

<b>23 March 2016</b>		<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Council</b>		
<b>Lower Thames Crossing - Council Consultation Response</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Cllr Oliver Gerrish, Portfolio Holder, Highways and Transportation		
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Ann Osola, Head of Service, Transportation and Highways		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Environment and Place		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## **Executive Summary**

This report sets out the proposed response to Highways England's consultation on route options for a proposed Lower Thames Crossing. The response consists of the position set out in Section 3 of this report, the Evidence Gathering Report developed by Planning, Transportation, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee summarising the various representations made to the Council in relation to the consultation; and a report by the Council's technical advisors, Peter Brett Associates, who have provided a critique the detail of Highways England's proposals.

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

**That Council:**

- 1.1 Endorse the Council's opposition to Highways England's proposed options for a Lower Thames Crossing, based the points set out in Section 3 of this report.**
- 1.2 Endorse the total response package, consisting of the points agreed in Recommendation 1.1, together with the Evidence Gathering Report and Technical Report, for submission to Highways England by the consultation deadline of 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016.**

### **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 Highways England has published options for a Lower Thames Crossing with consultation taking place between 26 January and 24 March 2016.**

- 2.2 Throughout the process of public consultation, 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, unanimously reaffirmed on 25 November 2015 and again confirmed by all Councillors at Full Council on 27 January 2016.
- 2.3 Prior to the commencement of Highways England's consultation, the Council organised a public meeting on 25 January. The consultation material had not been shared with the Council at this time.
- 2.4 On 9 February 2016, Planning, Transportation, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee (PTR O & S) hosted a Lower Thames Crossing Witness Session, where representations from Thurrock residents, businesses and community groups, as well as political representatives, were heard. The questions raised by these groups included concerns about the health and environmental impacts, especially due to increased air pollution, noise levels and loss of the Green Belt, and the value for money achieved from the 14% traffic congestion reduction on the existing crossing.
- 2.5 PTR O & S at its formal session on the evening of 9 February received a synopsis of the Witness Session, a presentation on the LTC Route Options from Highways England, and representations from Councillors and from Stephen Metcalfe MP.
- 2.6 A further public meeting was held at the Tilbury Cruise Terminal on the 25 February 2016 which was attended by approximately 1000 people, the majority of whom were vociferously against any further river crossing in Thurrock. Presentations were received from the Council Leader, Thurrock's two MPs and Highways England, followed by questions from the public.
- 2.7 The views expressed in these meetings are summarised in Section 3 of this report, with further details of stakeholder views provided in the Evidence Gathering Report at Appendix 1.
- 2.8 Thurrock Council also engaged the services of Peter Brett Associates to provide a technical assessment of the consultation materials. Their findings are summarised in Appendix 2.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 The Council's response to the Lower Thames Crossing Consultation covers the following points:

Thurrock Council is unanimously opposed to any Lower Thames Crossing at the proposed locations for the following reasons:

- 3.1.1 The traffic movement data on which the appraisal partly relies is historic - 2001 demand data. It is the foundation of the Highways England (HE) decision making yet there have been significant new developments in the sub-region over the last decade, and trip making patterns have changed as a result.
- 3.1.2 Route 3 has a slightly higher benefit to cost ratio, but there is no clear headway between options. Benefit to Cost ratios at lower end do not include wider economic benefits but the upper end does.
- 3.1.3 For the Highways England's preferred route (Route 3) these are 2.3 (lower) and 3.4 (upper). For every £1 invested HE claim a return of £2.30 - but this return is made up substantially of time savings arising from traffic on the new route. Given there are significant questions over the accuracy of the data from 2001, there must be questions over the accuracy of the modelling and therefore the travel time savings, and hence over the accuracy of the benefits.
- 3.1.4 Route corridors A and C fulfil substantially different strategic functions. Location C is likely to be less effective in alleviating congestion at Dartford Crossing than location A.
- 3.1.5 If a new crossing is built at location C, when incidents occur on the Dartford Crossing, there is no evidence that the local road network can cope with traffic diverting from the Dartford Crossing to the Lower Thames Crossing. Highways England's preferred option may cause worse community and environmental problems over the wide area, particularly on the key roads of the A13 and A2 when diverting traffic hits bottlenecks.
- 3.1.6 Any gridlock will worsen pollution in the area in increased emissions from vehicles and the number of vehicles. The future modelled scenario has an increased traffic movement from 140,000 vehicles a day now with the existing crossing to nearly 240,000 a day in total by 2041.
- 3.1.7 At the existing crossing traffic volumes in 2025 are predicted to be around 14% lower than a scenario without a new crossing. By 2041 they are predicated to be just 7% lower. This suggests that location C options have very limited benefits in terms of the main objective 'to relieve the congested Dartford Crossing and approach roads'. In consequence, there is unlikely to be a significant long term difference to general traffic conditions at the existing crossing.
- 3.1.8 The detailed information available to Highways England is yet to be published. There is a lack of information to make an informed decision over any route and the strategic case tests have not been met. More information is specifically required on wider traffic flows and impacts on junctions.
- 3.1.9 The need for a new crossing has not been demonstrated. Further work is required to explore alternative modes of travel. More freight could go by rail. It

is not shown how the options could support sustainable travel and land use integration as set out in Government Guidance.

- 3.1.10 The environmental harm caused by the scheme has not been fully assessed or quantified, including the impacts on health and local amenity and this may not be out-weighed by any economic or transport benefits - clearly further work is required on air quality and public health before the Government makes a decision. It must be given weight alongside economic and transport benefits.
- 3.1.11 As Option 1 within Corridor A has been reintroduced, after the consultation has started, a full 'like for like' assessment should be provided.
- 3.1.12 The public interest 'compelling case' required for Compulsory Purchase Orders has not yet been met.
- 3.1.13 The consultation has been flawed, with inadequate comparative information, inadequate capacity at venues, and inadequate hard copy consultation materials. The consultation should be at least extended but preferably halted to allow further work.
- 3.1.14 The Council has written two letters to the Secretary of State for Transport to this effect dated 11<sup>th</sup> February and 29<sup>th</sup> February respectively, but has yet to receive a reply. On the 15<sup>th</sup> March, a further letter was sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.
- 3.1.15 What is needed is a full strategic road network and local access road review to maintain resilience over the longer term.
- 3.1.16 The Council requests that joint work be instigated by Thurrock Council, the Department for Transport, and Highways England on the effect of pollution from vehicles on the health of residents.
- 3.1.17 Should Government insist on progressing a LTC option after the consultation that Thurrock Council should have a seat around the table to help protect residents and businesses from the least - worst option.

#### **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 has been informed by the feedback from: i) representatives of the local residents, businesses, community groups and local parties; ii) a special PTR O&S hearing; iii) dialogue with parties across a wider geography who have opinions on a Lower Thames Crossing through Thurrock; and iv)

technical expert advice on the implications of the Highways England's options on the economy, growth and transport.

## **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: **Sean Clark**  
**Director of Finance and IT**

The Council has agreed an annual budget to respond to the consultation in the first instance and to support and further negotiation, surveys, etc once a decision has been reached.

### **7.2 Legal**

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

The 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)

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):

- Cabinet 9 March 2016 Lower Thames Crossing Consultation
- Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview & Scrutiny 2 March 2016
- 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 – Evidence Gathering Report
- Appendix 2 – Peter Brett Associates Technical Report – to be tabled

**Report Author:**

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