

Appendix B – Background to the Lower Thames Crossing consultation and further details on the 2016 route options.

1 Background

- 1.1 On the 21st May 2013, the Department for Transport (DfT) launched their first consultation on the need and options for a third Lower Thames Crossing. This consultation focused on three corridor options: Option A (at the existing Dartford Crossing), Option B (crossing the Swanscombe Peninsula) and Option C (a route to the East of Gravesend). There was also an Option C Variant providing additional improvements to the A229 Bluebell Hill, the link between the M2 and the M20.
- 1.2 In response to the DfT's 2013 consultation, KCC expressed strong support for locating the new crossing at Option C, given the economic growth and job creation potential along with its positive impact on network resilience and the creation of a new strategic route from Dover to the Midlands and the North. This was supported on the condition that the connection of the proposed new Crossing to the M2 was moved westwards, thus connecting into the A2 and avoiding significant adverse environmental impact on the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), ancient woodland and KCC's flagship country park (Shorne Woods). KCC's proposed western alignment would connect to the A2 between the East of Gravesend and Cobham junctions. Tunnelling was also supported as it was considered that this method would help to reduce the impact on the internationally protected Marshes. KCC also supported the Option C Variant in response to the 2013 consultation, recognising the importance of connectivity between the two motorway corridors.
- 1.3 As a result of the 2013 consultation, Option B (Swanscombe) was discounted by the DfT due to it posing significant risk of jeopardising major redevelopment of the Swanscombe Peninsula combined with a lack of public support. The DfT then instructed Highways England (HE) to further investigate Option A, C and C Variant.

2 Current consultation – January 26th to March 24th 2016

- 2.1 Following the 2013 consultation, HE appraisal ruled out the C Variant because, according to HE assessment, it was shown to have insufficient impact in transferring traffic from the existing Dartford Crossing to the new Lower Thames Crossing, would have a high capital cost, and a high environmental impact on the AONB. However, it does anticipate giving further consideration to this link separately as part of HE's ongoing regional route planning.
- 2.2 A shortlist of four routes was then produced, one at Location A and three at Location C that take different routes through Thurrock and Essex. The Location C routes each have two options south of the river in Kent; the Eastern Southern Link (running to the east of Shorne village) and the Western Southern Link (to the west of the village of Thong).

- 2.3 The current public consultation was launched by HE on 26th January 2016, proposing a preferred route within the Option C corridor¹. The proposed scheme is Route 3, a dual carriageway connecting Junction 1 of the M2 to the M25 between Junctions 29 and 30, using a twin bored tunnel. The Eastern Southern Link has been identified by HE as the option best meeting the scheme objectives. However, KCC has to date favoured the connection being to the west into the A2 to minimise environmental impacts. Both options include a new junction with the A226, which will affect traffic flows on the local road network in Gravesend and from the Medway towns. The reasons for the HE's route recommendation are that it:
- Provides the best economic benefits of all the shortlist routes evaluated and reduces traffic at Dartford and therefore reduces congestion.
 - Can be largely constructed off-line avoiding the disruption caused by on-line works at Location A.
 - Provides network resilience through a second independent crossing of the Thames.
 - Provides a motorway-to-motorway experience for drivers.
 - Reduces air and noise pollution along the existing A282 corridor at Dartford, whilst recognising that there are environmental and community impacts in the vicinity of the new scheme, including noise and air quality on communities alongside the proposed route.
 - Will provide a new strategic link to the local, regional and strategic road network, increasing resilience and addressing future increases in traffic demand.
- 2.4 HE's analysis rejects Route 1 (additional capacity at the existing Dartford Crossing) as not meeting the transport and economic objectives for a new crossing. However, this is still an option that the DfT will consider in choosing their preferred route.
- 2.5 The two possible route alignments in Kent will have different impacts. These are explained in more detail below, and outline plans of the routes are shown in Figure 1.
- 2.8 **Western Southern Link (alignment proposed by KCC in 2014)**
To the north of the A2, the route would be on an embankment before moving to a cutting and passing under Thong Lane between Gravesend and Thong and then crossing the golf course towards the A226. The tunnel portal would be between the A226 and Lower Higham Road. At the A226 to the east of Chalk would be an all movements grade separated junction. To achieve the required slip road length, the A226 would have to be realigned approximately 1km from the tunnel portal.
- 2.9 The junction with the A2 would be all movements free-flowing but owing to limited space, it would require the realignment of the A2 to the north over a length of approximately 2.5km. Owing to tight curvatures, speeds on the slip roads would be limited, some to 30mph. There would also be some changes

¹ Consultation available at: <https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/cip/lower-thames-crossing-consultation>

to local access to the A2, with a new link road provided. It would also require the demolition of the service station on the A2.

2.10 Eastern Southern Link (HE's proposed scheme)

From Junction 1 of the M2 the route would go to the west of Great Crabbles Wood and east of Shorne, then on towards Lower Higham Road and Chalk. To the north of the M2, the road would be on a viaduct before entering a cutting beneath Pear Tree Lane, and then an embankment for approximately 800m before a cutting at Crown Lane, and embankment at the proposed junction with the A226. From this point, the alignment would be in a cutting to the tunnel portal.

2.11 The junction with the M2 would be complex, with the new connection creating a fourth level of slip roads. In combination with the topography of the area this will require pier heights up to 23m. Speeds on the slip roads would vary between 50mph and 70mph

Figure 1 – The Western Southern Link and Eastern Southern Link

