

THAMES CROSSING ACTION GROUP

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Evidence for the South East APPG Transport Infrastructure 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 South East APPG Transport Infrastructure Inquiry¹ in February 2023. TCAG can be contacted via email – admin@thamescrossingactiongroup.com.

Evidence

1. Is “Levelling-up” a threat or opportunity to Transport infrastructure for the South East?

The answer to this question is dependent on your interpretation of ‘Levelling-up’. If you consider growth and development as “Levelling-up” it can be considered a threat. If you consider saving, protecting, and enhancing our natural environment for a healthy and sustainable future it can be considered an opportunity. Currently, it sadly seems to be that those in position of authority are overlooking the importance of “Levelling-up” in regard to ensuring a healthy and sustainable future, instead favouring economic growth and development at any cost.

2. What should success criteria for transport-related measures in Levelling-up look like?

In regard to transport, we need to see a move to more sustainable travel and transport, instead of just defaulting to what has always been done, largely building more roads. Projects like the proposed £10bn+ Lower Thames Crossing do not provide “Levelling-up” in a sustainable manner. It fails to offer provision for cross river active travel², and is not viable for public transport/buses³ due to the lack of adequate connections. It would have an adverse impact on air quality, and would fail against the newly set legal levels for air pollution PM2.5⁴. It would emit 6.6 million tonnes of carbon⁵, which is not compliant with Net Zero.

There are more sustainable alternatives that would offer levelling-up on a wider scale. Cross river active and public transport. People need and want sustainable, affordable, reliable options. We need to level-up those options, rather than just keep focusing on road options that are harmful to the environment and our health and well-being.

¹ <https://www.secouncils.gov.uk/south-east-appg-launches-transport-infrastructure-inquiry>

² <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-for-walkers-cyclists-horse-riders/>

³ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-public-transport-and-nmu/>

⁴ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/lower-thames-crossing-pm2-5/>

⁵ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-carbon-emissions/>

We need adequate assessment of any future transport options, including environmental impacts. The Welsh Government are leading the way, and the UK Government need to follow suit on this for the rest of the UK, including the South East.

Things like road projects have such huge implications on so much. The proposed LTC would destroy and impact thousands of acres of agricultural land, including grade 1 listed land⁶. At a time when we have serious food security issues, we should not be destroying and impacting the farmland that we have left, we need to ensure a sustainable future in farming for our future needs. Failure to do so will just result in the need to import even more, and that then results in more congestion, and more calls for more roads. It's a never-ending downward spiral, unless things change. Where does it end, and who is looking at the cumulative impacts of this aspect on a national and global level?

Successful levelling-up should ensure a healthy and sustainable future for all, protecting and enhancing our natural environment. We need levelling up on things that are essential to us all, like clean air to breathe, clean water, healthy soils for producing our food and drink.

We cannot afford to carry on as though it is business as usual, and the focus cannot simply be on economic benefit and growth. Put bluntly you can't sit and count all that money, if there is no clean air to breathe!

4. Are there common transport pressure points in the South East?

The obvious transport pressure point is the Dartford Crossing. It is after all the original reason for calls for a new Thames Crossing. Yet the proposed LTC has morphed from being about solving the congestion and pollution problems at the current crossing, into being about economic benefit and growth and providing routes for the Ports in the South East through to the Midlands and beyond.

70% of goods in and out of the Port of Dover use the Dartford Crossing. 42% of the vehicles using the Dartford Crossing are goods vehicles. Yet the Port of Dover doesn't have a rail connection. Rail improvements between Ashford and Reading⁷ would negate the need for the proposed LTC, at a much lower cost. It would take more freight off roads and onto more sustainable rail.

The proposed LTC, if it goes ahead, would also add to congestion and pollution, as well as being a hugely destructive and harmful project. It would not solve the problems at the Dartford Crossing. Evidence shows that it would remain over design capacity, even if the proposed LTC goes ahead.

The Dartford Crossing has a design capacity of 135,000 vehicles per day, yet regularly sees 180,00 per day. That means we'd need to see a reduction of more than 25% to bring it back below capacity. Yet the LTC would take as little as 4% of traffic away in the am peak hour and 11% in the pm peak hour. It would also

⁶ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-impacts-on-farming/>

⁷ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/rail-and-tram-alternatives/>

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result in a 50% increase in cross river traffic. This is not a solution to the congestion and pollution problems associated with the Dartford Crossing⁸.

Not only that but National Highways are not planning how traffic would migrate between the two projects when there are incidents, if LTC goes ahead, and there would not be adequate connections⁹. For instance, when there's an incident at the Dartford Tunnel and traffic comes off the M25 onto the A2 coastbound to try and access the LTC, there would be just one single lane from the A2 onto the LTC.

Alternatively, when there's an incident at the QE2 bridge traffic would come off the M25 onto the A13 eastbound, only to find there is no direct access to the LTC. Instead it would have to go eastbound on the A13 to the Stanford A1014 junction, up around the already busy traffic lighted roundabout, (alongside DP World, London Gateway, Thames Enterprise Park etc traffic), and then back westbound on the A13 until just past (but not accessible from) the Orsett A128 junction to the new LTC slip road. If it instead tried to come off the M25 directly onto the LTC southbound, the M25 would be 5 lanes at this point going onto just 2 lanes southbound on the LTC until past the A13. It would lead to more chaos, congestion and pollution.

There are also built in bottlenecks in the LTC design. A couple of the most obvious ones are the fact that the A2 which was widened from 3 lanes to 4, would drop to just 2 lanes for a section in each direction, if the proposed LTC goes ahead¹⁰. The A13 that has just been widened to make it 3 lanes between the M25 and A1014 would also drop to 2 lanes in each direction for a section, if the LTC goes ahead¹¹.

A2 dualling near Dover and Blue Bell Hill improvements are just a couple of examples of where the existing road network would need further money spent working on it, as a result of the LTC¹².

More consideration also needs to be given to planning, and also ensuring that logistics are as efficient as possible to reduce miles travelled. We are losing count of how much development is being proposed and progressed in areas that are already known to suffer from congestion and pollution issues. We need more joined up thinking, and for issues not to be exasperated with bad decision making. We need to ensure that freight and deliveries are carried out as efficiently as possible to avoid adding the issues. This would benefit both the environment and the economy.

We need to ensure that any new transport options are solutions and not just temporary sticking plasters, while real sustainable alternatives are being overlooked and even ignored. We cannot have new projects adding to existing issues and/or worsening our transport options.

5. What are the funding prospects for proposed projects? a. Short term? b. Long term?

Road projects in the Road Investment Strategy have serious value for money issues¹³, and the management of the Strategic Road Investment has not been efficient or effective. We highlighted many concerns about this in our response to the Transport Select Committee's inquiry on the topic¹⁴.

⁸ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-not-fit-for-purpose/>

⁹ <http://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/incidents-ltc-dartford-crossing>

¹⁰ <http://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/a2-bottlenecks>

¹¹ <http://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-a13-bottleneck>

¹² <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/cost-of-the-proposed-ltc/>

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The prospects of funding projects like the proposed LTC are not good.

The cost of the proposed LTC has risen from £4.1bn in 2016, just before it was announced as the preferred route option, to now being up to £10bn+. The adjusted Benefit Cost Ratio has dropped in the same timeframe from 3.1 down to just 1.22. The basic BCR is currently reported as just 0.48 which is definitely poor value for money.

6. What “adequate freedoms” might help councils work with partners to deliver specific projects?

Local authorities and others need and deserve meaningful engagement with developers, including the likes of National Highways, when proposed projects are being consulted on. Projects like the proposed LTC are being inflicted on local authorities and communities that have good reason and evidence to show why such a project should not be progressed. However, we do not believe that National Highways have consulted adequately, and there is a distinct lack of meaningful engagement from National Highways. This is not conducive to working together and ensuring the best outcome for all.

8. Should local businesses pay more for enhanced transport infrastructure? How much and for what?

Based on the fact that during LTC consultation businesses appear to have been given priority over others¹⁵, we have concerns about companies being able to potentially sway decision making and buy their way into projects that can have adverse impacts on communities and the environment.

10. Any other thoughts or observations?

“The South East and ‘Global Britain’: what role for transport infrastructure in underpinning Britain’s plan to trade and grow?”

The role for transport infrastructure in Britain’s plans must be one of integrated sustainable travel and transport options. There is currently too much distance and disconnect between various modes of transport in our country. For example, we have National Highways, who’s only focus is on roads and ensuring their own future existence, rather than what is necessarily the fight thing for the country.

Evidence shows that more roads lead to more traffic and more congestion and pollution. We need to address the mentality of trying to build our way out of congestion. We need to see change, we need investment that encourages modal shift for the better. We need National Transport or National Travel to ensure our country moves ahead with joined up thinking on integrated sustainable travel and transport options for the benefit of the environment and for all. We cannot simply continue to push ahead as though it is business as usual, especially when it comes to proposing hugely destructive and harmful projects like the proposed Lower Thames Crossing, that would have a huge cost, £10bn+ financially, but also a cost to our environment, health and well-being. We need and deserve better.

¹³ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-value-for-money-issues/>

¹⁴ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Evidence-for-Strategic-Road-Investment-Inquiry.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/how-the-preferred-route-was-chosen/>