

# Options for a new Lower Thames Crossing Consultation Response



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The Freight Transport Association (FTA) is one of Britain's largest trade associations, and uniquely provides a voice for the whole of the UK's logistics sector. Its role, on behalf of over 14,000 members, is to enhance the safety, efficiency and sustainability of freight movement across the supply chain, regardless of transport mode. FTA members operate over 200,000 goods vehicles - almost half the UK fleet - and some one million liveried vans. In addition, they consign over 90 per cent of the freight moved by rail and over 70 per cent of sea and air freight. FTA works with its members to influence transport policy and decisions taken at local, national and European level to ensure they recognise the needs of industry's supply chains.

## Background

The Association consulted with its members through Regional and National Councils and has had a significant response from companies based across Great Britain on this issue. We see that it is significant that freight operators wherever they are in the Great Britain are interested and want to see an additional crossing on the Lower Thames and believe that it is important to invest in this strategic corridor in the South East of England as they see the issue to be of national significance to the economic wellbeing of the UK.

## Response to the consultation

### ***Q1. Do you agree that there is a strong case to increase road-based river crossing capacity in the Lower Thames area?***

FTA welcomes the introduction of free-flow technology at the end of next year, accompanied by the removal of the toll plazas. We believe this will go along way to resolving the *current* congestion issued faced at the Thurrock-Dartford crossing. However, there is also a need to plan for *future* demand on our road network, something which is all too often an after-thought.

The consultation document explains that traffic flows are predicted to increase due to the forecasted higher population growth in the South East compared to the rest of the country. Without a new crossing, traffic flows are expected to increase by 10-20 per cent southbound and by 2-10 per cent northbound between 2009 and 2041. This means that on a typical day, with no incidents, delays resulting from queuing on the crossing could exceed 3 minutes southbound and 10 minutes northbound. We believe that with the average running cost of the largest hgv at around £1 per minute, the cost of congestion can very easily outweigh the cost of the crossing charge. The Association believes that the case for a new crossing to increase road based river crossing capacity in the Lower Thames area is very strong.

### ***Q2. Which of the following location options for a new crossing do you prefer?***

**Option A** at the site of the existing crossing would be the quickest and cheapest option to deliver, and many believe, the most likely to happen. However we have major concerns that it will generate a greater bottleneck at the A282 crossing and possibly on surrounding routes rather than spreading the traffic volumes geographically.

**Option B** connecting the A2 with the A1089 is the least favourite option as it does not appear to provide any significant benefits to the strategic road network and gives a huge increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as well as the lowest benefit to cost ratio. It would be a local crossing for local traffic, but there is a risk that if there is an incident on the main Dartford-Thurrock crossing, that the strategic traffic will divert itself onto the local crossing, via local roads, in the same way

as currently happens with the Blackwall Tunnel. This would effectively cause significant problems for residents and businesses in the Grays, Tilbury and Swanscombe areas.

**Option C** connecting the M2 with the A13 with the variant (improvements on the A229 between M2 and M20) is the favoured option as it would deliver the best strategic benefits. It would also encourage and assist in attracting more investment and development along the route.

However, option C is the most expensive option and the Association is concerned that this may lead to significant increases in charges, both at the existing and new crossing, to cover the cost of construction. Whilst this more direct route offers potentially significant cost savings to vehicles travelling from the Channel ports to the north of London, if the charge levels are set too high, this benefit will be eroded and the new route will be underutilised. If it is not possible to cover the cost of construction for option C with a charge set at an acceptable level, the Association would move its preference to option A.

Additionally, following industry's experience of the operation of M6 toll road, the Severn and other estuarial crossings, we feel that Government must ensure that motorists and the industry are protected from very high toll increases. FTA is concerned that private infrastructure operators will be tempted to price larger lorries off their network in order to keep their maintenance costs to a minimum. Tolls and charges must be set to allow transport operators to choose the most economic option and however the charge or toll is calculated there must be no discriminatory pricing against commercial vehicles.

***Q3. Please indicate how important the following factors were in influencing your preference for the location of a new crossing, in answer to Q2.***

The Association recognises that part of this consultation seeks to establish factors that could be used to influence the choice of crossing, some of which are covered in our response to question two.

However we are very concerned on the lack at this stage of realistic and clear evidence on which our decisions and therefore we believe government decisions can be made. Indeed during our own consultations comments from our members reflected that it is the governments role to identify these factors to enable our and the public's response to be informed with a realistic business case.

Our assumptions therefore have had to be very general and based on forecast congestion figures rather than traffic flows along certain routes.

If congestion, and importantly journey reliability, is improved as forecasted there would be reductions in greenhouse gases and lower cost to operating vehicle fleets. The improved reliability will enable to industry to look at more accurate delivery deadlines and create for logistic operator's greater confidence in the networks operation.

Additionally diverting traffic along new routes away from what are already congested areas are likely to bring the advantages of journey reliability.

The logistics industry would also have to cope with the inevitable congestions that will be created by at the construction phase which could have a massive affect on the existing crossing and the surrounding network is options A or B were to be taken up and it would appear that option C therefore would bypass the existing crossing area and during build will be the least disruptive.

***Q4. Is your preference for the location of a new crossing, in answer to Q2, conditional on whether a bridge, bored tunnel or immersed tunnel is provided and if so, which type of crossing would you prefer?***

The Association recognises that tunnels can mitigate some of the effects of infrastructure on sensitive areas. However, assurance is sought that any new infrastructure can accommodate tall and wide vehicles as well as those carrying hazardous goods.

### ***Other Comments***

FTA is concerned that option C will still bring traffic to the M25 even though it would be further north than the existing crossing. The Association therefore believes that the Department for Transport should consider linking option C further up on the M11 rather than adding additional traffic to an already congested section of the M25.

### **Conclusion**

The Association is certain that a new crossing is required.

FTA members are generally in favour of Option C with the variant to connect the M20 and the M2. However, should the cost of construction result in significantly higher charges at the Lower Thames crossing and the existing Dartford-Thurrock crossing, the Association would prefer option A.

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