

Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission call for ideas ~ Response from Campaign for Better Transport

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the DCLG London Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission call for ideas.

The consultation document identifies, the Thames Estuary has huge potential to provide new homes and jobs, both within existing communities in east London, Kent and Essex, and in new developments such as Ebbsfleet.

We look to the Commission to set out a vision for 'green growth' that combines a flourishing economy with sustainable development. The direction the Commission takes will determine whether growth in the Thames Estuary repeats the errors of the past or rejects them.

The problems of air pollution, carbon emissions, obesity, traffic congestion, unaffordable housing, environmental degradation and social exclusion pose huge challenges, which can be tackled with a fresh approach to how we plan and meet transport needs.

Increasing connectivity

The Thames Estuary could be a model of modern public transport using a network of light rail and high quality local and long distance bus routes to link existing rail routes, reduce car dependency, stimulate jobs and create a better environment. This is in line with the Government's Cycling & Walking Investment Strategy and the recent move to see rail reopenings.

New infrastructure should not be seen as an end in itself but a means to the end of supporting economically and socially flourishing communities in a high quality, sustainable environment. Any new transport capacity should be designed to avoid the known problems of induced traffic, minimise environmental impacts and be sustainable and future proofed in terms of carbon reduction and tackling air pollution.

Meeting the freight challenge would transform the quality of life and environment in the Thames Estuary. Kent, the M25 and east London are choked by road freight traffic from the Kent ports. Shifting this freight to use spare capacity at London Gateway and Tilbury ports north of the Thames would better support the local economy and remove the need for costly and environmentally damaging Operation Stack and the proposed Lower Thames Crossing.

Figures for 2014, the latest available, show that of the top ten UK ports, Dover had the largest percentage increase in tonnage¹ with 2.42 million freight vehicles handled in 2014, growth 9.7% compared with the previous year and is 2.5% higher than the previous record of 2.36 million set in 2007.²

The pressure caused by road-based freight on Kent's infrastructure is well-known, with Operation Stack having serious implications in terms of environmental impact and costs to the public purse and to business. For example, the Freight Trade Association has estimated that Operation Stack costs the UK freight industry about £750,000 a day,³ while the Port of Dover estimates the UK economy loses up to £250m per day when Stack is in force.⁴ To provide an additional road crossing to service traffic from Kent, risks embedding rather than resolving the problem of excessive road freight traffic through the county.

A more sustainable solution would see a strategic re-routing of freight to rail and to alternative ports including Thames Gateway and Tilbury (which have the capacity and would welcome the business) rather than

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/465439/port-freight-statistics-2014.pdf

² <http://www.doverport.co.uk/about/news/port-of-dover-celebrates-record-breaking-freight-b/12937/>

³ <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/transport-committee/operation-stack/oral/23089.html>

⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-35866339>

reinforcing over reliance on Kent's roads, and further degradation of the county's environment, through provision of a road-based Lower Thames Crossing. In many cases these ports are nearer to the next destination of the goods in transit and so represent a smart operational choice as well as a more environmentally sustainable one.

There is real potential to expand use of ports north of the Thames instead of routing freight by road from Dover to north of the Thames. DP World London Gateway has ample capacity, served by a state of the art rail terminal, the largest in the country, with six 750 metre long rail sidings.⁵ Since the 2001 traffic assessments which are the basis for the consultation, major works have been undertaken to the M25/A13 junctions to support HGV movement to DP World London Gateway.⁶ Tilbury port, including the London Container Terminal (LCT), also has capacity to take extra freight without requiring additional road or rail infrastructure.

Connectivity is not only about travel: investing in high quality digital connections from the start would foster local business creativity, and reduce the need for unnecessary travel.

Creating affordable homes in sustainable communities

We advocate that all new housing developments in the Thames Estuary should be designed around sustainable transport and reduce car dependency.

New housing developments with inbuilt green travel plans have proven a success elsewhere, for example Kilnwood Vale, a 2,500 home urban extension to Crawley, West Sussex, developed by Bovis and Crest Nicholson. The site is designed to support and promote sustainable travel with the aim of minimising the amount of traffic generated by the development. The layout of the development is designed to promote bus travel and additional bus services are funded by the developer. New home purchasers receive a travel voucher to the value of £100 which can contribute towards the purchase of an adult bicycle, bus season ticket, rail season ticket or local authority travel pass.

Houten, an urban extension of Utrecht, that delivers high quality desirable housing in a community with very low car dependency through innovative town planning. Streets prioritise walking and cycling over cars throughout the community, and fast rail links connect residents to jobs and services further afield.

Providing household parking is a wasteful use of housing land, adding to costs and sprawl, and reinforcing the exclusion of individuals and families without access to cars. The Thames Estuary could show a better way where homes are designed to be car free, with car clubs, improved bus services, walking and cycling providing the primary connections.

This has multiple benefits in terms of improved affordability of homes, connecting people to jobs, and tackling issues of air pollution, carbon reduction and obesity, which are exacerbated by car-dependent communities.

We believe that combining these initiatives will transform the quality of life in the Thames Estuary for current and future generations, and set a bench mark for sustainable development.

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Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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⁵ <http://www.londongateway.com/the-port/#access>

⁶ https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/lct_letter_20160315.pdf