stop delays at the A1089/A13 junction. The Highways England Development Director continued by stating that 27 million journeys would take place across the LTC, and would not struggle with incidents like the Dartford Crossing currently does. He felt it would also reduce traffic along A1089, Dock Road, London Road, the A13 and M25.

The Highways England Associate Director continued by urging residents to participate in the Statutory Consultation. He stated that there had been six major changes since the November 2017 design which were: three lanes in each direction; changes to the route height; removal of the Tilbury link road; a new rest area/ service station at Tilbury; changes to the alignment of the route at Tilbury; and optimisation of the A13. The Chair then opened questions to Members. The Business Representative began by discussing the removal of the Tilbury link road and how this would affect the port. He stated that as there was only north bound access, south bound traffic would have to go through the Manor Way which would cause lots of traffic as there were between 6000 and 8000 vehicles per day. He felt that this level of traffic should be directed to motorways as this would reduce pollution in the borough. In addition, he felt that the proposals did not fit with government policy. The Highways England Development Director responded that with the proposed north bound access, traffic would be improved by 50%, and south bound traffic would be improved as there would be a reduction of vehicles on the A13 and M25. He then discussed how there was not enough infrastructure or demand in East Tilbury and Linford for a south bound road, but as the port was growing there were future options to expand.

The Chair then asked Highways England if they felt that mistakes made on East Facing Slips were being repeated, as the council did not want to have to revisit the road in 20 years' time. He felt that as this was a circa £7 billion scheme, the cost of the link road was very small in comparison, but the port was one of Thurrock's largest employers and major pieces of infrastructure. The Development Director for Highways England replied that there was not currently enough demand for a Tilbury link road, but with the Local Development Plan there could be plans in the future to extend the scheme.

The Vice-Chair then asked whether the Tilbury service area could be moved as residents did not want it, as it would be illuminated for 24 hours a day. He stated that this service area would increase the risk of COPD for residents. In addition, he mentioned that there was no cut and cover, or deep cover, along any part of the route apart from the M25 junction which was almost out of borough. The Highways England Development Director answered that the rest area was a part of the Statutory Consultation as Highways England wanted feedback from residents. He further described that 65% of accidents were due to driver behaviour, including fatigue and rest areas could help prevent these. He discussed how the government proposed to ban fossil fuels, so pollution would be reduced and the rest area would serve as an electric vehicle charging point. The Highways England Development Director then mentioned that the rest area would also be a regeneration project as the

site was currently an old landfill and produced large quantities of methane gas, but would become a place for wildlife. The Highways England Development Director then discussed the issue raised of cut and cover, and how the depth of the road had been reduced, although cut and cover was too expensive to pursue.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative then discussed the traffic along the A1089, which did not just include port traffic, but also Amazon, Asda and residential traffic. She stated that there would not be access to key infrastructure as residents would have to drive to Stanford to drive back on themselves along the A13. The Highways England Development Director replied that residents would not need to drive all the way to Stanford, and traffic would be relieved along the A13 and M25. The Chair then questioned what would happen to the 1.5 million cubic metres of spoil that would come from the project, and hoped that it would not be discarded in East Tilbury. The Highways England Development Director replied that no dumped spoil would be left in Tilbury, and that it would be used for different projects or given to people who needed it, for example to fill in abandoned quarries. He also added that all spoil produced from the Lower Thames Crossing would be treated before being used again.

Councillor Kelly then queried whether the removal of the Tilbury link road would suffocate potential for growth for companies such as Tilbury Two and Amazon who were based along the A1089. He felt that as the link road had been designed as one lane, and now an extra lane north of the A13 had been added, money was being moved around the project. He felt that there was no justification for the removal of the link road and the loss of potential growth because of this. He felt that HGVs would be driven through the heart of the borough if no link road was included in the scheme. The Highways England Development Director replied that there was not enough infrastructure on the local road network to cope with a link road when Highways England had modelled both a one and two lane road.

Councillor Sammons asked Highways England if they had visited East Tilbury and the problems that could be caused by the railway line. She added that the proposed service area would close off a section of Station Road as traffic would be routed around the service area. The Associate Director for Highways England answered that he understood the issue, but there would be no connection to the rest area over the railway line.

The Chair asked if Highways England could continue with the presentation. The Highways England Development Director continued that there were multiple reasons for the new proposal of three lanes which were: a new traffic model had been used which accommodated peak hour traffic flows; to give increasing support when incidents occurred at the Dartford Crossing; and provide additional reliability. He then moved on to discuss the simplification of the A13 which had changed so at the A1089 connection to the A13, drivers cannot access the LTC from the Orsett Cock roundabout. He then discussed the eastbound A13 to southbound LTC; and northbound LTC to eastbound A13 as these junctions had been removed as viaducts would have needed to

be built, and not enough traffic would use these routes to justify this.

The Chair then opened to questions. Councillor Allen began by stating his position remained opposed to the Lower Thames Crossing, due to the poor air quality that would occur and the ecological problems it would cause. He made the point that it would be a toll road, so any money spent by Highways England would be returnable, so they should get the project right by design. He asked what Highways England proposed to do to improve air quality in the borough, as there were no safe levels of particulates. The Highways England Development Director replied that without the LTC the A13 and A1089 would become very congested, which would mean air quality would not improve. Councillor Pothecary asked why cut and cover had not been considered and was not being used on the project. She added that the money being saved by not using cut and cover, would have to be spent by the NHS in treating COPD within the borough. She asked how Highways England had reached the conclusion that HGVs would go through the LTC and not the Dartford Crossing. She mentioned that there were lots of accidents at the Dartford Crossing, and what would happen if accidents occur on the LTC as traffic would then be pushed through Grays. The Highways England Development Director replied that the budget for LTC would increase by 3-5 times if cut and cover was included, and Highways England had a duty to spend money efficiently. He added that using traffic modelling data from mobile phone data usage, the demand was highest from the South East to the Midlands, and the preferred route for this was across the Dartford Crossing. He explained that due to the LTC and the reduction in traffic, accidents at the Dartford Crossing would also be reduced. Problems at the Dartford Crossing were due to a number of factors, including the merging of numerous local junction, and convoys happening up to every 15 minutes for 90 seconds. He added that with the LTC, traffic would be reduced on the Dartford Crossing so cars would have more room to merge, and therefore cause fewer accidents. He explained that as the LTC would be a very large tunnel HGVs, tankers and abnormal loads could all go through without the need for convoys which stopped traffic.

The Associate Director discussed that road users could not join onto the Orsett Cock roundabout and the A1089 from the LTC due to the traffic weaving. He added that local roads including Green Lane, Stifford Clays Road, and Baker Street would be diverted, along with A1013 which would be diverted to west Orsett Cock roundabout. He then listed other diversions to local roads which were: Rectory Road A1013, which would go around the showground; Heath Road, which would be moved west; Long Lane, where a connection would be put in; and Hornsbury Lane, which would be deviated to cross the Lower Thames Crossing. He confirmed that Brentwood Road would remain unchanged. He added that the northbound LTC will be lowered by 4 to 5 metres across the Mardyke and false cutting up to 2 metres would be put in place. He then described how false cutting worked, and the deeper cutting which mitigate against the visual effect of the scheme.

The Chair then opened the debate for members to ask questions. The Business Representative began by discussing the assumption that southbound traffic would be using junction 30, and how the southbound traffic

from the port, which equated to 9% of all traffic, would access the port. He felt that by removing the Tilbury link road, the LTC would stop traffic from the port reaching Kent and Sussex, and would have a negative effect on the Manor Way roundabout and junction 30. He mentioned that the LTC was not taking into account port or business expansion, and the number of businesses based around the A1089, and as the LTC would not be open until 2027, these factors should be considered. The Highways England Development Director answered that slip roads would only be added where traffic would be reduced, and where expansion was proven. He added that southbound traffic to the port would be able to use the existing road network, which would be relieved by the LTC and therefore increase the speed and reliability of journeys. He also discussed how the relief on the Dartford Crossing and A13 would reduce journey times by 50%. The Resident Representative discussed how close the service area would be to residents, and how the slow moving or stationary traffic pulling into the service area would cause an increase in pollution across the area. She felt that light pollution would also be increased as the service area would be operational 24 hours a day. The Highways England Development Director replied that a service area needed to be provided to manage driver fatigue along the route, but that they would look at lighting and planting options.

Councillor Abbas then made the point that although Highways England had met with 50 business and 25 community forums, the borough was still against the proposals, and that Highways England should listen to the Task Force suggestions and make plans made on these. The Highways England Development Director stated that the public events were important to gain feedback and would include all the Statutory Consultation paperwork, including 'easy read' versions for young people and people with learning disabilities. He reiterated the point that mobile units would be travelling around the borough and information was on the website, as well as Grays library and Tilbury hub.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative discussed the problems with electric cars, including the lack of green electricity to power these cars. She also brought some problems with the Statutory Consultation to Highways England's attention which included; the information points being 'hidden' on the website; Upminster being listed as south of the river; and Gravesend being listed as north of the river. She also felt that the LTC would not solve problems at the Dartford Crossing as it would still be running over capacity.

Councillor Jefferies then discussed how pollution could be reduced by cut and cover, as a six lane motorway was passing by some villages including Ockendon. He felt the cost of LTC would be small in comparison to the money that would be spent by the NHS on problems caused by the motorway, particularly with new housing developments being proposed in Ockendon. The Highways England Development Director replied that to add cut and cover would push the LTC outside affordability.

Councillor Kelly asked three questions which were: if the service station could be moved along the route to Gravesham; if electric HGVs were included in the

government's proposal to ban fossil fuels by 2040; and if the road was being built for tomorrow to include proposed expansions of both housing and businesses. The Highways England Development Director replied that Tilbury was the best place for the service area as many of the operational facilities for the road, including turnaround areas and plant amenities were based in Tilbury. He also stated that the position of the rest area on the route was up for discussion, and would take into consideration responses from the Statutory Consultation. He confirmed that HGVs were included in the government's plan to ban fossil fuels by 2040, and would be moving towards electric.

Councillor Rice asked what permanent areas around East Tilbury would be taken by Highways England, and which would only be taken during the construction period. He suggested using tunnels as cut and cover around large residential areas such as Chadwell St Mary, North Grays, Stifford Clays and Tilbury, as the population of the borough is predicted to grow by 300,000, and the LTC needs to be built to last. The Highways England Development Director discussed how Highways England had to talk to every landowner who would be affected by the scheme, and would undertake environmental mitigation.

The Highways England Development Director then discussed how there were currently 155,000 vehicles using the Dartford Crossing every day, and if the LTC was not built, this would rise to 172,000 per day. He added that if the LTC was built, traffic over the Dartford Crossing would reduce to 132,000 per day, which would again rise to 155,000 by 2041.

22. Task Force Priorities List

The Corporate Director Place stated that these questions had been brought back to the Task Force as they had not been on the agenda recently. He stated the priorities list had been turned into the mitigation schedule, which would be used as a baseline for issues which had been discussed for example, visual impact, the Tilbury railway line, and the impact on the local road network. Councillor Kelly stated he was glad to see these back on the agenda, even though they were outdated now and some questions had been answered. The Chair discussed that the questions would come back to November's Task Force meeting, so they could be improved and additional comments made.

23. Work Programme

It was agreed that the mitigation schedule would be added to November's Task Force meeting.

24. Any Other Business

It was confirmed there was no other business.

The meeting finished at 19.36

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**