

Kent County Council response to National Infrastructure Commission re London's Transport Infrastructure



January 2016

Introduction

The right infrastructure is key to growth; however getting the right infrastructure at the right time and getting funding for it is a challenge for many of the priority growth areas of the country.

National government clearly has a major role to play and it is in this context that Kent County Council (KCC) welcomes the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) as a permanent statutory body. The County Council supports the NIC's preparation of a National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA) which will provide long term strategic vision and establish clear, spatial priorities for the delivery of infrastructure aligned to economic and population growth. The NIA will ensure greater certainty for private investors, and provide greater assurance to local authorities and the development industry that growth is deliverable in a sustainable manner, supported by existing and planned infrastructure.

In November 2015 KCC published the 'Kent and Medway Growth and Infrastructure Framework' (GIF)¹ which comprehensively identifies the significant levels of economic and housing growth planned in Kent and Medway (to 2031) alongside the critical infrastructure necessary to facilitate this level of growth. Infrastructure necessary to unlock growth has been estimated at £6bn of which £2bn is currently unfunded, which if left unaddressed will undermine the long term delivery of sustainable growth in Kent and Medway. The County Council and its partners are now actively preparing a 10 point action plan to take forward the GIF including consideration of the funding models and structures required to deliver identified infrastructure priorities.

KCC therefore welcomes the opportunity to respond to the NIC in respect of London's transport infrastructure. The provision of good, efficient and reliable transport infrastructure in the capital is essential to ensure the free movement of people, goods and services between London and its environs, including Kent. Our county also acts uniquely as the primary transport corridor between the capital and the principal Channel ports of Dover and Eurotunnel.

London's transport infrastructure is not all about infrastructure in London. It is – or should be – about the provision of transport infrastructure which serves the whole of the greater south-east region, supporting the wider growth of the Home Counties which provide a significant proportion of the capital's workforce who are dependent on excellent transport infrastructure to access their employment and so contribute to the gross domestic product of the whole area.

There are a number of key transport initiatives which will have a direct bearing on London's transport infrastructure and its ability to cater for an ever increasing demand from commuter, business and leisure markets. Each of these initiatives is considered in relation to the specific questions posed in the consultation.

¹ The GIF is available to download via www.kent.gov.uk/GIF

1. What are the major economic and social challenges facing London and its commuter hinterland over the next two to three decades?

The major economic and social challenges facing London and the greater south-east region over the next two or three decades can only be properly understood in the context of that wider region. The challenges facing London cannot be addressed in London alone; they must embrace the region in which the capital is located and from which it draws its daily workforce. The challenges facing London and its Home Counties must therefore be treated together.

KCC has identified significant increases in employment growth and housing need projections in Kent and Medway between now and 2031. This growth should be recognised as a part of the major economic and social challenges facing the wider south-east region, and the NIC's plans for London's transport infrastructure must be cognisant of these significant economic and social challenges.

Projected Growth in Housing Need to 2031

The following figures for each District in Kent, and for Medway, indicate the forecast level of housing need between 2011 and 2031 (correct at November 2015):

District	Additional housing need 2011-31
Ashford	14,540
Canterbury	16,000
Dartford	17,300
Dover	14,000
Gravesham	6,170
Maidstone	18,560
Medway	24,000
Sevenoaks	12,400
Shepway	8,750
Swale	13,192
Thanet	12,000
Tonbridge and Malling	13,460
Tunbridge Wells	12,960

Projected Growth in Employment to 2031

The following figures for each District in Kent, and for Medway, indicate the forecast level of employment growth between 2011 and 2031 (correct at November 2015):

District	Additional employment growth 2011-31
Ashford	17,200
Canterbury	17,000
Dartford	22,100
Dover	400
Gravesham	7,000
Maidstone	14,400
Medway	20,100
Sevenoaks	7,000
Shepway	500
Swale	9,900
Thanet	5,000
Tonbridge and Malling	7,700
Tunbridge Wells	9,900

Southeastern Metro Rail Services

KCC has taken a very keen interest in recent years in the commuter routes which serve the south-east London suburbs and the western fringes of Kent. An approach from Transport for London (TfL) in 2013 to seek approval from KCC to their proposal for the transfer of the franchising authority for the Southeastern Metro rail services from the Department for Transport (DfT) to TfL was opposed by KCC at this time. The proposal did however present KCC with the opportunity to commission detailed consultancy work on the likely impact of the transfer of these Metro services, on both London and Kent.

The report (attached) provided some very useful data concerning current and projected usage of the south-east London Metro network and highlighted particular concerns, specifically around ticketing and performance issues on certain routes through south-east London to the capital's termini. For the purposes of this response, the WSP report contains much useful data, and the NIC may find some of its material helpful in determining the need for particular infrastructure improvements in the south-east London Metro operating area.

Subsequently, KCC has responded favourably to a new proposal from the Greater London Authority (GLA) for the transfer of south-east London Metro services to TfL. Following an agreement between KCC and TfL which protects the interests of Kent's rail passengers through the inclusion of three 'red lines' in respect of fares, paths and capacity, KCC has now agreed in principle to the future transfer of these services at, or shortly after, the start of the new franchise for the Southeastern operating area in 2018.

2. What are the strategic options for future investment in large-scale transport

infrastructure improvements in London - on road, rail and underground - including, but not limited to, Crossrail 2?

Lower Thames Crossing

For many years KCC has promoted the need for a new Lower Thames Crossing that will cater for strategic traffic and the county's function as the gateway to continental Europe, as well as providing greater connectivity with Kent's immediate neighbours to boost local and national economic activity and productivity. The existing Dartford-Thurrock River Crossing (A282 trunk road) is a significant link in the strategic road network, facilitating the movement of goods and people from Kent across the Thames to Essex and the North. The crossing is used by over 50 million vehicles each year, which is well above its design capacity. This lack of capacity results in congestion and unreliable journey times. Recent attempts to improve the crossing by removing the toll-booths and encouraging free-flow traffic have seen positive results but nevertheless traffic volumes continue to grow at the crossing and congestion will soon return to the levels seen before the improvements.

With the Garden City development at Ebbsfleet comprising a predicted 15,000 new homes, and the proposed Paramount development on the peninsular forecasting 27,000 new jobs, the need for the Crossing is ever more pressing. The delivery of a third crossing is vital to support the future growth of London, the South East and the UK as a whole.

KCC supports the provision of a new Lower Thames Crossing to the east of Gravesend and Thurrock connecting the M2 with the A13 and the M25 between Junctions 29 and 30, including improvements to the A229 to improve the link between the M2 and M20 (known as 'Option C variant' in DfT consultation to date). This option provides a clear opportunity for the DfT to radically improve capacity and resilience of the road network crossing the Thames, but also to provide urgently required resilience for the strategic network across Kent between the Ports (Eurotunnel and Dover), the Midlands, and the North. KCC has commissioned research into the benefits of the new crossing and concluded that Option C variant has the greatest economic benefits, primarily through job creation and housing growth. The improved connectivity resulting from the new crossing would attract businesses to north Kent/south Essex. Improved journey time reliability would enable residents to access more employment opportunities, effectively increasing the size of the labour market.

A KCC commissioned study by KPMG in 2010 concluded that a new crossing to the east of Gravesend would directly create 6,000 jobs and contribute £12.7 billion to local GVA. In a further study, URS (2012) carried out demand analysis showing that the new crossing would improve development viability and unlock economic growth. By implementing Option C variant in conjunction with upgrades to the A2/M2 corridor (M2 Junction 7 improvements and dualling the A2 north of Dover) a second strategic route between Kent and the North would be created, which is vital to keep London and the rest of Britain connected to the Port of Dover. Another study commissioned by KCC (Gowlings, 2012) has shown that there is a high level of interest from potential financiers, meaning that it is an attractive investment that could be delivered quickly by the private sector.

As the growth of London extends eastwards, the infrastructure required to support it also supports Kent. KCC believes that the current level of congestion at the existing crossing, along with forecast traffic growth and the significant scale of potential development, means that a third crossing should be the top priority and included in the NIC's strategic vision for large-scale transport improvements in London.

The linking of HS1 and HS2

KCC has specifically raised the importance of a dedicated link between HS1 and HS2 through joint meetings with the London Boroughs of Hackney and Newham and other stakeholders who are equally determined to see the installation of what many regard to be a missing link in the eventual High Speed (HS) network. Originally the draft hybrid bill for HS2, phase 1 (London - Birmingham) included such a dedicated link, which would have left HS1 just to the north of St Pancras and joined HS2 to the north of Euston. However, to reduce the estimated costs of HS2 and to speed the bill's progress through Parliament, the link was removed from the hybrid bill.

The current draft legislation will therefore result in a gap, of no more than about two or three miles, between the London termini of both HS rail routes. The strategic opportunity of operating through domestic, and eventually international, services between locations north of London, Kent and continental Europe will have been missed.

KCC regards this missing link as an essential piece of London's transport infrastructure, and urges the NIC to consider the options for funding and Parliamentary support required for its delivery. We have seen in Kent the transformational effects of HS1: wider opportunities for travel to employment, leisure, business and higher education. It would be a missed opportunity for London's transport network if this short distance between HS routes were not bridged by a dedicated link. It would not need to be at the full high speed of either HS1 or HS2, but it must be included in any future list of key infrastructure transport projects in the capital.

3. What opportunities are there to increase the benefits and reduce the costs of the proposed Crossrail 2 scheme?

4. What are the options for the funding, financing and delivery of large-scale transport infrastructure improvements in London, including Crossrail 2?

Crossrail 1 extension from Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet and Gravesend

It is in the context of both the approved route of Crossrail 1 to Abbey Wood, and its putative extension eastwards, that KCC would support in principle the proposal for the Crossrail 2 scheme. The interchange between both Crossrail routes at Tottenham Court Road would be a key interchange in Central London, and would offer a wide range of journeys by rail with just one change for Kent passengers.

The principal large-scale rail transport infrastructure improvement that KCC would support would be the eastwards extension of Crossrail 1 from Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet and Gravesend. An officer working group, led by the GLA and TfL, and including KCC and other interested authorities, is engaged in commissioning consultancy services to scope a Business Case into this proposal. KCC regards such an extension as essential in providing the necessary rail transport infrastructure to meet the planned growth in demand for rail transport between north-west Kent and London.

Crossrail 1 services will commence operation to Abbey Wood, which is located on the boundary between the London Boroughs of Bexley and Greenwich, in December 2018. The full Crossrail 1 route will be operational from December 2019, offering through services from Abbey Wood or Shenfield (Essex), via Liverpool Street and Paddington, to Heathrow or Reading. It will transform rail travel in and through the capital, and for Kent passengers will offer a single change at Farringdon from Thameslink services giving direct access to many West End destinations and Heathrow.

There has for been a long term aspiration held by, among others, the London Borough of Bexley for an eastwards extension of Crossrail 1. The line of route would follow the existing North Kent line from Abbey Wood, serving Belvedere, Erith, Slade Green, Dartford, Stone Crossing, Greenhithe and Swanscombe before serving Northfleet / Ebbsfleet International. It would then continue to, and terminate at, Gravesend, with turn-back and light maintenance facilities at Hoo Junction. This route has been safeguarded by all the affected planning authorities.

This project is crucial to London's transport infrastructure, as well as to that of north-west Kent and the Thames Gateway / Ebbsfleet area. It will, if approved, funded and delivered, provide a key rail transport corridor with frequent and reliable services direct to the West End and Heathrow, alleviating overcrowding and congestion on the exiting Mainline and Metro services which currently serve this and adjacent routes. It will also be imperative in providing the additional capacity required by the emerging Ebbsfleet Garden City through the Ebbsfleet UDC and, if it is approved, the proposed Paramount Leisure Park on the Swanscombe peninsula.

5. How have major metropolitan areas in other countries responded to similar challenges and priorities? Are there any lessons to be learned and applied in London?

In the United Kingdom, the example of Transport for the North (TfN), centred on but not exclusive to Greater Manchester, has established a template for the creation of further integrated transport authorities in other metropolitan areas. It is probable that the lessons learned in the creation and functioning of TfL, formed out of the former London Regional Transport and other transport authorities, would provide lessons and opportunities for TfN and other future transport authorities. The important point will be the opportunity for each metropolitan area to develop its own transport authority in a bespoke way that is appropriate for its location rather than to have a standard model applied throughout England.

As the largest non-metropolitan authority in England, KCC does not aspire to become its own transport authority. KCC regards the present arrangements, with significant influential input at all levels of Government, transport providers and operators by its members and officers, as the most effective way of procuring transport infrastructure in our county.

Finally, the proposed Strategic Transport Boards which are to be included in the new devolution deals will provide an opportunity for KCC to benefit from the increased level of devolved decision-making offered by Government. Following the success of the devolved funding granted through the LEPs, the new Strategic Transport Boards should enable local transport authorities such as KCC to adopt a more strategic approach to transport infrastructure investment throughout the county.

Conclusion

The provision of adequate transport infrastructure in London is key to the free movement of people, goods and services between London and the Home Counties, especially Kent. The areas highlighted above are the principal transport projects in which KCC is currently involved which have a direct bearing on this movement. KCC has also recently published its 'Growth and Infrastructure Framework' which includes estimates of future growth in employment and housing by district (including Medway). These statistics clearly demonstrate significant increases in both, especially in areas such as Ebbsfleet closest to Greater London.

The transport infrastructure for London and the greater south-east region clearly needs continued investment to ensure it is fit for purpose, for those living and working in the capital and for the ever greater numbers of people who will need to travel to London from Kent. KCC regards the work of the NIC as critical in ensuring the delivery of the transport infrastructure required to support the projected growth in employment and housing, in Kent and throughout the south-east.

Appendices

- 1 WSP Report: Southeastern Metro services – Transfer to TfL (WSP, 2013)
- 2 Crossrail 1 Eastern Extension – Economic Impact Study (TfL, 2015)