

THAMES CROSSING ACTION GROUP

www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com

Dear Rt. Hon. Grant Shapps MP

We are writing to you as Secretary of State for Transport to ask that you re-open Road Investment Strategy 2 (RIS2).

National Highways Licence¹ clause 6.29 states:

“Major variations, which would affect the Licence holder’s overall funding, have a material effect on the integrity of the RIS or otherwise compromise the Licence holder’s ability to comply with the RIS, would require the RIS to be re-opened.”

Firstly, we note that since RIS2 was set, the RIS2 budget was reduced by £3.4bn in the Spending Review 2021, which is a considerable change to the RIS.

We have witnessed considerable delays in so many areas of RIS2. The proposed Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) alone has seen National Highways needing to withdraw the Development Consent Order (DCO) in Nov 2020, and will still not be resubmitted until later this year at the earliest.

The LTC is budgeted in RIS2 up to £8.2bn, out of a capital enhancements budget of £14.7bn. National Highways Annual Report 2021² identifies the failure to promote the proposed LTC successfully as an “extreme” and “likely” risk, which by their own definition is an “existential threat” to National Highways. Considering these significant delays to the LTC and its strategic importance in RIS2, reopening/review of RIS2 must be considered essential.

Safety on our roads has become an even more serious concern, to the extent that on 12 January 2022 you paused the roll out of ‘Smart’ Motorways for five years into the RIS3 period, which also further reduces the capital enhancements part of RIS2. This matter also covers the proposed Lower Thames Crossing as you will see from the evidence sent to yourself and others on the 28th Feb. This is because the proposed LTC is being designed to ‘Smart’ Motorway standards, would use ‘smart’ technology, would not have a hard shoulder, and could only be used by vehicles that can legally use a motorway.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/431389/strategic-highways-licence.pdf

² https://nationalhighways.co.uk/media/0g2mueew/highways_ar21_interactive.pdf

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You have also rightly decided to review the National Policy Statement for National Networks (NPS NN), and it is apparent that this should lead to the policy needing to be updated to reflect the UK's legal commitment to Carbon Net Zero. There have clearly been delays and issues with legal challenges in regard to carbon and environmental issues. Identifying and actioning a review of the policy that governs the consenting for RIS2 schemes since it is outdated and not compliant with UK law, must again be considered a major variation to the integrity of RIS2.

More recently the need of a Food Security Strategy to be put into place has come to the forefront, and it is obvious that our country needs to be more self-sufficient with regard to food security. RIS2 would destroy so much valuable agricultural land. Again this must be considered extremely relevant in regard to the need to review RIS2.

By the end of October this year, there will be new legal levels for air pollution enshrined into UK law. This would again be very relevant to RIS2.

For all of the reasons above, we therefore officially call on you to re-open RIS2 in line with National Highways Licence due to the major variations detailed above.

Thanks and kind regards

Laura Blake

Chair – Thames Crossing Action Group

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cc Baroness Vere - Roads Minister, John Larkinson - ORR Chief Executive, Huw Merriman MP - Transport Committee Chair, Philip Dunne MP - Environment Audit Committee Chair, Neil Parish MP - Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee Chair, Baroness Parminter - Environment and Climate Change Committee Chair, Chris Start - Climate Change Committee Chief Executive