

LTC DCO Examination

Written Representation Objecting to the Granting of DCO for Proposed Lower Thames Crossing

OBJECTIONS TO LTC PROJECT

I am strongly opposed to the proposed Lower Thames Crossing on both conceptual and actual grounds

I have seen no real evidence that the actual Project Viability, Proof of Concept or Business Case have ever been appropriately and independently revisited over the long period that the project has struggled towards DCO.

I would suggest that the original raison d'être and feasibility study is woefully outdated, with Central Government Climate Targets and Strategic Plans for lower levels of traffic, emissions targets, higher focus on biodiversity and increasing woodland areas etc. etc. far superseding any perceived project benefits.

Time has moved on since the original proposal (which was always seriously flawed) and there have been significant changes in opinions, priorities and circumstances, which now render the project completely obsolete and offensive.

Since inception, Highways England (HE) have provided no updated compelling evidence of a critical need for more roadbuilding, as opposed to the compelling and overwhelming evidence and need to immediately tackle the Climate Catastrophe that we are now witnessing tragic daily examples of.

By National Highways own admission, the LTC will not resolve the problem it has been designed to address – this is a massive and totally unacceptable price to pay, Environmentally, Socially and Financially for a Sticking Plaster solution.

OBJECTIONS ON A PROJECT / MICRO / LOCAL LEVEL

Project Viability

HE Commercial Director, Nic Hillier, stated in New Civil Engineer 28/5/21 "The main business case for the Project is moving HGVs across the Thames".

If this is true, then what consideration or research has been undertaken to coax and/or push freight and haulage to fill the existing Dartford Crossing dead zone 8.00pm – 6.00am.?

There seems to be very little, if any, consideration given to this lower cost and achievable solution - are we going to end up with two major Thames Crossings next to each other that are both only utilised for 50% of each day?

In addition, the expansion of the ULEZ into Havering will further reduce the traffic flows and volumes at the North end of the LTC, as in addition to paying a toll to use this Folly, many drivers will incur a further £12.50 Charge when leaving it!

Furthermore, I understood that the Government's claimed Preferred Mode of Transport is Rail, so given that there is no direct rail link between Kent and Essex, why build further road links whilst no direct rail links exist?

We are Small Island surrounded by water, with an East Coast lined with Ports, many of which are under-utilised. A better solution must lie in moving freight, haulage and cargo by Sea, removing a significant volume from the road network.

Given the present far-reaching critical challenges and competing priorities faced by the Government, both domestically and globally, surely more innovative and forward thinking solutions are necessary, rather than simply building more roads and continuing to destroy the Environment. It is a £multi-billion madness to run a major new tunnel and road parallel to the existing M25 Thames Crossing and major Motorway. All you are doing is moving traffic congestion and bottlenecks onto new junctions.

It is incredulous that there will be no ability to migrate between the two routes in the event of an incident.

By National Highways own admissions, this solution to easing periods of traffic congestion at the existing Dartford Crossing is neither truly Fit for Purpose or a Forever Solution!

Smarter traffic management systems and Traffic Incident Response Protocols employed on the existing road infrastructure would totally negate the need for the LTC.

It would appear that no up-to-date data on Air and Noise Assessments are accessible and yet HE thought it satisfactory and appropriate to hold Community Impact Consultations without this information being available?!

Could you please consider and challenge what has been done to independently verify and substantiate the facts and figures promoted by HE to justify the new motorway and to update them from 2013 to the present?

Project Cost

The £8.2 Billion much quoted Project cost (which has undoubtedly escalated considerably and must presently stand at least £12BILLION and ever rising) could and should be spent on supporting our NHS and Social Care / addressing the Climate Catastrophe / Education / Food Poverty / Building back after COVID / Levelling Up etc. etc. etc.

Any expenditure on roads should be in repairing the ones we already have, many of which are in a shocking and dangerous state of disrepair.

As such, I am astounded that HE activity on this project continues unabated, when clearly it should be halted whilst the wider and forward looking picture and an informed and balanced STOP/go decision is made and not just because the budget has been temporarily frozen.

It is a National Disgrace and scandal that HE continue burning through Public Funds without a trace of Social Conscience. This is shockingly irresponsible and negligent.

Local Environmental Damage and Destruction

The original and current proposals, including refinements, remain to the serious detriment of the local Environment and Agricultural and Green Belt land. The construction work and beyond will cause a permanent increase in traffic emissions, Air, Noise and Light Pollution blighting the Essex Countryside and green spaces, some of which carry historic and heritage qualities and include a Conservation Area.

“Greenest Road Ever” - Do National Highways really feel it appropriate, responsible and humane to unleash 5+ million tonnes of Carbon Emissions into the local area and wider atmosphere, produce massive levels of Air, Noise and Light Pollution, create a hugely destructive and dangerous toxic triangle in this area, destroy Community Forest and Grade 1 Agricultural Farmland and demolish a Solar Farm?

The whole route would fail against World Health Organisation Standards for PM2.5.

Furthermore, in a time of Climate Catastrophe and Food Poverty, National Highways are now destroying acres of crops growing on Grade 1 Agricultural Land in their relentless pursuit of this obsolete roadbuilding project. Again, this is shockingly irresponsible and negligent.

Surely, their desperate attempts at Greenwashing fool nobody?

Local Impacts - Upminster and Ockendon

On a geographical basis, many of the significant local impacts, disruption and destruction are glossed over or hidden in the blurred and deliberately vague detail of the Consultation documentation and maps. These are only evident upon greater scrutiny, which suggests there is much that they are attempting to conceal in the knowledge that many residents will not have the fine detail analytical skills or indeed time, to fully assess the negative impacts.

For example, the closure of Ockendon Road for TWO YEARS, with proposed lengthy diversions and re-routing of bus routes. Affected residents have already experienced severe short-term disruption of local journeys, diversion of traffic and public transport and closure of public footpaths, as a result of their incessant “Investigatory” work.

For many residents and other road users the proposed road closures will result in diversions adding an extra 100km minimum to weekly journeys. For others relying on Public Transport they will be unable to get to the re-routed bus stops. What are HE doing to facilitate affected residents reaching these diverted bus stops or compensating drivers for the extra fuel and time they will have to spend as a result of this unacceptably lengthy closure?

There are, of course, also extremely damaging local Environmental impacts, which would result from the road closures and diversions.

North Ockendon Conservation Area

The current proposal for the slip roads of the LTC to join the M25 fall within site of the backdrop of a Grade 1 Listed 16th Century Church (St. Mary Magdalene) in a Conservation Area. The proposals will mean that from this Grade 1 Listed site, Motorway signage, additional traffic lanes and increased Air, Noise and Light Pollution will blight this area. Has Historic England or English Heritage been consulted in respect of this – if not, why not?

You should be aware that when the M25 was widened to 4 lane carriageways in this location, additional tree planting was promised to mitigate noise and, to date, this has not happened. Why

would residents believe that this will be the case with this current project, with an additional five lanes of traffic, bringing the carriageways even closer to the semi-rural Conservation Area. Current noise levels already exceed legal limits.

Thames Chase Community Forest

With Central Government and all Opposition Parties promoting green space, biodiversity projects, ecological preservation and reducing carbon emissions, it seems a reckless contradiction and travesty to destroy Community Woodland and wildlife natural habitats.

National Highways intend to destroy Community Forest in this Borough and along other lengths of the route and then try to claim credit for establishing additional woodland in an already primarily green area like Great Warley, which will be of no real additional benefit to the local residents here? This would appear to be a desperate bid to buy favour and deflect attention away from the reckless pursuit of protecting the LTC Golden Goose, whilst destroying the Environment.

This is shameful Greenwashing and without moral conscience.

HE Campaign of Mis-Information

From my experience, information provided in previous telephone consultations has not been accurate compared to what is actually happening on the ground. Contact with the LTC Project Team has often yielded less than transparent answers and, at times, totally false information.

Throughout, this has been a campaign of subterfuge and deceit in a clumsy attempt to bulldoze the LTC project through.

You know that National Highways have been massively under reporting the levels of carbon emissions and environmental damage that the construction and usage of this motorway will create.

The fact is, this project is a Cash Cow for HE and they will go to any lengths and employ any tactics to protect and promote it. HE have been shown to have vastly over reported the benefits, whilst massively under reporting the environmental damage, emissions levels and costs. This has included manipulation of data and statistics, suppression of Expert Opinion on the true levels of emissions and bullying attempts to obfuscate the FOI process, all of which have been well publicised and widely reported.

The Machiavellian manoeuvres of the previous Transport Minister, Grant Shapps, in refusing to review the NPS, have also been exposed and much reported upon.

National Highways are now conducting an increasingly desperate propaganda campaign claiming Green credentials, when clearly this is a Planet damaging venture. The Brand Change to 'National Highways', was a ridiculous attempt to distance itself from the toxic reputation Highways England had gained, it fools nobody and is yet another example mis-spending taxpayers money in pursuit of devious self-interest.

I am aware of the legalities and powers that HE operate under cover of. However, my ever increasing concerns are in respect of the unscrupulous and devious methods continually employed to force this DCO through and the resulting devastation that this will have on the local and wider environment. The activities of National Highways seem to be free of any Public accountability or checks & balances.

Sadly, there is increasing evidence and a growing catalogue of subterfuge and dirty tricks to manipulate this Consultation and railroad the project through DCO.

OBJECTIONS ON A MACRO / ENVIRONMENTAL / ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL LEVEL

Obviously, of far greater urgency and wider importance is the Climate Catastrophe.

How can the continuation of this highly destructive and eye watering expensive road building programme possibly be reconciled with the commitments the Government have made to tackling and preventing permanent Environmental disaster?

Wildfires decimating Europe, USA, Australia

Heat extremes across the Globe, including Canada and Sicily

Floods in Central London, New York, Tokyo and German Cities

Frosts in Kenya destroying tea crops

30degree+ temperatures in Greenland

Every day we hear more and more warnings on Climate Catastrophe – is the Government and Mark Harper actually listening?

We have already had deaths in Central London legally attributed to Air Pollution.

If Government Ministers and National Highways negligently continue to ignore this overwhelming evidence, they must assume individual personal accountability and culpability. They should be held responsible and taken to account when the devastating impacts of this proposed project start to take their toll of our Health and Environment.

This is not about different viewpoints or whether you support the LTC project or not. Clearly, it is impossible to reconcile the Government's Environmental Policy and legally binding commitments to Carbon Net Zero with the wanton neglect and hypocrisy of pressing ahead relentlessly with an obscenely expensive, destructive, outdated and now unnecessary road building programme.

Please, please, please do not ignore all of these imperilled warnings. We do not need nor can we absorb more roads and the consequential Environmental destruction that the LTC project will certainly result in.

Spend our money elsewhere, where it is desperately needed.

CONCLUSION TO OBJECTION

There is overwhelming evidence that we are already in the midst of a Climate Catastrophe, therefore, it is difficult to comprehend the mentality or ethics of even contemplating continuing with this Environment destroying ill-conceived roadbuilding Project.

Given the rapidly growing scrutiny of the value and actual impacts of large scale Environmentally devastating infrastructure projects, the minimum immediate action required is to take a Time Out from the relentless pursuit of railroading this project through.

The moment that the Government committed to Climate Change Targets, they left no option but to withdraw from this grotesquely expensive, Climate destroying and now inappropriate and obsolete Vanity Project.

Instead, our Government and National Highways choose to try and save face and protect their own short term self- interest by continuing to waste precious Public Funds on a project which is now entirely discredited.

It would be desirable and refreshing to have transparency and honesty from the Government and from National Highways about the huge contradiction and neglect of pressing ahead with this £multi-billion road building project and other infrastructure projects, whilst fulfilling its Environmental pledges and policies.

No doubt this will put our true commitment to tackling the irreversible Climate Catastrophe under the spotlight.

Global Climate Crisis is inevitable, unprecedented, and irreversible. The Science is unequivocal. The verdict is clear. There is no more room for manoeuvre, delay or procrastination in dealing with a crisis that it is this Generation's responsibility to address.

This Global Emergency obviously transcends governments, short term agendas and Corporate self-interest. As such, it vital that we have an honest, transparent, balanced, forward thinking and non-political approach to assessing this DCO.

Future generations will be apoplectic and damn us for prioritising short term commercial gain, corrupt Corporate greed and self-interest over Environment, Health and Conservation.

Pick The Planet.

Gary Fitzgerald

