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Dear Mr Adams

Regarding the Lower Thames Crossing consultation, this letter is to reinforce my survey response, in which I felt there was little scope to respond with a comprehensive viewpoint. I therefore hope that this follow up letter will be used alongside my survey response.

In sum, while I welcome the public consultation around the preferred options for the new Lower Thames Crossing, I am fundamentally against the proposal of the crossing at Location C, east of Gravesend and Tilbury.

This is principally on the basis of there being no clear strategy around road congestion will be dealt with in an already over-capacity area. I then hold further objections around the lack of plans to control air pollution, which will particularly affect the Medway basin, as well as significant damage that will be caused to beautiful parts of North Kent. I will detail these objections in order and under their own headings below.

Impact on current road infrastructure

North Kent has suffered from congestion and over-capacity along its major road arteries for some years, not just around the Dartford Crossing. For instance, the A2 west of the Medway River currently suffers long tailbacks at peak times, with a significant impact on the A228 and the smaller towns and villages in the area. Given the gridlock across the whole of Medway at peak times, it is clear to see that the current road investment proposals are woeful and have not been sufficiently considered, rather than just trying to fit something in to the already over stretched network.

However, as detailed in May 2014 Department for Transport study, Option C would shift the congestion to the east of the Medway River down the M2 and M20. This will still impact the A228 Rochester bypass which serves a number of communities and important shipping and energy infrastructure towards the Isle of Grain. It should also be acknowledged that it is these areas that already suffer from problems associated with Operation Stack.

From the evidence provided in the May 2014 study, it is clear that Option C, while alleviating pressures at Dartford, will increase congestion along the M2 and M20, which will be exacerbated by the effects of Operation Stack and the growing levels of haulage coming from Dover and the Channel Crossing. Highways England even admit in their consultation documents that the building of more roads does not necessarily reduce congestion.

Similarly, there is no consideration of the proposed increase of housing across North Kent, with 30,000 homes planned for Medway alone. This includes 5,000 homes at the former Royal Engineers Barracks near Chattenden in my constituency, which will add pressures to the local roads filtering onto the A2/M2.

Elsewhere in North Kent, the Ebbsfleet Garden City will mean a further 20,000 homes adding more cars and more pressures to our roads. In addition, the proposed Paramount Park will bring many thousands of extra visitors to the region. However, there appears to be no consideration of how to deal with the expected future growth, let alone today's.

The lack of a sustainable strategy regarding increased traffic volumes, both from the new Thames Crossing and the additional homes planned for the area up to 2035, leaves an infrastructure nightmare waiting to happen.

I have previously raised these issues with Highways England in the summer of 2016 and I am disappointed that none of my comments have been acted upon in this proposal. In sum, I do not believe all the correct modelling and assessments have been carried out in order for a correct assessment by residents and businesses in the South East.

Air quality concerns

Figures released by the Mayor of London in the summer of 2013, showed that the Dartford Crossing was the second worst road in the entire country for exhaust emissions, with higher levels of the dangerous NO_x gas than anywhere else in the country. This gas can damage lung tissue, causing premature death in extreme cases. It's also known to cause respiratory diseases like emphysema or bronchitis, as well as aggravating existing heart disease.

Medway has long had a problem with air pollution due to its geographic location and landscape. Rochester itself has been ranked among the worst air pollution areas in the country. There is a prevailing South Westerly wind from air pollution is blown from the Southern section of the M25, London and the congestion of the Dartford Crossing. This is demonstrated in the May 2014 study.

The May 2014 study shows that the change in NO₂ concentration under Option A would bring fractional changes to the North Kent area of between -0.4 to +0.4, while there would be a larger increase around Dartford. However, the May 2014 study accepts that there would be a significant rise in NO₂ concentration under Option C across a larger area around the Thames Estuary.

While either Option would bring more traffic to each respective area, my objection to Option C lies with the lack of strategy around reducing NO₂ levels. The May 2014 study shows that Option C would cause higher NO₂ concentrations across a wider area, therefore affecting a significant number of people in these areas.

I feel it is no coincidence that Medway's cancer rates are higher than most other areas of Kent and England as a whole. For instance, a Medway Council Health and Wellbeing Board found in February that each year in Medway, there are over 320 deaths for people under-75 due to cancer. Medway

has also had the highest under-75 death rate from preventable cancers, in the South East and England in 2014. Lung cancer rates are also significantly higher than the England average.

Also, the one-year lung cancer survival rate for Medway has steadily fallen below the England average. Medway had the worst one-year survival rate for lung cancer of all Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in England, according to data from 2008-2010. There are strong links to cancer rates and air pollution, which we already know is an issue for Medway. Therefore, by placing a crossing at Location C will only worsen these concerning health statistics.

The Proposals offer no solution to the increased number of HGVs coming from Dover, nor does it consider the impact of this number of HGVs which will be held up in congestion along the M2. In the face of a 40% increase of HGVs travelling, with a growing number entering Dover from North Eastern Europe rather than the Northern and Eastern ports, I would expect some form of consideration be present in any proposal.

Moreover, I am aware that in the May 2014 study it is recommended that 'a programme of air quality monitoring should be considered to provide additional information for future phase of assessment'. This included the A2/M2 junction at Gravesham and the Option C corridor. I understand that there has been no such monitor in advance of this consultation, which in my opinion misguides those responding and discredits the information provided.

Environmental concerns

It is my belief that the proposals for Option C will cause the most significant environmental damage. In its path, ancient woodland, wildlife habitats and sites of special scientific interest will all suffer, both directly and indirectly.

The Thames Estuary is home to a network of mudflats, salt marsh and grazing land that is the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar, as well as RSPB Shorne Marshes. This whole area provides a rich mosaic of feeding and breeding habitats for birds and animals.

In addition, I am particularly concerned with the damage to the areas which form some of the most beautiful areas of Gravesham and South West Essex. This specifically relates to Great Crabbles Wood and the North Downs, both of which are also invaluable recreational and environmental sites used by many of my constituents.

There appears to be no consideration of such impacts, which affect a great deal of socio-economic activity across North Kent and Essex. There is no reassurance to the hundreds of thousands of residents dismissing notions of Option C being placed at what appears to planners as large, unused green space. These pieces of land is of great importance locally so it is disappointing to see no form of recognition in the proposals.

Finally, it is my opinion that it appears that the attempt under Option C is to try to push the problem away from London and into the South East corner, rather than really seek to tackle a long term solution to the congestion at Dartford and the region.

Again, I do hope that this letter will be used in elaborating my consultation survey response. This is going to be a major issue to the North Kent and South West Essex region and I look forward to the consultations outcome.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly Tolhurst". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot at the end.

Kelly Tolhurst MP
Member of Parliament for Rochester and Strood

Cc Andrew Jones MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport