

Evidence for the Strategic Road Investment Inquiry

Introduction

Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) represent thousands of people who are opposed to the hugely destructive and harmful, not fit for purpose £10bn+++ proposed Lower Thames Crossing (LTC). More info on us and our concerns and issues with the proposed LTC can be found on our website

www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com.

This paper was prepared and submitted by Laura Blake, Chair of TCAG on behalf of the group in response to the Strategic Road Investment Inquiry¹ in February 2023. TCAG can be contacted via email –

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Reason for submitting evidence

This inquiry will look into how well the current Road Investment Strategy (RIS2) is being managed, and what the Government's priorities should be for future investment.

Since the proposed Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) was originally a RIS1 project (the preferred route being announced in 2017), is currently a RIS2 project, and will also largely move into RIS3 period (current predicted opening 2030) we felt it important to make a representation to share evidence of our experience and knowledge through our work over the years, which we hope you will find helpful.

Because as a group we represent those opposed to the proposed LTC our representation and evidence will focus on the LTC, but we know from our communications with other campaign groups around the country that many of the concerns and issues we have are not unique to the LTC, they are similar for most if not all projects.

We have endeavoured to keep our evidence concise, but due to the large amount of evidence we have, we present summary responses in the Requested Evidence section of our representation, with more detailed evidence to support our representation in the Appendices. We hope this assists in highlighting the evidence, but also gives adequate information to support our representation. Should you need any further clarification or wish to discuss further we would be more than happy to oblige and make any additional representation as needed.

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/7088/>

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Requested Evidence

1. How effectively has the RIS2 enhancements portfolio been managed to date?

(Please see additional supporting evidence to this question in Appendix 1)

We do not believe that there is enough transparency in regard to the management of the RIS. But based on the information and evidence we have, we do not believe the RIS2 enhancements portfolio has been at all well managed to date. We have very serious concerns about the RIS and National Highways (NH) not being fit for purpose.

Evidence shows that Ministers and the public are being misled on the proposed LTC. The LTC Accounting Officer Assessment is using figures two years out of date. Biased, misleading propaganda and greenwashing is taking place. There is a lack of transparency and meaningful engagement.

We have experienced inadequate consultation, lack of meaningful engagement by NH, lots of misleading propaganda and greenwashing. Costs rising and Benefit Cost Ratio dropping. Misleading Accounting Officer Assessments. Projects that fail to meet scheme objectives and are simply not fit for purpose.

There have been increasing numbers of legal challenges and delays, often due to inadequacies in National Highways (NH) and outdated policies.

We believe there is questionable use of Designated Funds for promotion of, and influencing opinions for, new road projects. We also believe this usage could be influencing the cost and benefit cost ratio for new road projects, since it appears some associated costs are being covered by Designated Funds rather than projects budgets.

2. Are risks to the enhancements portfolio for the remainder of the RIS2 period being well managed?

(Please see additional supporting evidence to this question in Appendix 2)

Based on the evidence of what has gone wrong and how badly RIS2 has been managed to date, as well as NH attitude of business as usual, we have no trust or faith in them making any changes to the way they manage the remainder of RIS2. We believe that the risks are not being well managed and will likely get greater unless some close and strict monitoring takes place and NH are held accountable. They know that failure to deliver LTC is an existential threat to the organization, so we believe they will continue to attempt to mislead, greenwash and push ahead at any cost in order to future proof their own jobs and future, regardless of the consequences.

3. What are the impacts of delays and cost overruns on the overall programme, and can the revised programme be delivered to schedule and on budget?

(Please see additional supporting evidence to this question in Appendix 3)

Delays have been due to inadequate planning and consultations, legal challenges due to outdated policy and a lack of genuine care or consideration of environmental impacts of NH projects. We believe the prematurely awarding contracts prior to DCOs being granted, especially when there are so many delays, is also adding to value for money issues. We question how income from NH land and property portfolio and rentals are handled and monitored.

We do not believe NH are currently providing a realistic estimate of cost for the rest of RIS2 and what will move into RIS3. Accounting Officer Assessments are using figures that are years out of date, when they are supposed to offer guidance and transparency to those making decisions about spending significant amounts of public money. Contingency funds that are usually for when things go wrong have already been spent or allocated. This does not bode well for now or moving forward.

Over the duration of the project so far, the proposed LTC cost has gone from £4.1bn up to now £10.1bn (as of Aug 2020) and likely to rise even more. The adjusted Benefit Cost Ratio has dropped from 3.1 down to 1.22, again this appears to be based on the estimated cost being two years out of date, so is likely to drop further.

There are serious impacts of delays and cost overruns on the overall programme, and the revised programme cannot and should not be delivered, for financial, environmental, and efficiency reasons.

4. What progress is being made on planning for the next Road Investment Strategy?

(Please see additional supporting evidence to this question in Appendix 4)

Progress is slow and questionable. We should not have companies that have a vested interest advising NH on RIS3 strategy.

We have serious concerns about the progress that is being made for the next RIS, and feel things would just get worse, with yet more public money being wasted on projects that are destructive, harmful, and not fit for purpose. We believe there are better and more sustainable options that should be considered.

5. What lessons from RIS2 need to be incorporated into RIS3 to ensure it is achievable and delivers on policy objectives?

(Please see additional supporting evidence to this question in Appendix 5)

There are a great many lessons from RIS1 and RIS2 that should have been learnt. Largely that there is not enough transparency and monitoring taking place, and serious urgent review of the RIS programme is needed. At a time of climate emergency, we should not be pushing ahead with RIS3, especially based on misleading information that is being provided to Ministers, and on National Highways' track record.

6. Is the Government's current and forthcoming roads investment programme meeting the current and future needs of consumers and businesses?

(Please see additional supporting evidence to this question in Appendix 6)

No. The only businesses that are benefiting from the current RIS are National Highways and the construction companies they are using on their projects.

Evidence shows that the proposed LTC would not solve the issues at the Dartford Crossing, and would also bring additional issues.

When considering the needs of businesses more consideration should also be given to the fact that more roads create more traffic, more congestion and more pollution. If people are too ill to work this negatively impacts businesses' productivity, and also means that if they are not able to work they will not have money to spend.

Also, at a time of climate emergency we need to be focusing not only on consumers and businesses needs, but environmental needs, because without a healthy environment there will not be a sustainable existence for anyone.

7. Does the Government's roads investment programme align with other policy priorities, such as decarbonisation, levelling up, productivity and growth?

(Please see additional supporting evidence to this question in Appendix 7)

The Government's roads investment programme fails to align with other policy priorities such as decarbonisation, levelling up, productivity and growth.

Looking at the proposed LTC as an example:

- Estimated 6.6 million tonnes of carbon
- Fails to offer provision for modal shift
- Fails against newly set legal targets for PM2.5
- Would have an adverse impact on biodiversity
- Would result in an increase in accidents
- Is focused on South East and East and offers no levelling up
- Has serious value for money issues, an ever-rising cost and ever dropping Benefit Cost Ratio.
- The fact NH have refused to share an estimated figure of economic benefit and growth strongly suggests that it is not as good as they would like people to believe, otherwise they would be shouting it from the rooftops!

8. How should RIS3 take account of technological developments, and evidence on ways of increasing capacity on the Strategic Road Network (such as smart motorways and potential alternatives to them)?

(Please see additional supporting evidence to this question in Appendix 8)

Based on evidence and the level of serious public concern in regard to 'Smart' Motorways, and NH's failure to deliver what was signed off by Government, serious consideration needs to be given to both current and future technological developments.

Investment should be focused on modal shift and more sustainable alternatives, rather than increasing capacity on the Strategic Road Network, since evidence shows that road building just generates more traffic, with all the associated congestion and pollution.

Conclusion

There is strong evidence of bad management of RIS2 to date, no evidence to show that lessons have been learnt and that improvements will be made. There is growing evidence that the RIS and NH are no longer relevant and fit for purpose. We need to instead be investing in more sustainable integrated transport options. RIS is not value for money, and is not a viable option at a time of climate emergency. We call on Government to scrap, or at very least urgently review the RIS.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to present our paper to you in relation to this inquiry. We hope you will find it of interest and helpful to all aspects on which you were seeking evidence. Please don't hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss further.

Evidence Appendices 1-8

The information contained in this section of our evidence largely shows examples relating to the proposed LTC, because that is where we have gathered our knowledge and experience from to enable us to make this representation.

Whilst specific to the proposed LTC, we believe that in many instances it will be relevant across other projects within the RIS too. We also highlight that being the largest project in the RIS the issues with LTC have a huge relevance to the RIS overall. We hope this info is helpful in highlighting some of the main issues of the RIS.

Appendix 1

We believe there is so much evidence of how RIS2 is not being well managed. It is apparent that costs continue to rise, benefit cost ratios continue to drop, and contingency funds have already been spent or allocated.

Misleading information and lack of transparency

An Accounting Officer Assessment (AOA) is supposed to offer transparency and guidance to Ministers making decisions about spending significant amounts of public money.

Yet the proposed LTC AOA contains misleading info and figures that are two years out of date².

When reviewed alongside other official documents it is clear that not only is the information within the AOA misleading it raises questions of how up to date any official details of the proposed LTC are.

The AOA references an Infrastructure Projects Authority (IPA) stage gate assessment review in Nov 2021, and a follow-up IPA independent peer review in June 2022. We submitted an FOI³ to request copies of mentioned reviews, to better enable us to assess what had been reviewed. This request has been refused. We question why the sensitive information mentioned as the reason for refusal to share could not be redacted in the interest of transparency. We can only assume there is possibly something to hide.

We also question how the IPA can perform its required function when it is totally reliant on the misleading information from NH. It doesn't matter who checks something if they are not given accurate and reliable information.

The estimated cost of the proposed LTC has gone from £4.1bn to £10.1bn as of August 2020, according to official documents. What is not apparent is how much the cost has risen since August 2020.

The adjusted benefit cost ratio had dropped from 3.1 down to just 1.22, and that is not taking increases in cost since Aug 2020 into account.

It is also apparent that there is creative accounting and false economy associated with the LTC project⁴. The Tilbury Link Road for instance has been removed from the LTC project, and progressed as a separate

² <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ministers-are-being-misled-on-lower-thames-crossing-costs/>

³ https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/ipa_stage_gate_assessment_nov_20

⁴ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/cost-of-the-proposed-ltc/>

stand-alone RIS3 pipeline project. The Port of Dover have also called for dualling works to the A2 near Dover as a direct result of the LTC⁵.

Kent County Council are progressing Blue Bell Hill Improvements, as a direct result of the LTC. Blue Bell Hill improvements were included in Variant C at LTC route options stage, but ruled out due to the additional cost financially and environmentally, and because it wasn't deemed by NH to be essential for a new crossing. One has to ask why it was not progressed since those works are now being progressed as a separate stand-alone project, outside of the LTC budget.

Other works would also be needed as a direct result of the LTC. Also, the proposed LTC utilizes the existing local road network in order for it to operate. This will put further pressure and cost on local authorities.

All these costs that are being hidden away and disassociated from the LTC project should be included within the LTC budget. Anything else is creative accounting and a false economy. Further review should be carried out on what the true cost and benefit cost ratio would be if all of these factors were included in the LTC. We doubt it would represent value for money.

It is not just the cost that is misleading either. The LTC AOA states that the project aspires to achieve Net Zero carbon position, which is hardly a true and transparent representation of the 6.6 million tonnes of carbon that the proposed LTC is estimated to emit, if it goes ahead. A top NH/LTC boss, at an industry event, has even said the project won't go ahead unless the carbon issues can be resolved⁶.

National Highways and Balfour Beatty (who were recently awarded one of the contracts, subject to permission being granted) have both backed away from their bold claims about slashing carbon emissions when asked for more info on how they would do so by ourselves and an industry journalist⁷.

The LTC is being presented as a Pathfinder project in regard to carbon emissions, and there are ongoing attempts to greenwash the project⁸. It is being billed as the greenest road ever built in the UK. The reality is that it would be hugely destructive and harmful, and is estimated to emit around 6.6 million tonnes of carbon.

There is also creative accounting in regard to environmental mitigation and compensation with the controversial Hole Farm Community Woodland⁹. NH have stated publicly that this will go ahead regardless of whether LTC goes ahead or not, but is also including it as part of the environmental mitigation and compensation for the LTC project. How can that be considered acceptable? It's hardly compensation or mitigation if it is something they will deliver regardless!

Calls for RIS2 to be re-opened

Since there have been major variations, in regard to clause 6.29 of NH's License¹⁰ ourselves and others called for RIS2 to be re-opened¹¹. We do not feel our concerns were given adequate consideration, and that instead NH and DfT are being given freedom to push on regardless. This is not good management.

⁵ <https://youtu.be/hylzZzY0Vgw?t=83>

⁶ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/no-ltc-if-national-highways-dont-resolve-carbon-issues/>

⁷ <https://www.highwaysmagazine.co.uk/Thames-Tunnel-carbon-claims-fade-under-questioning-/12083>

⁸ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-greenwash/>

⁹ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/hole-farm-community-woodland/>

¹⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/431389/strategic-highways-licence.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/tcag-call-for-ris2-to-be-reopened/>

DCO delays and legal challenges

As has been widely reported there have been serious delays with RIS2. Some of the delays have been due to the growing number of legal challenges. NH and the DfT say it was not possible for them to anticipate these challenges. Yet many campaigners have and still are warning and voicing concerns that RIS2 projects are not legally compliant, especially since they are knowingly being judged against a policy that is known to be out of date and no longer in keeping with UK legislation.

It is not just the direct delays that need to be considered when assessing the delays caused by legal challenges but also the additional cost that NH and the DfT are running up. They should have anticipated the legal challenges and prevented it reaching the stage where people had no option but to take legal action. Just as they should be anticipating the next round of legal challenges if they do not learn from this.

Delays are also down to inadequate consultation and management of the projects.

Inadequacies of consultation

A lack of adequate consultation will lead to ongoing issues. We have experienced serious issues in regard to the LTC consultation from the very beginning, and we have found that the more we look into things the worse they get.

We presented our evidence of inadequacies¹² at various stages in the consultation process, and also to the Planning Inspectorate(PINS). Part of the reason why the first LTC Development Consent Order (DCO) was withdrawn was because of inadequacy of consultation concerns. This led to two more years of delays, further consultation, all adding to the cost of the project.

NH failed to deliver what was requested of them right back to the route options stage¹³, which has led to ongoing issues since there has never been an adequate consultation on the route options.

There has also been a distinct lack of meaningful engagement from NH. So much info has been withheld from the public, NGOs, and Local Authorities etc. This means that we have not been privy to information which we feel we should have been consulted on prior to DCO. We also believe it to be a way of NH controlling the situation, as we now have limited time frames to review an estimated 63,000 pages of documentation. How can this be considered adequate and efficient, let alone fair?

It should also be noted that funding to Local Authorities during the consultation stage is reduced once the DCO is submitted, which then puts additional pressure on councils on their ability to review and make representations for the DCO Examination. This is particularly relevant when NH have withheld so much info until the DCO stage. It also puts further financial burden on councils to be able to continue making representations.

We also have concerns over NH practice of Specialist Security Services being used, which includes monitoring/investigating/spying on individuals and groups such as ours that oppose the project. This is not in keeping with civil liberties and making us feel comfortable in taking part in what should be a democratic process. There is also the issue of the cost of these contracts. One contract has already been awarded to the value of £900,000¹⁴, and a Prior Information Notice was also published for a further £90million

¹² <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/inadequacies-of-ltc-consultation-process/>

¹³ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-route-options/>

¹⁴ <https://www.find-tender.service.gov.uk/Notice/016682-2021>

contract¹⁵. At the stage these details were published it was prior to DCO so also very premature to be talking about contracts for such huge amounts of money.

Questionable use of Designated Funds

The Road Investment Strategy for between 2020-2025 RIS2 has a Designated Fund worth £936 million. When set up the Designated funds were ringfenced, within the RIS to “help improve the surroundings of the strategic road network in a way that supports and protects people and the things we value for quality of life, both now and in the future”¹⁶

Put basically Designated Funds should benefit the communities and environment damaged and impacted by the existing road network.

Yet NH have been increasingly using Designated Funds in ways to promote new projects, in attempts to put positive spin on these destructive and harmful projects. With the proposed LTC for example, they have recently been promoting a £250,000 LTC Community Fund¹⁷.

One of the suggested uses of the grants is to “increase the use of technology to help local communities better understand the LTC proposals and inspire future careers in construction”. This appears to be presenting the idea of using grant funds to fund the presentation and promotion of a new road project. Surely this does not fit with the original remit of the Designated Funds? Also, any monies spent on presenting and promoting a new road project like the proposed LTC should fall within the LTC budget, and be included in the total cost, not be subbed from Designated Funds, as this must also have impact on the Benefit Cost Ratio calculations too.

We consider other suggested uses of the grant to be hypocritical too, since the proposed LTC would destroy and negatively impact green spaces and our ability to use and enjoy them. It would have an adverse impact on health and wellbeing. The new crossing would offer no provision for walkers, cyclists and horse riders to cross the river, and would negatively impact their existing routes. It would impact and sever our heritage and communities, and destroy and impact businesses and jobs. And of course, have many other negative impacts.

Public perception is also that they are using these funds in an attempt to influence opinion and try and build support for their road projects. An example, Brentwood Council were voicing concerns and opposition to the proposed LTC, until announcements started being made that NH were using LTC community funds for a new high-speed broadband connection in Brentwood. Also, the creation of the highly controversial Hole Farm Community Woodland, also in the Brentwood area. Suddenly Brentwood Council began voicing support for LTC.

In the case of Hole Farm Community Woodland¹⁸ we question the creative accounting for this site. It is being counted as biodiversity improvement work along the existing Strategic Road Network (in this instance the M25), and something that will be progressed regardless of whether LTC goes ahead or not. However, it is also being claimed as environmental mitigation and compensation for the proposed LTC. This is just more propaganda and greenwashing, as well as creative accounting.

¹⁵ <https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/notice/e088407f-279c-42d5-92e7-b6679fcf0a5f>

¹⁶ https://nationalhighways.co.uk/media/x5vfxwg1/df-ris1-review-summary-report_final_20210917.pdf

¹⁷ <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-roads/lower-thames-crossing/news-and-media/news/community-fund-apply-now/>

¹⁸ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/hole-farm-community-woodland/>

NH Property portfolio and rentals

We know that NH have a large property and land portfolio, but question how the monies associated with this from both sales and rental are accounted.

For instance, are the rentals from properties that have been acquired for projects like the proposed LTC put back into the budget for LTC, or do they go into a central fund for other things? From what we have been told the portfolio of property that was no longer needed from projects is also large. Where does income from those properties go? Who is monitoring that?

Retrospective planning applications

There is evidence of a growing amount of retrospective planning applications being sought by NH for various projects. Not only does this show a level of arrogance that they don't feel they need to submit planning applications before carrying out work, it also leads to additional costs.

We have seen it with the controversial infilling of bridges, and also experienced it ourselves in regard to the LTC compound in Thurrock, where numerous retrospective planning applications were submitted¹⁹.

'Smart' Motorways

There are serious concerns in regard to 'Smart' Motorways, and evidence that NH failed to deliver on what was signed off by government.

Lack of confidence in NH

We believe that the name change from Highways England(HE) to National Highways was an attempt to rebrand in the hope it would repair the bad reputation the company had obtained.

But it is apparent that since bad behaviour and bad practices continue the money spent on rebranding has not been, and will not be successful. It is not even clear on the official reasons for the change, who decided it, what the decision-making process was, or how much it cost. How can this be considered value for money?

We also ask how and whether we we should have confidence in the standards and guidelines they work to for road projects, considering they publish the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges themselves. Surely this is a case of marking your own homework?

We have heard about the damage that has been caused for the A303 Stonehenge project, which does nothing to reassure the efficiencies of NH and their contractors.

¹⁹ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/tcag-comment-on-retrospective-ltc-compound-planning-application/>

Appendix 2

Concerns over how well the remainder of RIS2 will be managed

We have serious concerns that there is no sign of lessons having been learnt so far in regard to bad management of RIS2.

We feel that NH have a level of arrogance on being able to keep pushing ahead, because to date they have not been held accountable for their actions, despite the evidence of their failings and inadequacies.

In our experience there is a definite presumption from NH that everything will go their way. Yet precedents are being set in regard to the proposed LTC. Most responses to consultations, first attempt of DCO having to be withdrawn, since the Planning Inspectorate were due to refuse it.

We believe that NH and others should have seen the legal challenges and delays coming up until this point. We have been making concerns perfectly clear. We anticipate that there will likely be need for further legal challenges moving forward, unless there is drastic change.

It is concerning that the LTC Accounting Officer Assessment is misleading and using figures two years out of date²⁰. This does not encourage or allow for improvements to the way the remainder of RIS2 and into RIS3 is managed, since decisions are being made based on outdated misleading info and cost.

It is apparent that the cost of everything is rising considerably, but that NH are not making transparent info available on this cost, which further puts management of RIS2 at risk. The fact the contingency plan has already been spent and allocated offers no reassurance or confidence.

NH own annual report details that failure to deliver the proposed LTC is an existential threat to the organization. We believe that is part of the reason they continue to attempt to push ahead with the project, despite it failing to meet scheme objectives, due to fear of threat levels.

Likewise we believe that there could be a culture of not being overly concerned about poor design within projects, since that future proofs their jobs, as further works would be needed to correct the issues.

Since it appears that the DfT have no real plans to start recommending which projects should be scrapped or delayed, it again feels like nobody will hold NH to account of their poor management of RIS2. More needs to be done to monitor and check what is being presented in regard to the RIS, and appropriate actions to ensure the best outcome, even if as we believe this will result in major scrapping of projects.

²⁰ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ministers-are-being-misled-on-lower-thames-crossing-costs/>

Appendix 3

Inadequacies and delays

Delays in RIS2 have been due to inadequacies of projects and consultations and NH as an organization. Also because of legal challenges which are as a result of Government and NH ignoring things like climate emergency, and carbon emissions.

The outdated roads policy is a large part of the problem too. It should have been suspended whilst the policy is reviewed and updated to reflect UK legislation.

Prematurely awarding contracts

NH are prematurely awarding contracts, subject to DCOs being granted. This is even more of an issue when there are delays, and we also question the awarding of some contracts.

For example, the Prior Information Notice²¹ in Feb 2020 for the LTC spoil contract put the total value of the contract at an estimated £40million (ex VAT). The contract has since been split into two contracts, both of which have been awarded to Ingrebourne Valley Ltd²².

One of the contracts is for enabling and prep work, and the contract has already started before the DCO Examination has even taken place, let alone been granted. We have always been under the impression that works associated with construction could not begin unless a DCO has been granted. It is presumptuous to begin prepping sites to receive the spoil prior to permission being granted. It is also putting public money at risk of being wasted. The value of this contract is £571,582.50 with the re-measurable items giving an outturn forecast of circa £1million. That is a large amount of public money being wasted if the project is not granted permission. Are there compensation clauses in any of the contracts being awarded, for if permission is not granted? Further risking public money.

It is also questionable that a site would need preparing because we have been given the impression that the spoil would be used for landscaping the two new 'parks' and along the route. If that is the case then how can work start on land that is within the development boundary despite no permission for the project?

The other part of the contract for spoil disposal has a value of £43.6 million. This means the total value of the two contracts together is likely to be between £44-45million based on the information disclosed, and without taking any increases into account. Far more than the originally estimated £40million.

The other notable point is that the contract was awarded to this company since NH say they were the only ones who tendered and were deemed to have the capabilities, skill and experience for the work. We therefore find it strange that it is stated that the spoil disposal contract is likely to be subcontracted. Can it really be that demanding to be able to subcontract the work to dispose of spoil?

Plus with the proposed LTC being delayed considerably due to the original DCO application having to be withdrawn, why was more time not put into looking for other contractors? What's to say that another company wouldn't possibly have put a tender in once the timeline becomes clearer. They may not have tendered in the first place because of other commitments, but be available to consider taking the work after the timeline for LTC is pushed back because of the delays. Is it really acceptable to award a contract

²¹ <https://ted.europa.eu/udl?uri=TED:NOTICE:063332-2020:TEXT:EN:HTML>

²² <https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/ccf051e0-32b3-4dde-acc6-b426a7a0bda0>

prematurely at a higher than expected cost because there is allegedly only one company bidding for the job?

Delays have resulted in ever rising costs, especially now because of inflation and huge price hikes on so many things. We do not believe that NH have actually published updated costs/figures to reflect these changes. In fact, we believe that the LTC Accounting Officer Assessment is using figures that are misleading and two years out of date. We do not believe that Ministers, or the public in general, are being presented with transparent and adequate information about NH projects and the ever-rising costs and ever dropping benefit cost ratio.

Like the National Audit Office and others, we have serious concerns that there are serious value for money issues, and we feel that the whole RIS enhancements need urgent review and scrapping.

Land & Property

We also question how much money NH must have spent on land and property in regard to LTC and other projects. We know they have a large portfolio of properties that ended up not being needed by various projects. This must be a nice cash cow for NH, as they rent them out, or hold them in their portfolio. What happens to the funds raised by rental and sales of these properties? What happens to the income from renting properties that are acquired prior to DCO decision? Does that income go towards paying for the project, or is does it go into NH general funds? Are these things being considered and monitored?

Cost and Value for Money

LTC Cost history

2016 Summary Business Case ²³	£4.1bn - £5.7bn *
2016 Consultation Booklet ²⁴	£4.3bn - £5.9bn (inc allowances for inflation)
2017 Preferred Route Announcement	No cost mentioned
2018 Statutory Consultation ²⁵	£5.3bn - £6.8bn
2020 Spring Budget - RIS2 (March 11 th) ²⁶	£6.4bn - £8.2bn
2020 Outline Business Case (August) ²⁷	£5.27bn - £9bn
2022 Funding Statement ²⁸	£5.2bn - £9bn
2022 NAO Report (cost as at Aug 2020) ²⁹ (increase in cost since March 2020)	£5.3bn – £9bn c £1.9bn

* At this time LTC was Route 3 WSL

²³ https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/ltc/lower-thames-crossing-consultation/user_uploads/lower-thames-crossing-consultation-summary-business-case.pdf

²⁴ https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/ltc/lower-thames-crossing-consultation/user_uploads/lower-thames-crossing-consultation-booklet.pdf

²⁵

https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/ltc/consultation/supporting_documents/LTC%205%20The%20Case%20for%20the%20Project.pdf

²⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/951100/road-investment-strategy-2-2020-2025.pdf

²⁷ https://nationalhighways.co.uk/media/w3rlnonz/ltc-obc-2022-foi-3385-ic-182335-r3f3_redacted.pdf

²⁸ <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TR010032/TR010032-001251-4.3%20Funding%20Statement.pdf>

²⁹ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Report-Progress-with-the-second-road-investment-strategy-2020-to-2025.pdf>

Note how the 2022 NAO Report states the cost has risen by c £1.9bn since March 2020, yet if you add £1.9bn onto the cost in March 2020 it would be more than the cost stated in the Aug 2020 OBC.

March 2020 £6.4bn - £8.2bn + £1.9bn = **£8.3bn - £10.1bn**

Also note that this would be the cost as at Aug 2020.

Why has the cost not risen further since Aug 2020? Clearly a lot has happened in that time and inflation and costs of everything has risen considerably.

In Feb 2022 , due to changes in the way the government now calculates carbon emission costs, the proposed Lower Thames Crossing carbon costs for construction alone rose by more than 230% to almost £500million. In an article in industry publication, New Civil Engineer³⁰, New Economics Foundation senior researcher has said “after factoring in the emissions over the scheme’s operational lifetime, the total climate cost is likely to rise over £1bn”. We have seen no evidence to suggest this has been represented in the current estimated cost including within the LTC Accounting Officer Assessment.

LTC BCR history

2016 Consultation Summary Business Case	Initial BCR = 2.1-1.5	Adjusted BCR = 3.1-2.2
2018 Case for the Project	BCR = 1.5-2	
2022	Initial BCR=0.48	Adjusted BCR = 1.22

It has to be questioned what the latest BCR for LTC actually is since it appears the 2022 BCRs would be based on incorrect cost estimate, as per above. The cost should have risen since Aug 2022 therefore the BCR would have shrunk further.

National Audit Office report (25th Nov 2022)

The ‘Road enhancements: progress with the second road investment strategy (2020 to 2025)’ report³¹ published by the National Audit Office not only voices concerns over the value for money of projects including the proposed Lower Thames Crossing, but also contains important evidence that needs to be considered.

Accounting Office Assessment (6th January 2023)

It is apparent from looking at the LTC Accounting Officer Assessment(AOA) that misleading info and outdated figures are being used which could mislead Ministers³².

The AOA is supposed to offer transparency and guidance to Ministers making decisions on spending significant amounts of public money.

We question the long delay in the LTC AOA being published too. Public perception is that NH and DfT held it back until after the LTC DCO application had been accepted for Examination. It seems once a DCO is live government are unable or unwilling to comment publicly on the project. Not only does this give opportunity to try and take pressure off the projects publicly, but is also questionable considering NH are

³⁰ <https://www.newcivilengineer.com/latest/carbon-cost-of-lower-thames-crossing-construction-rises-to-500m-02-02-2022/?tkn=1>

³¹ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Report-Progress-with-the-second-road-investment-strategy-2020-to-2025.pdf>

³² <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ministers-are-being-misled-on-lower-thames-crossing-costs/>

holding public community events for people to ask questions about LTC, yet MPs cannot publicly get answers on LTC for themselves or their constituents.

Appendix 4

Delays and issues with RIS3 planning

We made representations about RIS3 in both the National Highways RIS3 consultation³³ and the Office of Rail and Roads RIS consultation³⁴. We are still waiting on the DfT RIS3 consultation which was anticipated to be launched before now.

Some RIS2 projects will be carried over into RIS3, plus there are predicted to be additional RIS3 pipeline projects. This includes the Tilbury Link Road (TLR), which since being removed from the LTC project is being progressed as a separate stand-alone project, despite it being a completely direct result of the proposed LTC, if it goes ahead. After all you can't have the TLR without the proposed LTC, as without LTC there would be nothing to link to! We believe that the TLR was removed from the LTC project so as to reduce the estimated cost. This is a false economy.

NH have also appointed Atkins, Jacobs, and PricewaterhouseCooper to advise its RIS3 strategy³⁵. Surely companies that stand to benefit financially from works in any RIS period have a vested interest in advising on its strategy?

We also note that companies like Jacobs are also heavily involved in consultation for the likes of Transport East³⁶. We feel this could also be a conflict of interest, and could influence opinions and decisions about the RIS.

We believe that more focus and consideration should go into ensuring that the existing road network is better managed and maintained.

We have serious concerns that NH will just attempt to continue pushing ahead as though it is business as usual, ignoring all the previous issues and concerns.

If we are to meet ambitions of a more sustainable future, and modal shift, we need to address the fact that a government company focused on highways is no longer relevant or fit for purpose, because evidence shows that business as usual from NH is not viable.

³³ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/route-strategies-ris3-consultation/>

³⁴ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/orr-ris3-consultation/>

³⁵ <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-roads/lower-thames-crossing/news-and-media/news/highways-england-awards-jacobs-the-lower-thames-crossing-integration-partner-contract/>

³⁶ <https://www.transporteast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/A-30-year-transport-strategy-for-the-East-UPDATED.pdf>

Appendix 5

Lessons that need to be learnt

We need to learn that at a time of climate emergency we cannot carry on as though it is business as usual. We need to address the fact that having a government company focused purely on highways is likely no longer relevant or fit for purpose. We need to be investing in other more sustainable integrated transport options.

It should be noted that public perception is that NH cannot be trusted, and that better monitoring and checking of info provided by NH and the DfT is needed. We cannot afford to have Accounting Officer Assessments that are misleading and out of date.

It is also important that any 'independent' reviews of NH projects is not just someone else looking at evidence/info that has been purely presented to them by NH, since there is evidence that what they have been presenting is often misleading.

More clarity is needed on what NH consider a contingency plan to be for, as it appears they have a very different idea to most people.

Government and NH should listen more to the public and others. It is because NH and the DfT have failed to listen to genuine concerns from people that there have been legal challenges that could have easily been prevented by listening to us more, and/or suspending the policy whilst it is reviewed for example. We see that failure to consider the reviewed/updated NPS NN on projects that are already in the system is highly likely to lead to further legal challenges.

It is essential that all information shared is up to date, not misleading, not biased, not propaganda, and not greenwashing. That representations are listened to and given proper and full consideration, no more tick box exercises.

It would be helpful to have an official means for people to report serious concerns for investigation, as there are many of us who are experiencing serious issues and experience ongoing experiences of the issues and concerns. We feel too much trust is given to NH, and they seem to believe they are a law unto themselves and that everyone should blindly trust them, when the reality is they have a proven track record of inadequacies, of misleading people, and failing to deliver on what is being asked of them.

Appendix 6

Meeting current and future needs

Whilst we appreciate that this inquiry is on Strategic Road Investment, we would respectfully draw attention to the question of whether a road investment programme is actually the right way forward for the sustainable future we need.

Also, that the focus should not always be on consumers and businesses, consideration also needs to be given to the environment, health, and sustainability.

Many road projects are destroying and having a huge negative impact on agricultural land for example. At a time when food security is a serious issue, what is being done to consider and assess the impacts, including cumulative impacts, of road building?

It is not just direct loss of land, it is also the negative impacts of pollution from road building and road traffic to the air, water and soil.

On the topic of food security Tesco are now using rail more and more^{37 38}, which has helped them improve supply and reduced their carbon emissions.

The proposed LTC is focused on providing routes for the ports through to the Midlands and beyond. 70% of goods in and out of the Port of Dover use the Dartford Crossing. 42% of traffic using the Dartford Crossing is goods vehicles. Yet the Port of Dover is not connected by rail.

Rail improvements between Ashford and Reading would negate the need for the proposed £10bn+++ Lower Thames Crossing³⁹, for an estimated cost of around £4.5bn, by getting more freight off of roads and onto more sustainable rail. But of course, National **Highways** are focused on roads not rail, and likely ensuring their own future existence.

The Port of Tilbury only supported the proposed LTC if it included a connection/junction for them. National Highways added the Tilbury Link Road⁴⁰ to appease this, only to remove it later. The Tilbury Link Road is now being progressed as a separate stand-alone RIS3 pipeline project.

It is apparent that it will be necessary to make cuts and delay some RIS3 projects. Not only is it a false economy to remove aspects of such a huge project, such as the Tilbury Link Road, but this also demonstrates the manipulation of the project to suit NH own needs and wants, and the further risk this creates since RIS3 may not be able to support the associated projects that would be needed as a direct result of the Lower Thames Crossing, if it goes ahead.

Blue Bell Hill improvements⁴¹ and dualling of the A2 near Dover are similar examples of works that would be necessary as a direct result of the proposed LTC. We do stress that we don't necessarily support these other projects, we share this to highlight how it is a false economy and adds to the risks moving forward.

³⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/tesco-express-british-supermarket-turns-rail-deliver-christmas-2021-12-16/>

³⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/oct/06/tesco-profits-double-as-shelves-stay-stocked-despite-supply-chain-problems>

³⁹ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/rail-and-tram-alternatives/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/tilbury-link-road/>

⁴¹ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/blue-bell-hill-improvements-consultation-response/>

Blue Bell Hill improvements would obviously be needed since Port of Dover traffic largely uses the M20/A20, so would need a route to cut through to the M2/A2 to reach the LTC. Improvements at Blue Bell Hill were included in one of the original route options, Variant C, at route selection stage⁴², but was ruled out by NH because it would add to the cost and environmental impacts, and was not deemed essential for a new crossing. Yet is now being progressed as a separate stand-alone project, which Kent County Council are seeking funding for.

The A2 near Dover dualling has been publicly called for by the Port of Dover⁴³, and deemed necessary as a direct result of the proposed LTC too.

There are concerns that poor design and planning would also result in the existing local road network being utilized to allow the proposed project to operate, putting further pressure on the existing road network, and adding additional cost to host Local Authorities. An example would be how the proposed LTC utilizes the existing road network around the A13/Orsett Cock⁴⁴.

Poor design also throws up issues and concerns in regard to what has become the Stanford Detour⁴⁵, which would see LTC related traffic impacting the A1014/Stanford junction on the A13, which as well as being a considerable detour for LTC traffic, would also impact businesses, like DP World, London Gateway, Thames Enterprise Park, Thames Freeport, as well as the local community.

What is being proposed for the LTC would not solve the problems at the Dartford Crossing, does not offer adequate connections, does not take into account how traffic would migrate between crossings when there are incidents, which would result in more chaos, congestion and pollution. This is not beneficial for those using the roads and those impacted by the fall out from the congestion and pollution, including businesses and communities throughout the region.

⁴² <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-route-options/>

⁴³ <https://youtu.be/hylzZzYOVgw>

⁴⁴ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/orsett-cock-a1089/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/the-stanford-detour/>

Appendix 7

It seems to us that unfortunately Government do a lot of talking, but are lacking in backing up the talk with actions.

National Policy Statement for National Networks (NPS NN)

The very policy upon which National Significant Projects (NSIPs) in the RIS will be judged upon is outdated and currently being reviewed. This review is only happening because of the threat of legal challenge.

We and others have called for the policy to be suspended whilst the review and update that will be needed takes place. However, Government instead have chosen to knowingly push ahead with judging RIS NSIPs against this policy that they know is outdated and not in keeping with legislation on things like Net Zero.

When NH and the DfT gave oral evidence to the Transport Select Committee recently they were asked whether they could potentially predict future legal challenge risks, and said they couldn't. They even said that they felt the review and update of the policy would put an end to the legal challenges they have been facing.

However, they also stated that the new policy would not be used retrospectively. This means that projects like the proposed LTC would be knowingly judged against a policy that is outdated against UK legislation. We predict that this will likely result in legal challenges moving forward.

There are reasons that legislation is passed, and that should be acknowledged and respected, rather than doing as Government and NH seem to do, which is just bury their head in the sand and try to get away with what suits them.

Government policy and legislation

Net Zero

Alternatives that could deliver better benefits with lower emissions have not been given proper consideration. For example, rail improvements between Ashford and Reading (cost approx. £4.5bn) would negate the need for the proposed LTC, and take freight off the roads and onto more sustainable rail.

42% of traffic using the Dartford Crossing is goods vehicles⁴⁶. And why doesn't the Port of Dover have a rail connection? Many see the problem as being that National Highways only ever focus on Highways.

The *2022 LTC 6.1 Environmental Statement Chapter 15 – Climate*⁴⁷ estimates **6.596 million tonnes** of carbon.

This is an increase of 25% since the *2020 LTC 6.3 Environmental Statement Appendices Appendix 15.1 Carbon and Energy Plan*⁴⁸ which estimated **5.273 million tonnes** of carbon.

In Dec 2022 it was reported⁴⁹ that National Highways Lower Thames Crossing project director, tunnels, Sinisa Galac, said there won't be a Lower Thames Crossing if they don't resolve carbon issues.

⁴⁶ <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-roads/lower-thames-crossing/news-and-media/news/data-reveals-dartford-crossing-carrying-more-goods-than-ever-before/>

⁴⁷ <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TR010032/TR010032-001587-6.1%20Environmental%20Statement%20Chapter%2015%20-%20Climate.pdf>

⁴⁸ <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/679347/response/1687136/attach/3/6.3%20ES%20Appendix%2015.1%20Carbon%20and%20Energy%20Plan.pdf>

⁴⁹ <https://www.newcivilengineer.com/latest/national-highways-boss-there-wont-be-a-lower-thames-crossing-if-we-dont-resolve-carbon-issues-09-12-2022/>

It was also mentioned in the same article that he claimed “...another 10-20% will be slashed through carbon capture”.

When we emailed NH/LTC to ask for more information on this statement, we received the following response on 10th Jan 2023.

The NCE article referenced a talk that Sinisa Galac, Tunnels Director for the Lower Thames Crossing, gave at a tunnelling industry conference. The audience at the conference included representatives from organisations that are involved in researching replacement of fossil fuels and carbon capture and utilisation and storage (CCUS) or are likely to seek to work on the scheme and Sinisa took the opportunity to impress on them the extent of our low carbon ambition.

As a pathfinder for carbon neutral construction, we will seek to adopt low and zero carbon technologies as they become viable. While carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) is not yet available, there are a number of industrial clusters in the UK where the technology is being developed. The projected readiness dates overlap with the construction period of the Lower Thames Crossing and there is potential that we could start using cement manufactured with CCUS towards the end of the construction period.

Previously NH have claimed that the LTC carbon emissions would be cut by 80%⁵⁰ due to government policies including ending the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans.

This is from the Government’s Decarbonisation Plan, initially the DfT refused to share the carbon emissions figures behind the Decarbonisation Plan.⁵¹ to back up that it is viable. Initial analysis of the finally released data shows that the DfT assumptions look well of course⁵². It is not therefore acceptable for NH to make such bold claims about 80% cuts in LTC emissions.

Decarbonisation

We hear about decarbonisation plans and policy, yet the proposed LTC alone is estimated to emit around 6.6 million tonnes of carbon, and there would also be a around a 50% increase in cross river traffic⁵³, if it goes ahead.

None of this is in keeping with Net Zero, or the Climate Change Committee’s recommendation⁵⁴:

“In further developing their thinking on Roads Investment Scheme 3, DfT and National Highways must rigorously assess the emissions impacts of these plans and thoroughly consider alternative approaches that could deliver similar benefits with lower emissions. The strategy should not aim to cater for unconstrained growth in road traffic and should be compatible with Net Zero.”

It should also be noted that NH have not been transparent over the years in regard to disclosing and presenting estimated carbon emissions for the proposed LTC.

For example, in July 2022 NH were publicly claiming an 80% reduction in carbon emissions for the proposed LTC⁵⁵. Yet information available at the time showed a whopping 67% increase in the estimated LTC operational traffic carbon emissions⁵⁶.

⁵⁰ <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-roads/lower-thames-crossing/news-and-media/news/government-decarbonisation-plans-drive-down-projected-carbon-emissions/>

⁵¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/dec/19/co2-emission-figures-road-transport-uk-government-blocks-release>

⁵² <https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/local-transport-today/news/73023/the-route-to-net-zero-dft-assumptions-look-well-off-course>

⁵³ <https://lowerthamescrossingthurrock.co.uk/wider-debate-is-needed-on-the-merits-of-ltc-creating-a-new-m25-outer-orbital-route>

⁵⁴ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Progress-in-reducing-emissions-2022-Report-to-Parliament.pdf>

⁵⁵ <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-roads/lower-thames-crossing/news-and-media/news/government-decarbonisation-plans-drive-down-projected-carbon-emissions/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-carbon-emissions/>

In addition, at an industry event a top NH/LTC boss said that there won't be an LTC if they don't resolve the carbon emissions⁵⁷.

When questioned by TCAG and an industry journalist about claims of further slashing carbon emissions for the LTC, both NH/LTC and Balfour Beatty (who have recently been awarded the Roads to the North contract, subject to permission being granted) were unable to provide further evidence of how they would achieve that, and backed away from their bold claims.⁵⁸

Yet they proceed to present to the public and Government that the project aspires to achieve net zero position, such as in the LTC Accounting Officer Assessment.

Decarbonisation also looks to modal shift, yet the proposed LTC is purely focused on motorised vehicles. This is to the extent that due to lack of adequate connections the proposed LTC is not even viable for public transport bus routes. Clearly the largest projects in the RIS is not offering provision for modal shift that is needed. What is needed is integrated sustainable transport options, but when we have National Highways that is not going to happen as their focus and future is purely highways, the clue is in their name!

25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP)

The 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP)⁵⁹ published in 2018 outlines the steps to achieve Government's ambition to leave our environment in a better state than we found it.

There is no way such destructive and harmful road projects can align with what is set out in the plan. For example:

Some of the targets set in 25YEP include:

- Clean air
- Clean and plentiful water
- Thriving plants and wildlife
- Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment
- Mitigating and adapting to climate change

Yet the proposed LTC alone would result in:

- an increase in air pollution, and the whole proposed route fails against newly set legally binding targets for air pollution, including PM2.5
- an increase to water pollution from PM2.5 and nitrogen deposition
- loss of and impacts to wildlife and habitats
- negative impacts on an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, local heritage, and people's ability to engage with the natural environment in a safe and healthy environment
- worsen climate change through its environmental impacts including 6.6 million tonnes of carbon

Clearly the proposed LTC one of the largest RIS projects is not in keeping with Government's ambitions and targets for 25YEP, and would leave the environment in a far worse state than we found it in.

⁵⁷ <https://www.newcivilengineer.com/latest/national-highways-boss-there-wont-be-a-lower-thames-crossing-if-we-dont-resolve-carbon-issues-09-12-2022/>

⁵⁸ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/no-ltc-if-national-highways-dont-resolve-carbon-issues/>

⁵⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

Environment Act

The whole proposed LTC route would fail against the newly set legal targets of the Environment Act. We particularly highlight the new targets for air pollution PM2.5. Evidence shows that the whole route would fail against the new levels.

We do not believe that NH are giving adequate consideration to PM2.5 concerns and issues. When questioned about air pollution they tend to comment as though Electric Vehicles will solve the issue of air pollution, but of course that is not true as they emit deadly PM2.5.

Gear Change - Active Travel

The 4 main themes of the Gear Change policy⁶⁰ are:

- Better streets for cycling and people
- Cycling and walking at the heart of decision-making
- Empowering and encouraging local authorities
- Enabling people to cycle and protecting them when they do

Active travel is a more sustainable modal shift that would reduce congestion and pollution, and also has positive health and well-being benefits. Yet as a proposed new river crossing the proposed LTC offers no provision for cross river active travel. Not only that but it would also have a negative impact on existing routes and usage. NH have been attempting to greenwash and misleading people about active travel in regard to the proposed LTC. Many of the new routes they are claiming are actually existing routes that would need be realigned due to the proposed LTC. It is therefore clear to see that what is being proposed is not in keeping with the Gear Change policy

Levelling Up

The RIS enhancements portfolio is largely focused on the South East, East and South West, this hardly promotes fair levelling up. We have also not seen any evidence that projects like the proposed LTC or others would actually offer any beneficial levelling up to areas that need it. Rather that it would likely have a negative impact on areas already suffering with poor air quality and greater health issues etc.

If the proposed LTC goes ahead it would have a negative impact on the existing local road network, which would result in additional costs to the Unitary Local Authority of Thurrock Council, who already have financial concerns.

It has been reported than Kent County Council have advised Government of the risk of bankruptcy (or S114 as it is for LAs)⁶¹. Again, there would be additional associated costs to KCC, as improvement works like Blue Bell Hill would be needed as a direct result of the LTC if it goes ahead.

Growth

Any growth should be sustainable, in the correct location, and for genuine reason, not just for the sake of it. However, as previously mentioned above the CCC stated that the RIS *should not aim to cater for unconstrained growth in road traffic*. With a predicted 50% increase in cross river traffic in a region that is already heavily congested this is not compliant. Again, as already mentioned no clear estimated figure of

⁶⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-plan-for-england>

⁶¹ <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/kcc-warns-it-faces-bankruptcy-without-help-277048/>

the predicted economic growth/benefit has been shared with us, suggesting that it is not as good as NH would like people to believe, otherwise they'd be shouting it from the rooftops!

Appendix 8

Technology and 'Smart' Motorways

Any technological developments whether existing or future potentials need to be fully and adequately reviewed, and not just by NH.

Evidence of the benefits and any risks should be made available in a clear and transparent manner.

Anything that is progressed must be delivered based on what is signed off, and regular monitoring and reporting carried out.

Where and when needed actions must be taken, and prioritized when deemed a serious concern in regard to safety. NH should be held accountable for their actions.

'Smart' motorways are anything but smart, they are dangerous, and a serious concern to many. NH failed to deliver on what was signed off by Government, and continue to operate them without adequate technology and operations/staffing.

NH are currently finding work-arounds to avoid the bad publicity about 'Smart' Motorways, and to avoid the current pause on them.

For example, the proposed LTC was referred to as a motorway prior to growing media coverage and public outcry over the dangers of 'Smart' Motorways. It has now been designated an All-Purpose Trunk Road (APTR), but is being designed using 'smart' motorway standard and technology.

The main difference between a motorway and APTR is the colour of the road signs. Yet the green road signs as opposed to blue do not make them any safer in regard to 'smart' motorway technology.

It is the lack of hard shoulder, the lack of and issues with adequate cctv, and the problems within the control rooms such as inadequate systems crashing and staff not being able to carry out their duties in a safe and effective manner due to issues beyond their control that make 'Smart' Motorways dangerous.

NH have previously provided different information in regard to questions about 'Smart' LTC to ourselves, Local Authorities, and the DfT. At this time we provided evidence⁶² ⁶³ and called for 'Smart' LTC to be paused in keeping with the pause on 'Smart' Motorways.

Put simply the proposed LTC would be a 'Smart' Motorway by stealth.

We would also question whether looking for ways to increase capacity on the Strategic Road Network is actually in keeping with Government policy and ambitions to reach Net Zero, encourage modal shift, improve air quality, improve biodiversity, level up, and sustainable growth.

⁶² <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/TCAG-Call-for-Smart-LTC-to-be-paused.pdf>

⁶³ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/call-to-pause-proposed-smart-ltc/>

There is so much evidence to show that new roads increase traffic, so looking to increase capacity is not going to work, we need alternative solutions. We need to look at what is causing the congestion and address that, not just keeping on with a never-ending downward spiral of road building.

It is predicted the proposed LTC would not solve the problems of congestion at the Dartford Crossing, and would increase cross river traffic by around 50%. It is obvious what is being proposed is not fit for purpose. In our opinion that is the danger of having National Highways their focus is purely on highways and not on more sustainable alternatives, and modal shift because that doesn't secure their own future.

What we need for a sustainable future is National Transport or National Travel that incorporates all modes of transport and can focus on modal shift and connectivity, efficiency, reliability, and affordability of the way we all travel to ensure a safer, healthier more sustainable future for all.