

Our re [REDACTED]

Ms Laura Blake
Chair of Thames Crossing Action Group

Chris Taylor
Director – Complex Infrastructure
Programme
Highways England
Woodlands
Manton Lane
Bedford MK41 7LW

www.highwaysengland.co.uk

Highways England Customer
Contact Centre: 0300 123 5000

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Dear Ms Blake

Lower Thames Crossing

Thank you for your emails of 6, 16 and 24 March addressed to Jim O’Sullivan, Chief Executive of Highways England, in relation the above scheme. As this issue falls within my area of responsibility, he has asked me to reply to you personally.

I understand from your correspondence to me and to my team on the Lower Thames Crossing that you believe we should stop all engagement work and our site work on the Lower Thames Crossing. This is of course a difficult period and we cannot say with any certainty how long the current state of affairs will continue. We are therefore proceeding with our project work whilst following all of observe the government’s directions and guidance, including social distancing, to progress the important work necessary to develop our proposals.

The development of the Lower Thames Crossing and other infrastructure projects have an important role as the country seeks to recover from the wide range of impacts we face. It is critical that we maintain the progress of our projects and keep the momentum of delivery.

The team are seeking to deal with this as carefully and as sensitively as possible in the circumstances. We have extended the consultation, offered a telephone service, our site staff are following all government guidelines and we are offering to help people complete their Land Interest Questionnaires.

I appreciate you have concerns, but I am firmly of the view that continuing our work is the right thing to do at this time.

Addressing your emails in turn, the Supplementary Consultation on the changes we have made to the project’s design since our 2018 Statutory

Consultation, has been underway since 29 January. At the time the Government introduced more stringent social distancing measure in response to the Corona Virus pandemic, we were 7 weeks through the 8-week consultation period. We were able to complete more than 80% of our events, with almost 4,000 people visiting the 7 Public Information Events (PIE) and 10 Mobile Information Centres (MIC).

The current situation with Coronavirus is unprecedented and we gave very careful consideration to how we support the Government's efforts to curb the spread of the virus, protecting the public and our staff, while also continuing our vital work to maintain, operate and improve England's strategic road network.

Following the Government's updated guidance issued on Monday 16 March we took the decision to cancel our last PIE and our remaining 3 MICS. While we have carried out the majority of our events, we recognise that some people may have not yet had the opportunity to speak to the team at an event. We also understand that the attentions of people and organisations will have been focused elsewhere over recent days.

We therefore introduced two measures to respond to those issues. Firstly, we extended the consultation until 23:59 on Thursday 2 April to give people additional time to complete their consultation response and to enable organisations to complete their governance processes, which may have been disrupted.

Secondly, we introduced two new public consultation telephone events to give members of the public who had planned to go to the remaining events the opportunity to speak to a member of the project team about the changes we are consulting on.

With regards to our work on site, we take our responsibility to supporting the Government's response to Covid-19 extremely seriously and we are following all Government guidance. As a result, we are limiting site works on the Lower Thames Crossing project to essential survey and investigation work in the local area in line with the stringent guidance set out by Government to keep the public and our people safe. We will keep this work under constant review, keep our website up to date and inform stakeholders of any changes. This is a rapidly changing picture and we are following and implementing Government guidance as and when it is updated.

As the Lower Thames Crossing is one of the Government's key Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, our staff have key worker status, and in addition to the Government's social distancing protocols we are adhering to guidance from the Construction Leadership Council:

<http://www.constructionleadershipcouncil.co.uk/news/site-operating-procedures-during-covid-19/>

The Government's guidance does not state that construction works should stop, but that staff should adhere to social distancing protocols. We have reduced

the number of workers on site so there is therefore no longer a need the use of the mini bus as a method of transport, all workers will make their own journeys.

Turning to the Lower Thames Crossing website, all of the information about the Supplementary Consultation, including the Guide to Consultation and map books and other consultation materials, are available in one place, on our dedicated consultation website – www.lowerthamescrossing.co.uk/consultation-2020

We appreciate the thoroughness with which you have reviewed our project website; this feedback has been passed onto digital team and will be incorporated into updates to the website that will take place following the conclusion of the Supplementary Consultation in April.

I understand there are a number of other queries you are waiting for a response to; I have asked the team to gather these together and provide a single response to you shortly. As always, we will endeavour to respond to any new enquiries within our published timescales.

This is an unprecedented time, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing engagement with the project. I understand that you have a wide range of questions relating to the project and the team is working hard to respond to your questions and to those submitted by other people as quickly as possible. This would be made easier if you could group your questions together in a smaller number of emails.

I hope this has answered your concerns satisfactorily. If you have any further questions the project team would be pleased to answer them.

You can email them directly at info@lowerthamescrossing.co.uk or leave a message with our Customer Contact Centre on 0300 123 5000.

Yours sincerely



Chris Taylor
Director – Complex Infrastructure Programme