

To: Highways England
National Traffic Operations Centre
3 Ridgeway
Quinton Business Park
Birmingham
B32 1AF

From : Keith Taylor, Green Party MEP for South East England

Re: Response to Lower Thames Crossing consultation

This letter constitutes my response to Highways England's consultation on plans for the Lower Thames Crossing. I wholeheartedly reject this scheme and this latest consultation ridicules the last as none of the environmental or social concerns highlighted by concerned citizens appear to have been heeded or addressed in these latest plans.

This 14 mile stretch of road, which will cost £6bn to build and will take just a fraction off journey time at best, is the most epic waste of public finances at a time when public services are being crippled. It only serves to make the problems already experienced in the area worse. Even using the consultation's own statistics, it is clear that the proposed solution will not improve congestion in Dartford and will leave the area still running over capacity, and in jeopardy of replicating the problem further upstream. Building more road capacity does not alleviate traffic - it induces demand.

The Government's approach to dealing with congestion, improving the economy and creating jobs time and again upsells the solutions, but is devoid of credible evidence and fails to consider the true cost. This scheme is dangerous. It will cut large swathes of the countryside in two. It will make air quality in one of the country's most polluted areas worse¹. The resulting health issues for local people is a public emergency already; a new road will only worsen the living conditions – including more noise, for local people. And it will bring an incredibly emissions-intensive project online 3 years before the point at which scientists have told us we must decarbonise our society in order to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. It is short-sighted, old-fashioned, foolish and wrong.

Six billion pounds invested in more considered, long term solutions could not just address the issue in the Lower Thames area, but the entire country. According to the Campaign for Better Transport (CfBT), these same sums invested elsewhere could halve the pothole backlog, fund over 10,000 electric buses, build at least 2,000 miles of cycle superhighway (that's Lands End to John O'Groats twice over), or provide support for vital bus services nationwide.

¹ Three of the UK's most polluted areas (exceeding or at legal limits) according to WHO data are in the proposed area - Thurrock, Grays and Stanford-le-Hope.

There has been no mention of trying to tackle the issue by improving other modes of transport, especially rail. With or without further road building these increases in motorised traffic are not sustainable. There appears to have been no consideration of investment in public transport.

Road transport accounts for about one fifth of the EU's total emissions of CO₂ (cars and vans 15%, heavy duty vehicles 6%). Despite improvements in fuel consumption efficiency in recent years, emissions remain high mainly due to increasing road freight traffic. And this is especially important when considering the type of traffic in this area. The longstanding problems caused by cross-Channel lorries are well-known, and exemplified by Operation Stack and new proposals for a major lorry park. With the uncertainty of Brexit, traffic flows in the area may become increasingly unpredictable or unmanageable. We need to be taking goods off of the roads and creating a more level playing field across modes for freight - this is where investment should be going.

Especially as CfBT highlight, existing freight terminals north of the Thames at London Gateway and Tilbury have spare capacity and good rail freight connections. Investing in rail, sea and waterways would be a much smarter, greener and safer decision that would likely derive many more benefits and not create as many serious issues as the proposals at hand.

It is worth pointing out that the EIA Scoping Report for the project states that:

“Climate change mitigation is essential to minimise the most dangerous impacts of climate change, as previous global greenhouse gas emissions have already committed us to some degree of continued climate change for at least the next 30 years.”

Yet there is absolutely no consideration in the document at all that considers the impact that building this road would have over its lifetime from the vehicles that will travel on it. This one example embodies all that is wrong with this idea and the Government's road building scheme at large - it fails to consider the future. It is essential that we minimise the harm coming from our society. Transport emissions are one of the largest contributors to the causes of climate change, and the only one that continues to grow - because of projects like this. There can be no place for them in our future if we are to avoid the most dangerous impacts of climate change. It should not be permitted to go ahead.