

STATEMENT TO SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING PETITION:

We the undersigned petition the council to withdraw its support for a Lower Thames Crossing East of Gravesend and to support the thousands of Kent residents whose lives would be devastated by this proposal. A new crossing east of Gravesend will not address the problems at Dartford.

STATEMENT:

This petition was started on 4th February 2016 and exceeded the required 2,500 signatures in a little over 3 weeks. It was therefore closed on 2nd March to allow us to present the petition before this Cabinet Committee, and before KCC responds to the consultation.

A new crossing east of Gravesend will cause immense and permanent environmental harm to the last remaining area of Green Belt between the urban riverside area stretching from London to Gravesend, and the Medway Towns conurbation. The preferred route would damage the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and destroy Great Crabbles Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest. It would divide the village of Shorne, bringing noise and pollution to thousands of people not currently affected.

The proposed junction on the A226 would result in a massive increase in traffic and maintenance liabilities to the local infrastructure, through the villages and streets of Gravesend, and will expose the Green Belt and RAMSAR marshes to the kind of inappropriate development we see on the Dartford Crossing approaches.

And yet it will not address the problems at Dartford, much of which result from the restrictions and constant closures of the obsolete tunnels. Highways England estimate that a crossing east of Gravesend would only reduce the traffic at the Dartford Crossing by 14%; it is already operating at 7% over capacity. Any improvement at Dartford would be minimal and short-lived, and we would quickly be back to the same situation as we are at present, after spending £6bn.

Highways England appears to have deliberately talked up the difficulties and costs of a so-called solution at Dartford, by proposing to demolish many properties and businesses and to take over 6 years to widen the A282. This is no more than a 20th century solution to a 21st century problem.

This is not fair to the people of Dartford, and it is not fair to the people of Gravesham. We need to address the problems of congestion, noise and pollution at Dartford, not just spread the same problems to thousands of others. For the Cabinet to consciously support a decision to do so would be irresponsible and inexcusable.

There are other solutions available, including a new M25 tunnel which would bypass the A282, reducing traffic and pollution through the populated areas of Dartford by well over half and relieving congestion at all the junctions between junction 3 and junction 29. We should also be considering a more holistic approach to the problems, by using rail, and ferry ports other than Dover.

But above all, you must address the problems at Dartford, rather than just spread the harm and misery to thousands of others. We therefore call on the Cabinet not to support the proposal for a Lower Thames Crossing east of Gravesend, but instead to support the thousands of Gravesham residents whose lives would be devastated by this proposal, and the thousands of Dartford residents who would continue to suffer long after the money has been spent.