

JACKIE DOYLE-PRICE MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

15th

November 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing in respect of the Lower Thames Crossing. This project now budgeted at £10bn no longer offers value for money in light of the changed circumstances since it was first mooted in 2008.

I make this representation with considerable regret. My constituents are hugely disadvantaged by the presence of the Dartford Crossing. When there are traffic incidents it can lead to gridlock lasting many hours. Indeed, the 23-mile journey from my home to Westminster has taken as much as six hours when there is such an incident. The problems caused by congestion at the Dartford Crossing are hugely significant to businesses in the area too. In 2013, the busiest shopping day of the year was a write off for Lakeside shopping centre thanks to traffic gridlock on December 23rd.

It was against this background that I was very clear that any new crossing must alleviate congestion at Dartford and must not create any additional congestion on Thurrock's local road network. I am sad to say that this is not the case. Indeed, as it is currently designed there is every prospect that the traffic congestion will become worse.

I was never satisfied with the current route. I felt it was a missed opportunity to design a road which would have helped to deliver wider economic objectives. For example, the A127 is in need of widening and without it Essex is constrained in how it delivers its housing numbers. For that reason, I supported a route which would have connected there and connected with the M25 at Junction 29.

Instead, what we have is one that loops through Thurrock and joins the M25 between Junction 29 and Junction 30. It is an M25 bypass for Dover Port traffic. Nothing more. What is worse is that the port traffic from Thurrock's busy ports cannot access this new piece of road infrastructure in any satisfactory way.

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR THURROCK

Whilst tackling traffic congestion caused by Dover made sense at the time the crossing was conceived; we have since then had Brexit. This has had the effect of changing the economics of port activity. While ever we were part of the single market there was every advantage in HGVs boarding ferries and hitting the road as soon as the ship arrived. Today trailers spend longer at the quay with the consequence that unaccompanied freight makes more sense. Indeed, Britain's newest port Tilbury 2, was built to meet the demands of this new market.

Fundamentally the weakness of this design is that it utterly fails to consider the impact on Thurrock's local road network. National Highways is charged with delivering strategic road infrastructure and making sure that the strategic road network operates efficiently. It can afford to be negligent about the impact of Thurrock's road network. Indeed, the strategic road network will operate more efficiently if it does.

Such an approach is fundamentally flawed. Thurrock is a major logistics hub. I style it the logistics capital of the UK. With the three busy Ports, the fastest growing port centre in the UK and the highest intensity of logistics employment we depend massively on appropriate road and rail infrastructure. It is therefore utterly wrong that we should be expected to host a brand-new motorway with all the attendant environmental costs that go with it, without being able to draw benefit from it ourselves.

I should also add that Thurrock Borough Council has ambitions to deliver significant numbers of new homes. However, we are constantly being criticised by HMG for not having a suitable local plan. Yet we are blighted from doing so by the land envelope currently set aside by Lower Thames Crossing. And if that were not bad enough National Highways objects to any housing development which exceeds 200 homes on the basis that it would add to traffic congestion at Junction 30 of the M25. We are absolutely stuck until issues surrounding the Lower Thames Crossing are resolved, but this has now been going on for fifteen years.

So, I ask you to give this project serious challenge to explore whether in the light of Brexit this is the right option to address congestion at the Dartford Crossing. I can suggest a quick win to address congestion at the Dartford Crossing. Junction 30 of the M25 remains a serious bottleneck. Not least because the A13 has no east facing slips at the Lakeside Junction.



Consequently, traffic has to travel west to Junction 30 and 31 to go east. East facing slips at the Lakeside Junction would alleviate a considerable amount of congestion and would make the road network more resilient when there are traffic incidents.

I fully support the need for more crossings across the Thames but I am afraid that this particular proposal has now gone past it's sell by date. It will no longer deliver the benefits intended. We should, in short, rip it up and start again.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ben Owen' with a large flourish underneath.

The Rt Hon Mark Harper MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR