

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

04 June 2013

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT: LOWER THAMES CROSSING

This report supplements the Update on Transport Issues report in respect of the Lower Thames Crossing providing more detail on the three options which are the now subject of the consultations recently announced by the Department of Transport. The report sets out some preliminary responses for consideration.

Delegated authority is sought for the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health to fully respond to the consultation by the deadline of 15th July, subject to any further information that might be available for consideration by Cabinet on 19th June.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Government acknowledged the need for additional road based river crossing capacity in the Lower Thames area in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review and in the November 2011 National Infrastructure Plan, which included the project as one of its top 40 priorities. This has arisen from concerns over the current Dartford-Thurrock crossing, which at a daily average flow of 140,000 vehicles a day (and rising) is already in excess of its maximum design capacity of 135,000 leading to congestion and delays (estimated to be equivalent to £15m per year in 'lost time') and the associated impacts on the environment, particularly air quality.
- 1.1.2 As noted in the Update on Transport Issues report the Government is inviting comments on three alternative options (A, B and C – See Annex 1) for a new Lower Thames Crossing up to the 15th July. There is also a variant for Option C involving improvements to the A229 between the M2 and M20.
- 1.1.3 The options are derived from an earlier study by the Department for Transport (DfT) in 2009. They relate to three proposed, broad locations for an additional road crossing of the Thames to the east of London and modelling work has been carried out for three different engineering options for each (i.e. a bridge, immersed

tunnel and a bored tunnel). No detailed routes or designs have been worked up to date. This consultation is seeking views on the general location of a new crossing.

1.1.4 The options have been assessed by DfT in comparison with a base case ('do nothing') scenario using a number of criteria including:

- Contribution to the national economy;
- Reducing congestion at the existing crossing;
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- Impacts on environmentally sensitive areas;
- Impacts on planned development sites; and
- Cost, affordability and value for money.

1.1.5 An additional criterion looking at the wider economic benefit of each option has also been considered. This addresses the wider potential benefits of greater connectivity to the strategic road network as a stimulus for inward investment and economic growth.

1.1.6 After the consultation period closes in July the Government will consider the responses and announce a decision in the autumn. The consultation document then notes that there will be the 'potential' for work to commence on developing a scheme, which would include further consideration of the financing options, more detailed surveying and forecasting and an environmental impact assessment. This work will be accompanied by further public consultations. No timescales are proposed at this stage, although the studies so far anticipate a new crossing could be open by 2025.

1.2 A Closer Look at the Options and The Department for Transport's Assessment

1.2.1 Overall the Department for Transport's assessment showed that all three options were technically feasible, although the additional option of improving the A229 (the Option C 'Variant') demonstrated 'significant engineering difficulties', presumably associated with widening the gap in the North Downs through which the road passes and the interrelationships with High Speed 1.

1.2.2 All of the options were shown to have positive cost benefit ratios of varying degree and they will all have adverse impacts on the environment, which will need to be mitigated. Due to the estimated cost of delivery (between £1.2bn and £5bn), all of the options will need public funding assistance to initiate delivery and some of the more expensive options will continue to need public finance to supplement any toll income in the future.

Option A – At the site of the existing A282 Dartford-Thurrock Crossing

- 1.2.3 This option is the lowest cost (between £1.2bn and £1.6bn), is the shortest and has the least overall impact on the natural environment of all the options. It delivers the best improvements in alleviating congestion at the existing crossing, but scores less well in terms of improving connectivity of the strategic road network and therefore in stimulating economic growth.
- 1.2.4 There are modest improvements in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but there may be a need for complementary improvements to junctions 1 and 30 on the M25 to deal with the increased traffic flows at the crossing. Some planned development sites in Dartford and Thurrock may be affected.
- 1.2.5 This option scored the highest on the Department for Transport's Benefits to Cost Ratio (BCR) ranging between 1.0 and 1.8 (or 1.4 and 2.4 taking into account the potential wider impacts). The 2.4 BCR was the highest score of any of the options and represents a new bridge at the exiting crossing.

Option B – This option is to the east of the existing crossing located between Grays and Tilbury on the Essex side and the Swanscombe Peninsular on the Kent side. The links to the existing strategic road network would be between the A1089 in Essex (the road linking Tilbury Docks to the A13 and then on to the M25) and the A2 (approximately where the B259 joins Watling Street, 2 miles to the west of the junction of the A227 and the A2).

- 1.2.6 This option would provide some alleviation of the existing congestion, but not as extensive as Option A. This option would also lead to increased congestion on the A2 and on the A13 east of Basildon and is not expected to offset predicted traffic growth, so there will be an increase in green house gas emissions.
- 1.2.7 There would be improved connectivity to the strategic road network so this option has a positive effect on supporting economic development locally, but the route traverses planned strategic development sites north of the A2 in Kent, which would need to be taken into consideration and also important heritage and archaeological sites resulting in greater environmental impact.
- 1.2.8 The estimated cost of this option is between £1.8bn and £2.2bn and has a BCR of between 0.5 and 0.8 or 1.1 and 1.7, taking into account the wider impacts.
- 1.2.9 Option C – This option is the longest, proposing a new road leaving the M25 at North Ockenden in Essex, heading south east to the north bank of the Thames Estuary to the east of Tilbury, making landfall on the south bank of the Thames to the east of Gravesend and joining the M2 at the junction with the A289 (approximately 2 miles to the west of the Medway Bridge).
- 1.2.10 This option has a similar beneficial impact on alleviating congestion at the existing crossing to Option B, but is assessed at this stage to be less likely to add delays to the A2 or A13.

- 1.2.11 It offers the most potential economic benefit due to improved connectivity of all the options and a significant reduction in greenhouse gases as it offers a more direct route for many journeys. However, it crosses many sensitive areas including the North Downs AoNB, Green Belt, a Ramsar site and ancient woodland. It therefore has the greatest adverse impact on the environment.
- 1.2.12 Option C is estimated to cost in the region of £3.1bn and £3.2bn (twice as much as Option A) and has a BCR of between 1.2 and 1.3 or 1.9 and 2.0 with the wider impacts taken into account.

Option C (Variant) – This proposes an additional improvement to the A229 Blue Bell Hill between Junction 3 of the M2 and Junction 6 of the M20 – approximately 3 miles.

- 1.2.13 The extra connectivity offered by the variant would increase the potential benefits for economic growth, but the increased cost of construction outweighs nearly all of the additional benefits. This implies the economic case for Option C does not rely on it being delivered with the variant. The significantly higher cost of Option C would mean supplementary funding from the public purse would be necessary to top up any revenues from tolls.
- 1.2.14 With the additional works to improve the A229 the cost increases to between £4.9bn and £5bn, but the BCR remains at 1.2 or 1.7 taking into account wider impacts.

1.3 Potential Implications for Tonbridge and Malling

- 1.3.1 **Option A** represents a targeted improvement of the capacity issues associated with the existing Dartford Crossing, which must be the primary objective of this project. It has the least impact on land take, sensitive land use designations and delivers the most benefits in alleviating the current problems, as would be expected. It is the shortest of the three options and consequently the lowest cost.
- 1.3.2 It fares less well in terms of increasing connectivity of the strategic road network and therefore the potential for enhanced economic development and inward investment is considered to be less than the other alternatives.
- 1.3.3 The Department for Transport hints at complementary improvements to the junctions on the M25 either side of the crossing to take account of the increased flow of vehicles using the additional capacity, but it is not clear if these have been included in the cost benefit analysis.
- 1.3.4 Overall, this option would probably have the least impact on the Borough, and with the exception of Dartford Borough, the rest of Kent. There may be some benefits for local businesses and residents in improved journey times, road safety and reliability as a result. However, these may be eroded in the absence of the necessary improvements to the junctions either side of the crossing, and so any response should emphasise the importance of these.

- 1.3.5 As this is not a new route north, it is unlikely to have the effect of encouraging road users away from existing roads used to access the M25 and the Dartford Crossing.
- 1.3.6 **Option B**, unlike Option A opens up more development opportunities by extending and improving the connectivity of the strategic road network and offering an alternative to the Dartford Crossing, but the impacts and the costs of construction are greater than Option A and at this stage seem to outweigh these potential benefits.
- 1.3.7 There may be some associated impacts on the A227 and to the A228 and A229 in the form of increased traffic if these are perceived as more direct routes to the new crossing. Increased congestion on the A2 may also have a knock on effect on local businesses that rely on this route for accessing markets in the rest of the UK and in Europe.
- 1.3.8 Dartford and Gravesham Boroughs will experience the greatest impacts associated with Option B, for example through the loss of strategic development sites on the Swanscombe Peninsular and some disruption during the construction phase. This may be offset by the economic development opportunities highlighted in the assessment, although that balance is not easy to make at this stage.
- 1.3.9 **Option C** and the variant A229 improvements are the most costly in both construction and environmental impact terms.
- 1.3.10 With the improvements to the A229 proposed by the variant to Option C traffic would be encouraged to use Blue Bell Hill for accessing the Channel ports via the M20 and the new crossing effectively bypassing London and the M25. That might be desirable in respect of economic benefit to areas beyond the south east, but in terms of more local investment potential there is an associated risk that Kent and Tonbridge and Malling will be 'bypassed' and carry the burden of the impact of the project without the direct economic benefit.
- 1.3.11 However, the Government's assessment of the options concluded that the variant to Option C is not critical to the economic case. Together with the engineering challenges presented by the variant it seems unlikely that this will be considered further.
- 1.3.12 Without the improvements to the A229 in Option C there will undoubtedly be an increase in traffic using this route to access the new crossing. The A228 and A227 corridors will also represent alternatives for traffic wishing to access the new crossing and/or bypass the M25, particularly at times when there is congestion or hold ups on the latter.
- 1.3.13 By the time this option could be built it is likely that, subject to the current Inquiry and funding, the A21 between Tonbridge and Pembury will be dualled adding to the attractiveness of the A228 as an alternative route. Increasing traffic along the A228 corridor, without compensating improvements, will have an adverse impact

on road users and the communities along the route in the form of more congestion, unreliable journey times, increasing risk of accidents, and environmental impacts, such as worsening air quality.

- 1.3.14 As with Option B, Option C and its variant may also have wider implications on the Borough's future growth to be considered in the new Local Plan. In particular it could potentially give rise to greater pressures for development the impact of which, at this stage, it is very difficult to assess.

1.4 Concluding Remarks

- 1.4.1 The current consultation is seeking views on broad locations for a Lower Thames Crossing. The Department for Transport's assessment points towards a enhancement of the existing Dartford Crossing as having the best Benefits to Cost Ratio and alleviating the existing problems, although the other options are said to offer greater potential economic development opportunities, particularly in the Thames Gateway, subject to accommodating the anticipated additional costs, impacts and mitigation.
- 1.4.2 Options B and C and the variant to Option C are likely to have implications on the borough, which are explored in section 1.3 above. Option C is considered to carry the greatest risk of environmental harm to the Borough, by virtue of a range of impacts on communities across the Borough, but especially on those in the north of Tonbridge and Malling and/or near to the routes of the A 228, A 229 and A 227.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report which is raising awareness of a consultation on broad route options for a Lower Thames Crossing.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report which is raising awareness of a consultation on route options for a Lower Thames Crossing. There may be implications associated with the implementation of the final scheme as and when that is decided by the Government, but there will be further opportunities to comment on any detailed proposals when they are promoted.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 Not responding to this consultation may carry the risk of not expressing the Borough Council's views on the proposed locations of a new Lower Thames Crossing.

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.8.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.9 Recommendations

1.9.1 The Advisory Board **NOTE and ENDORSE** the content of this Supplementary Report; and

1.9.2 **REQUEST** that the Cabinet delegate authority to the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health, in liaison with The Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Transport, to formally respond to the Department for Transport on behalf of the Borough Council by July 15th taking into account comments Members may wish to make.

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

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Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	This report summarises the three options that are subject to the Government's current consultation and seeks delegated powers to respond within the specified timescales. There will be further opportunities to respond to the detailed proposals as and when they are progressed.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	No	See above.
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.