

# **The Lower Thames Crossing**

## **Written Representations - Deadline 1 – 18<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

### **Response from Essex Area Ramblers - Registration no: 20034420**

#### **Introduction**

My name is Graham Reeve and this is a submission written on behalf of the Essex Area Ramblers

I am a retired Transport Planner who worked for a large international consultancy for many years.

#### **Proposed infrastructure for walkers, cyclists and horse riders (WCH)**

The Project would cross numerous existing PRoW and footpaths along local roads that are used by WCH. Some of these would be temporarily impacted during construction and may be closed, diverted or impacted by construction traffic.

There would be a number of permanent PRoW and footway diversions, with grade separated crossings provided across the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) for WCH. Most PRoW and footways along local roads would be re-provided along their current routes when the Project is completed. Hornsby Lane, would be permanently stopped up as a result of the Project and although dedicated WCH facilities are not provided on this road, the movement of WCH will be impacted. There is a proposed new bridleway to the east of Hornsby Lane which would cross the LTC.

National Highways (NH) state that there would be a comprehensive provision of new footpaths, bridleways and cycleways as a result of the Project and this amounts to approximately 1.4km of new cycle track, 26km of new shared track (walkers and cyclists), 3km of new bridleways and 1.2km of new unmade footpaths.

The new provision for WCH in Essex is shown on Plates 1.2 and 1.3 in volume 7 of NH's Transport Assessment.

#### **Comments on PRoWs**

Essex Ramblers have examined the proposals for WCH and are generally content that the replacement PRoWs are adequate in principle. However, as there are no detailed plans at this stage, the Ramblers will need to be satisfied that the new WCH routes have acceptable dimensions, surfacing and wayfinding.

We are particularly concerned where the crossings are shared with cyclists and horse riders and we will need to be satisfied that adequate design and segregation is achieved. NH state that WCH routes would be designed in accordance with DMRB standard CD 143, which provides a desirable minimum width of 2.6m and an absolute minimum width of 2.0m for pedestrian routes. On shared pedestrian/cycle routes, there would be a desirable minimum width of 5m and an absolute minimum width of 3.0m.

These dimensions are considered to be acceptable, but the Ramblers will also need to be assured that these facilities will be guaranteed to be constructed and will not be sacrificed when value engineering or cost cutting is undertaken.

However, The Ramblers are very concerned about the impact that the proposed WCH diversions and closures during construction will have on WCH users. The construction period is about 4 or 5 years and any closures for this length of time are unacceptable and should be for as short a duration as possible and time limited. The Ramblers request to be consulted on this issue before any construction commences.

### **Transport Assessment**

The baseline assessment for the highway network was created to represent the transport system in the Lower Thames area as it was in March 2016, an average month in the year. The year 2016, which is pre-Covid, was the year when traffic count data was collected at the start of the model building process.

This transport model, known as LTAM, has been used to predict the conditions on the road network in the proposed opening year of 2030 and in the years 2037, 2045 and 2051 for the AM peak, interpeak and PM peak hours.

As everyone is aware, the Covid pandemic has had a fundamental impact on travel patterns. For example, there is clear evidence that there is less commuting as more people chose to work from home, for at least several days in the week, and there could be a more dispersed population as people adjust to more home working.

The LTAM has been built using the DfT Transport Analysis Guidance known as TAG. As part of the TAG methodology, the DfT published 'TAG Unit M4 : Forecasting and Uncertainty' in May 2023, which recognises that Covid has led to marked changes in travel demand relative to pre-Covid projected demand. Paragraph B.2.2 states: *'To account for Covid-19 related changes, trip matrices based before the beginning of the pandemic should ideally be rebased, or if this is not possible, an appropriate adjustment applied to model inputs or outputs in a proportionate way.'*

It is recognised that rebasing of models takes time and resources, but where model rebasing is not practical but *'if it is clear that Covid has had an impact on travel, this should be represented using appropriate change in travel demand across the trip matrix, considering trip purpose and patterns as appropriate, and apply this to produce an updated core forecast.'* (para B.3.2)

The LTC Transport Assessment discusses the impact of Covid, and paragraph 5.7.40 states *'From 2021 onwards, demand rebounded and has returned to pre- Covid 19 levels, although this does vary by location, and there have been some changes in the mix of vehicle types, especially during peak hours.'*

Paragraph 5.7.41 goes on to say *'the baseline for the Project's transport model remains as March 2016. In addition growth forecasts do not yet take into account of any long-term effects arising from the Covid 19 pandemic..'*

For such a major project and investment, it is not acceptable that no attempt has been made to adjust the traffic forecasts, when it is clear that local traffic patterns have changed, particularly in the peak hours when the assessments are most important and DfT guidance states that the change in travel demand caused by Covid should be taken into account. These changes could impact on the expected traffic flow changes and benefits, and the design of the project, particularly at junctions.

These changes in traffic patterns could also impact on the overall Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of the project.

With the 2 year delay in commencing construction, there is ample opportunity to make the necessary adjustments to the transport model, to provide a more realistic assessment on the impact of the LTC project.

### **Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan**

The Ramblers are concerned whether major road improvements, such as the LTC, can lead to increased car travel and whether they are consistent with the Government's climate commitments.

Government recognise, in their recently published, 'Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain: Department for Transport: July 2021', that their major transport infrastructure programmes were designed before the pandemic and they want to understand how changing patterns of work, shopping and business travel might affect them, as well as their climate commitments.

The Essex Area Ramblers support this and as discussed above, believe a review of the traffic levels and forecasts is essential to ensure that the scheme is relevant in a post Covid situation and is in line with the Government's climate commitments of net zero emissions by 2050.

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17<sup>th</sup> July 2023