

Lower Thames Crossing (LTC): CPRE Kent/Essex Position Paper

Background

In 2010 the Government committed to fund additional capacity at the Dartford Crossings. Consultations and studies since 2013 narrowed down the options to either additional in-line capacity at the existing Dartford crossing; or a new crossing between Shorne in Kent and Tilbury in Essex. CPRE believes both these options would have major negative environmental impacts.

Rationale

A major justification of the need for a new crossing is the volume of road freight traffic - up 80% in the last 20 years to over 3.7 million trucks per year travelling through the M20 'Channel corridor' in Kent along the foot of the Kent Downs AONB. Continued growth at this rate would lead to further congestion and wasted expenditure on additional road infrastructure.

Overdependence on the ostensibly low-cost fast channel crossing at Dover by sea and Folkestone by tunnel has reduced investment in alternative routes between the UK and Europe. The problems caused by this overdependence were clear this summer with Operation Stack in place for 32 days, at an estimated cost of £750,000 a day to the haulage industry and £250 million a day to UK industry.

Resilience should be a major consideration in the light of this. The Local Enterprise Partnership for Essex, Kent and Medway should promote dispersed traffic routes including modal shift to rail and using the London Gateway port for roll-on/roll-off freight services. Unconstrained growth at the Dover/Channel Tunnel crossing is unsustainable at the Dartford crossing bottleneck and leads to ever-present roadside HGV parking along the network and the gridlock consequences of Operation Stack. Any further expansion at the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel must include an Operating Agreement requiring the management of HGV movements, including in emergencies.

Options

The Dartford option would be a great local burden even if improved operation could alleviate pollution and congestion. The Tilbury/Shorne route would cut a whole new motorway further east, destroying nationally important landscapes, wildlife sites, national heritage and the character of iconic settlements such as Orsett in Essex, Chalk in Kent, and villages and landscape that are a vital part of the rural and tourist economy. We need a wider, more resilient solution, including investment in ports north of the Thames to disperse the cross channel movement of freight.

Proposal

Better operation of the existing Thames crossings within a sustainable transport strategy would:

- Be free from congestion
- Have acceptably low air pollution levels
- Be part of a dispersed strategic transport network and channel crossing system, resilient to economic, security and weather issues
- Reduce the number of loaded trucks parking up overnight and at weekends on local roads
- Offer a partnership with fleet managers for an end to unsocial working conditions for drivers
- Promote more diversion to rail and unaccompanied trailer operations
- Herald the beginning of a lower impact future for transport through Kent and Essex

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