

THE LOWER THAMES CROSSING – “ THE WORLD HAS MOVED ON

INTRODUCTION

It is hardly surprising that National Highways, formerly the Highways Agency and later Highways England a government-owned company charged with operating, maintaining and improving motorways and major roads in England should have ignored the possibility that there might be an alternative solution to that which it proposes with the potential to render a new crossing unnecessary.

It is usual, I believe, for any promotor of a planning application to demonstrate that all alternatives to the promotor's proposals capable of achieving the same or a better outcome have been explored.

So far as I can see National Highways has given no consideration to the possibility that a dedicated rail freight operation using the Channel Tunnel could achieve the same or an even better outcome.

RAIL FREIGHT FROM CHINA'S EASTERN SEABOARD ARRIVES AT BARKING IN LONDON IN 2017

An additional Thames crossing downstream from Dartford was first considered in the ‘Roads for Prosperity’ white paper in 1989.

The Channel Tunnel has since been built; the Channel Tunnel Rail Link to Waterloo opened and closed to be replaced by HS1 terminating at London St. Pancras and work has now begun on the construction of HS2.

And British Railways has been privatised, first becoming Railtrack, then Network Rail and is presently poised to morph into Great British Railways.

And freight trains from Yiwu on China's eastern seaboard arrived at Barking in London in 2017.

TAKING RAIL FREIGHT BEYOND BARKING TO SCOTLAND

Construction and market cases for a spinal freight railway route beyond Barking comprising almost entirely existing underused railways with shorter sections of dismantled railways and new tunnels has been developed. The 470-mile route running from central Scotland to the Channel Tunnel will connect new rail/motorway transfer terminals at strategic points on the motorway system (100 miles of reinstated railway and 5 miles of new surface railway in the Midlands – the rest is existing railway). The cost of the project could be around £5bn.

Clearances would be higher than those elsewhere in Britain. Structures along the route will be upgraded where necessary, and some new structures provided, to be able to carry normal haulage equipment in current use. This would permit a rapid adoption of the new system by logistics firms. It will be compatible with similar routes which already exist in Europe, and therefore could handle all types of road and rail equipment in use in Britain and the Continent (continental freight trains are still largely excluded from Britain by what amount to inadequate structure heights on key UK railways).

The route will accommodate existing passenger services and will create some new passenger

opportunities along currently abandoned sections of route.

GBFR could be completed within four years. The route is already engineered, because it almost entirely comprises existing or former railway routes. There are no residential properties on the route, and limited environmental impacts. In return, a big share of UK-Continent road haulage traffic could be rapidly transferred off the motorways, especially those in the Southeast. Making rapid adoption by road hauliers practical, and getting savings from reusing existing assets, creates a realistic possibility of financial market participation.

GBFR embodies the cumulative effort of firms and businessmen who have understood that the correct solution is to adapt railway standards to suit the freight market and its existing equipment, and not the other way round.

The alternative approach in the railway system has been to ask hauliers to buy specialised, small-size road equipment. Alternative approaches to the problem do not address the need for more capacity for a lot of new lorries on trains services, and for existing UK (and potential Continental standards) freight trains. They also mean unwelcome complexity and expense for hauliers. With these drawbacks transfer from road to rail could only happen very slowly as hauliers gradually adopt the new equipment, and may not happen at all.

The UK has a railway connection (via the Channel Tunnel) with the Continent but no road. It ought long ago to have made a big and valuable transfer road freight to rail. But nothing has been achieved in the UK. The only success has been Eurotunnel's own Lorry Shuttle which shows that railways adapted to handle normal road equipment can capture significant volumes of road freight.

The freight route between Europe and Glasgow is expected to take 48 months to create from TWA Powers being given for its construction at a cost of Â£5bn.

A TRAMWAY BETWEEN GRAYS AND EBBSFLEET

An outline business case for a tramway between Grays and Ebbsfleet passing under the Thames is with the DfT. The tramway could be built in 36 months from obtaining TWA Powers at an estimated cost of Â£1bn.

NATIONAL BENEFIT

The two projects if implemented would not only avoid the need to build the crossing itself; it would avoid the need for more of Essex's and Kent's countryside being covered in tarmac and enable a reduction in greenhouse gases and particulates across England, Wales and Scotland.

A significant contribution to the United Kingdoms battle with climate change. The world has moved on and perhaps this is one project where we as a nation need to catch up