

THAMES CROSSING ACTION GROUP

www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com

30th December 2022

Ref: TCAG-PAC-TOA-221230

Dear Dame Meg Hillier and Mr Fairbrother

We are writing in regard to the Accounting Officer Assessment for the proposed £10bn+ Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) road project.

We are aware of the Public Accounts Committee's 'Improving the Accounting Officer Assessment Process' report of Nov 2022¹, and Mr Fairbrother's letter to Dame Meg Hillier of October 2022².

It is noted that in the Annex of Mr Fairbrother's October letter it is stated that the Department for Transport (DfT) has committed to publish the remaining three accounting officer assessments this autumn, including for the proposed Lower Thames Crossing. As the year ends LTC is still missing³.

We see from the report and letter that there is concern regarding the lack of and delay in publishing the Accounting Officer Assessments for projects in the Government's Major Projects Portfolio.

We too are concerned, about the ever-rising estimated cost of the proposed Lower Thames Crossing which is now estimated to cost £9-10 billion of likely more. We question why Government seem intent on pushing ahead with this project, and whether it has anything to do with a lack of adequate information being shared with them.

This is a scheme that would be hugely destructive and harmful, fails to meet the scheme objectives⁴, would not be compliant with legally binding commitments to Net Zero and newly set air pollution targets. It is estimated the proposed LTC would emit around 6.6million tonnes of carbon, and the whole route would fail against PM2.5 targets. It would not solve the problems at the Dartford Crossing, put simply the proposed LTC is not fit for purpose⁵ and would be a huge waste of taxpayers' money.

We are also aware that National Highways (NH) refused to share a copy of the Outline Business Case (OBC) for the proposed LTC with host Local Authority, Thurrock Council. It took an FOI request

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/31757/documents/178775/default/>

² <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/31540/documents/176939/default/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-major-projects-portfolio-accounting-officer-assessments>

⁴ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-project-objectives/>

⁵ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-not-fit-for-purpose/>

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and the Information Commissioner's Office stepping in to instruct NH to release the requested info. Even then NH only released an outdated 2020 OBC, and the cost has risen greatly since then.

As you will be aware, the National Audit Office (NAO) 'Road enhancements: progress with the second road investment strategy (2020-2025)' report⁶ published in Nov 2022, has also voiced concerns about value for money issues on projects, including the proposed Lower Thames Crossing.

We know from the NH 'Annual report and account'⁷ that the failure to deliver the project is a likely risk, and an existential risk to the organisation, and have to wonder whether this is why such important information is being delayed and withheld.

There certainly seems to be a lot of secrecy and withholding of information in regard to the cost and business case of the proposed LTC.

We have been through extensive consultation, much of which without knowing an up to date estimated cost of the project. We have to question whether relevant Government departments and representatives have equally been making decisions and opinions without having access to adequate information too.

Surely it is in the best interest of Government and the public for this kind of information to be available?

We would respectfully ask you to kindly contact Bernadette Kelly (the DfT's permanent secretary and chief accounting officer) and ask her to publish it as soon as possible, and to seek an explanation as to the delay of its publication.

There is no doubt in our minds that the proposed LTC should be scrapped, or at very least subject to a full and urgent investigation (aside from the DCO). We would welcome your comments.

Many thanks, we look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

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cc. Stephen Metcalfe MP, Jackie Doyle-Price MP, Adam Holloway MP, Julia Lopez MP, Thurrock Council

⁶ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Report-Progress-with-the-second-road-investment-strategy-2020-to-2025.pdf>

⁷ https://nationalhighways.co.uk/media/baphtjxv/national_highways_ar22_interactive_final.pdf