



Meeting note

File reference	Lower Thames Crossing – TR010032
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	1 September 2020
Meeting with	Highways England
Venue	Teams meeting
Meeting objectives	Project update meeting
Circulation	All attendees

Summary of key points discussed and advice given:

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) advised that a note of the meeting would be taken and published on its website in accordance with section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 (the PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

Design Refinement Consultation

The Applicant provided an overview of the level of response it had received to its Design Refinement Consultation which ran until 12 August 2020. Of the 1,176 responses, the bulk were submitted online, while 212 were sent by email and 93 were provided on paper response forms.

The Applicant explained that the attendance for virtual exhibitions was approximately 13,000 visitors and there were over 41,000 hits on the website. The Applicant noted the level of engagement its webinars and interactive maps feature had received. The Applicant outlined some of the issues raised in responses: air quality, noise, vibration, traffic levels, support for the chosen route and encouragement to build the scheme alongside suggested alternatives. It was noted that the level of response had reduced since the previous consultation exercises but that this was not unexpected.

Land interest engagement

The Applicant explained that it had been made aware of a small number of land interests that had not received the Design Refinement Consultation letter. Following an internal audit, the Applicant re-issued the letters for those who had not received them and extended the deadline for response if notified after the close of the consultation. The Inspectorate queried if the undelivered recipients were located geographically near to each other or spread out. The Applicant advised they were

spread out. The Applicant noted that a summary of the actions taken would be contained in the Consultation Report.

The Applicant acknowledged its land property team is continuing to update its database following newly identified persons and noted that land interests who are identified after the close of Design Refinement Consultation will receive a reach-out letter providing guidance on how to engage during the Examination.

Stakeholder engagement

The Applicant set out that it had continued engagement with stakeholders following its preferred route announcement in 2017 and provided an overview of its stakeholder engagement programme. The Applicant briefly outlined how various changes to the scheme had arisen in response to stakeholder feedback and agreement. A table outlining the key draft application documents that had been shared with local authorities and other key stakeholders was also shared to inform the discussion.

The Applicant provided a brief overview of ongoing engagement with statutory undertakers and provided an update on the proposed Protective Provisions to be agreed with the energy companies, Port of London Authority, Marine Management Organisation (MMO), local drainage authorities, Network Rail and telecom companies. It was noted that there are likely to be unresolved issues taken into Examination.

The Applicant provided an overview of the comments raised in feedback from key stakeholders and the response/action that followed.

The Inspectorate outlined the process for local authorities to submit Adequacy of Consultation Representations (AoCRs) and encouraged the Applicant to provide appropriate detail of the consultation undertaken and responses received within its Consultation Report (CR). The Applicant explained that changes to its consultation programme, such as at the Supplementary Consultation stage (cancelled events that were replaced with virtual events with an extended deadline for response) would be comprehensively explained in the CR narrative.

The Applicant outlined how it was continuing to work to seek agreement with local authorities. The Inspectorate encouraged collaborative engagement where possible. The Applicant set out its next steps included reviewing feedback on draft documents, initial discussions on the drafting of Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) and continued engagement on design development.

The Inspectorate queried how engagement in respect of traffic modelling was progressing. The Applicant indicated that work was in progress and would likely continue on through the Examination stage.

Standalone NSIPs within the scheme

The Applicant had previously acknowledged that works to overhead power lines (OHL) in the vicinity of the A13/A1089 junction within the scheme constituted a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) in their own regard. The Applicant had now identified four further potential NSIPs within the scheme for works to underground gas pipelines; three pipelines are located to south of the River Thames and one to the north.

The Applicant noted dialogue with the owners of the pipelines – National Grid (3 pipelines) and Cadent (1 pipeline) – and explained that the works would be authorised under Schedule 1 of the DCO.

The Applicant explained that accordance with the relevant energy National Policy Statements (NPS) EN-1, EN-4 and EN-5 will be addressed in an NPS accordance table submitted as part of the application. The Inspectorate requested sight of the draft NPS compliance document before submission.

The Inspectorate queried whether the margins for meeting the threshold test were so minimal that minor changes to the scheme could bring them back under the threshold. The Applicant noted it was considered unlikely at this stage and set out in more detail how it believed the works met the tests to be deemed as standalone NSIPs.

There was discussion over how the standalone NSIPs within the scheme had been addressed within the consultation undertaken to date. The Applicant explained how this had been presented having regard to its consultation duties.

Limits of deviation, plans and environmental assessment

The Applicant outlined the limits of deviation (LoD) it was applying for by breaking it down into three sections: the highway, tunnel and utility works. The Inspectorate queried whether the LoD would be fully assessed within the Environmental Statement (ES). The Applicant confirmed they had been.

The Applicant provided an overview of how it would present its suite of plans within the application documents. It proposes to have 16 sets of plans with the main sets comprising of 47 drawings plus a key plan. The Applicant presented an example of how the Works Plans will appear and set out the respective scales for the land plans, works plans, location plan and engineering drawings.

The Applicant outlined the various methodologies and good practice documents used for assessing and mitigating carbon, climate change and air quality effects within the ES. The Applicant set out its assumptions for potential residual significant effects and concluded it was unlikely to have significant effects or compromise the UK ability to meet its carbon budget. Impacts relating to project vulnerability to climate change were also unlikely. The Applicant identified that key environmental considerations exist around impacts from the proposals to cultural heritage, ancient woodland, and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The Inspectorate noted that the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) methodology does not promote a standalone chapter on traffic and transport within the ES. Feedback from environmental statutory consultees' is a preference for a standalone chapter to be provided. The Applicant confirmed it would be following DMRB methodologies.

The Applicant provided an overview of the air quality assessment impacts, which included dust and vehicle emissions during construction and operation. The Inspectorate advised that the assumptions for future traffic emissions and the data the air quality assessment is based on should be clearly set out in the ES. The Applicant noted it was based on Defra's traffic change data.

AOB

The Inspectorate explained that on the run up to submission, it begins to liaise with the relevant local authorities to prepare them for submission and the request for AoCRs.

The Applicant explained it would keep the Inspectorate updated with its anticipated submission date and was still working towards submission in early Quarter 4 2020.