

CABINET

9 JULY 2013

OPTIONS FOR A NEW LOWER THAMES CROSSING – CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Phil Filmer, Frontline Services

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

Author: Steve Hewlett, Head of Integrated Transport

Summary

This report summarises the Department for Transport consultation on the options for a new Lower Thames Crossing. It sets out the main issues, provides provisional officer comment and details a recommended response to the consultation.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 This is a matter for Cabinet. The Department for Transport (DfT) has published a consultation document designed to gather views on the preferred location for additional road-based river crossing capacity in the Lower Thames area. It is for Cabinet to consider a view on the options.
- 1.2 The location of a new crossing could have a significant impact on land use and transport policies in Medway.
- 1.3 The deadline for the DfT to receive views is 16 July 2013.

2. Background

- 2.1 The existing crossing experiences high levels of traffic, catering for 140,000 vehicles each day¹. Nearly half of the traffic that uses the crossing is made up of freight and business users².
- 2.2 On 20 April 2009 the DfT published a study that investigated ways to address capacity constraints at the Dartford-Thurrock river crossing. An objective of the study was to provide advice about the future requirement for crossing enhancements across the Lower Thames. The study reviewed and brought

¹ DfT Options for a New Lower Thames Crossing – Consultation Document

² DfT Review of Lower Thames Crossing Options: Final Review Report, April 2013, section 3.3

up to date previous appropriate reports and appraisals that had been carried out. The 2009 study assessed five local options for a new crossing, these being:

- Major Option A – Additional capacity at the existing Dartford-Thurrock crossing
- Major Option B – Swanscombe Peninsula link A2 to A1089
- Major Option C – East of Gravesend and link to M20
- Major Option D – M2 link to Canvey Island
- Major Option E – Isle of Grain to east of Southend

2.3 The 2009 study concluded that:

- a) there is an existing problem at the Dartford-Thurrock crossing that requires resolution through the provision of additional cross-river capacity in the Lower Thames area
- b) the following are worthy of further investigation:
 - Making better use of the existing crossing
 - Major options A, B and C
- c) not to pursue options D or E

2.4 The original study was considered by Cabinet on 2 June 2009 (88/2009), when Cabinet instructed the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture to write to the Department for Transport to:

- a) seek agreement for Medway Council to actively participate in any project group set up to influence the study brief for the detailed assessment of the proposed crossing options;
- b) support the study recommendation that options D1 and D2 should not be taken forward for future examination for the reasons given in the report;
- c) provide early feedback on factual inaccuracies in the report.

2.5 Subsequent to considering the results of the 2009 consultation the Government has:

- a) confirmed that options D and E are not worthy of further investigation;
- b) set up a Lower Thames Crossing Stakeholder Advisory Panel. Officers from Medway Council, Kent County Council, Essex Council and the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership are represented on the group;
- c) in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review made a commitment to review the options for increasing future capacity at the existing crossing;
- d) in 2011 introduced a charge suspension protocol and updated the National Infrastructure Plan to include the Lower Thames Crossing as one of the top 40 priority infrastructure projects; and
- e) committed to introducing free-flow charging during 2014 (currently programmed for October 2014).

3. Options

3.1 Evidence of the need for additional road-based river crossing capacity in the Lower Thames area is presented in the 2013 consultation document following a review by the DfT in 2012. The 2013 consultation document proposes three different location options for a new crossing and a further variant of one of the options. The DfT considers that conceptual designs have shown that it would

be feasible to construct a new crossing at each of the three proposed location options and to connect this new crossing to the wider strategic road network.

3.2 The three options investigated by DfT as part of the 2012 review were:

- Option A: At the site of the existing A282 Dartford-Thurrock crossing;
- Option B: Connecting the A2 with the A1089; and
- Option C: Connecting the M2 with the A13 and the M25 between junctions 29 and 30.

3.3 DfT also considered a variant of Option C involving widening the A229 between the M2 and the M20. The variant was considered to understand whether the added value of widening the A229 would materially improve the business case for Option C.

3.4 Option A is expected to provide additional long-term capacity at the site of the existing crossing and offers the shortest route of the three options investigated. A crossing at Option B would be located between the Swanscombe Peninsula and the A1089. Option C would be located between the east of Gravesend and east of Tilbury. This would form a major new piece of infrastructure on the strategic road network, and provide a direct route for longer distance journeys using the M25 and the M20. Appendix A reproduces the figure 5.1 from the 2013 consultation document, which displays the locations of the three options and the variant for Option C.

4. Advice and analysis

4.1 The DfT consultation is designed to gather opinion on the preferred location for a new crossing and on the relative importance of the factors on which a decision will be based. The Government considers that the decision on where to locate a new Lower Thames crossing will be based on the extent to which a new crossing at each location will:

- a) contribute to the national economy, through improving journey times and the connectivity of the strategic road network, both to and within the Thames Gateway and the South East;
- b) reduce congestion at the existing crossing and improve the resilience of the strategic road network;
- c) contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- d) avoid unacceptable impacts on environmentally sensitive areas and improve quality of life; and
- e) avoid unacceptable impacts on committed development.

4.2 The DfT assessed the location options against a base case to determine their expected performance in relation to the factors in paragraph 4.1. In order to do this, the impacts of each location were assessed against a number of economic, social and environmental factors which are set out in the table 4.1

Economic	Social	Environmental
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts on business users • Congestion and resilience • Wider economic impacts • Regeneration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts on consumers (users for personal and commuting trips) • Distributional impacts on different income groups • Impacts on accident numbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure of population to noise • Air quality • Greenhouse gas emissions • Townscape/ landscape and heritage • Habitats and biodiversity • Water

4.3 From Medway Council's point of view, the relative merits and disbenefits of the three Options are summarised below:

	Relative merit	Relative disbenefit
Option A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would improve journey times from Medway by reducing congestion at the Dartford Crossing by a greatest amount. • Least overall impact on natural environment and numbers of people affected by noise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would do little to facilitate economic growth and regeneration in Medway. • Would not improve the connectivity of the strategic road network. • Potential for greater congestion around M25 Junctions 30 and 2.
Option B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alleviates congestion at existing crossing, but to a lesser extent than Option A. • Improved connectivity and increased jobs compared to Option A. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs outweigh the expected benefits. • Likely to result in increased congestion on A229 between M2 and M20 unless Option C variant also included in this option. • Adds delay on the strategic highway network on A2 and A13. • Potential impact on major regeneration sites north of the A2 in the Swanscombe Peninsula.
Option C and Cvariant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greatest benefit in terms of economic growth, job creation and regeneration. • Would deliver circa 4 times more economic benefits and at least 5 times more 'freight' benefits than Option A. • Greatest benefit in terms of connectivity and resilience of the strategic road network. • Largest decrease in greenhouse gas emissions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging to deliver because the scheme passes through Green Belt land and has greatest impact on environmentally sensitive areas, passing through Kent Downs AONB, ancient woodland and the Thames Marshes Ramsar site. This constraint could potentially delay delivery, which would be detrimental to the regeneration of the area.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greatest journey time savings of all options. • Delays on A229 are improved in both directions with variant option. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delays on A229 are increased in both directions unless variant option included.
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4.4 DfT request that consultees respond to the consultation by using the consultation form provided within the consultation documentation. The consultation form is reproduced at Appendix B including the recommended response from Medway Council.

4.5 This is the first stage of decision making. Government intends to consider the responses to this consultation and announce a decision in autumn 2013. At that point Government will set out the next steps to develop a scheme. The Government assumption is the opening year of the new crossing would be 2025.

5. Risk management

5.1 This is a project that will not be delivered by Medway Council, but we would anticipate participating in the development of the project.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Medway Council not involved in project development	Medway Council are not invited to participate in the further development of the project	Lobby DfT to ensure the Lower Thames Crossing Stakeholder Advisory Panel is maintained and that Medway Council continues to have a place on the group	L
Options change	Options that were discounted from the 2009 study or new options are introduced which has a detrimental impact on Medway	Lobby DfT to seek confirmation that discounted or new options will not be introduced	L

6. Consultation

6.1 The DfT consultation period began on 21 May and will run until 16 July 2013. During this period the DfT have undertaken a number of consultation events, including public exhibitions and workshops. The consultation has included all-member briefing on 24 June at Gun Wharf.

7. Financial and legal implications

7.1 There are no financial or legal implications at this stage.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 Cabinet recommend that the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture respond to the Options for a New Lower Thames Crossing Consultation Document by submitting the completed consultation form at Appendix B to the DfT by the closing date, advising that Medway Council does not support option B but believes Option A or C (variant) merit further consideration.

9. Suggested reasons for decision(s)

- 9.1 To ensure the views of Medway Council are fully understood by the DfT.

Lead officer contact

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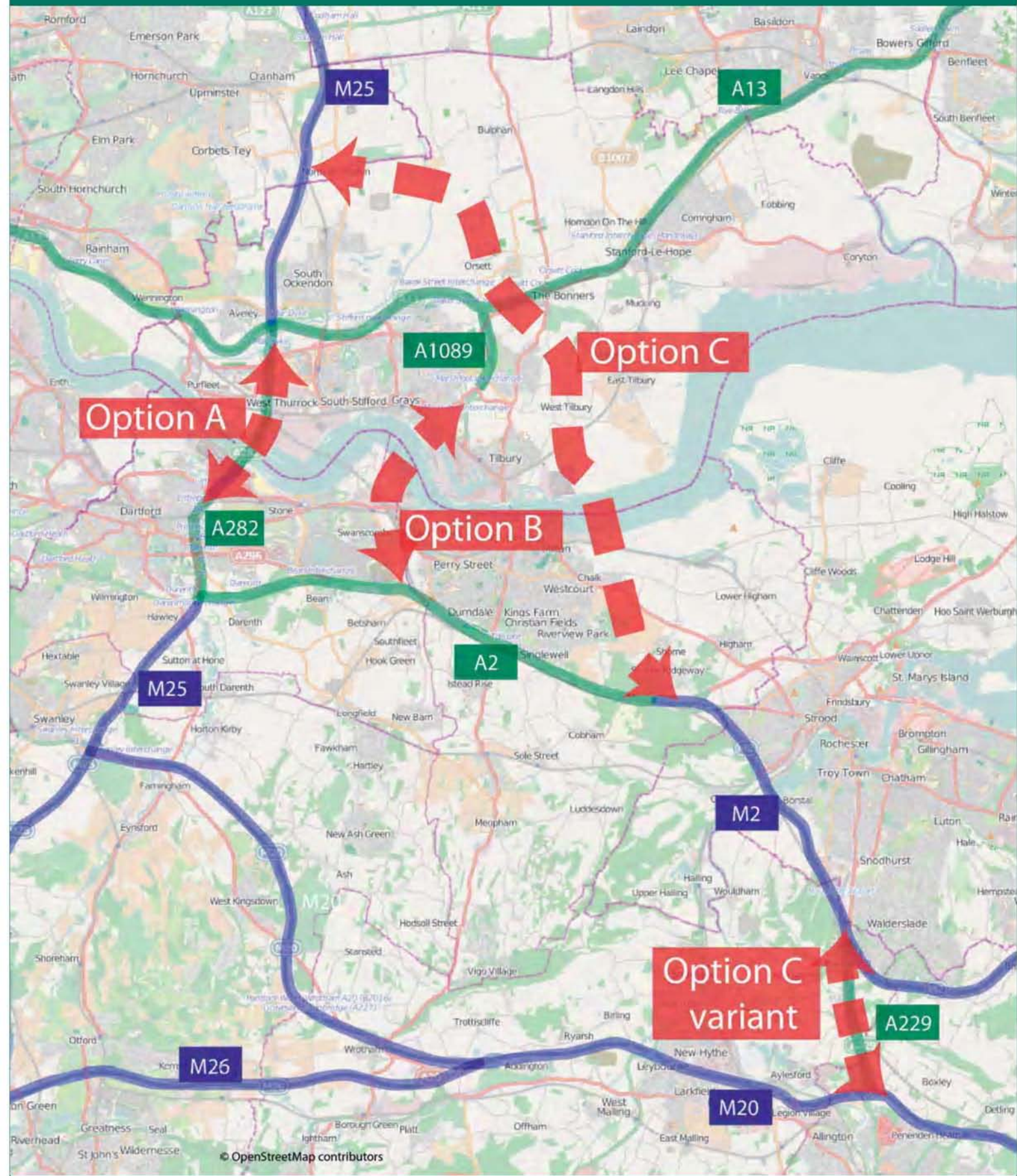
Background papers

Options for a New Lower Thames Crossing – Consultation Document, DfT (May 2013). Details at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/series/lower-thames-crossing>

Dartford River Study, DfT (January 2009)
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/strategy/capacityrequirements/dartfordrivercrossing/>

Appendix A - Options for a New Lower Thames Crossing

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Appendix B – Consultation response form and recommended response

Department for Transport

Options for a new Lower Thames crossing

Introduction

This consultation seeks views on the location of a new Lower Thames crossing.

The questions on which the Government is seeking views are set out on the pages that follow. In each case, the Government is interested in your views, as well as any additional evidence that you feel it should consider in reaching its final decisions.

About you

Please provide the following information about you. This information will help us analyse responses.

First name: Steve

Surname: Hewlett

Email address: steve.hewlett@medway.gov.uk

Home postcode: n/a

Work postcode: ME4 4TR

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation?

Yes

No

If yes, please state your organisation name:

Medway Council

What type of organisation is this?

- Trade Association
- Environmental organisation
- Residents group
- Business
- Central Government
- Local Government
- Other (please specify)

Which of the following best describes how often you use the existing Dartford-Thurrock Crossing

- Daily
- Weekly
- Occasionally
- Never

Generally, how would you describe the purpose of these journeys?

- Mostly commuting to and from work
- Mostly business
- Mostly leisure

Please provide your response to the consultation questions below.

Question 1. Do you agree that there is a strong case to increase road-based river crossing capacity in the Lower Thames area?

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Please explain your reasons:

Medway Council agrees that there is a strong case to increase road-based river crossing capacity in the Lower Thames area.

The existing crossing is already operating at over its design capacity and there are significant delays for traffic on a daily basis affecting businesses based in Medway.

Additional traffic demands will be generated in future years through development of key sites in the Thames Gateway and through increasing road freight traffic from the Channel ports. It is considered that the regeneration of Medway will be put at risk without increased river crossing capacity.

Question 2. Which of the following location options for a new crossing do you prefer?

- Option A: at the site of the existing A282 Dartford-Thurrock crossing
- Option B: connecting the A2 with the A1089
- Option C: connecting the M2 with the A13 and the M25 between junctions 29 and 30
- Option C variant: connecting the M2 with the A13 and the M25 between junctions 29 and 30, and additionally widening the A229 between the M2 and the M20
- Other

If other, please provide details:

Medway Council considers that each of the options would have huge impacts – both positive and negative - on communities in North Kent and South Essex. Medway Council has the following observations on each option:

Option A: Medway Council recognises that Option A would ease congestion at the existing crossing, but believes it would do little to increase the resilience of the strategic road network, or to facilitate the growth and development of the local economy.

Options B: As well as adding delay on the strategic highway network on A2 and A13, Medway Council is concerned Option B is likely to result in increased congestion on A229 between M2 and M20 unless the variant to Option C is included. Medway Council is also concerned that this option does not offer value for money because costs outweigh the expected benefits.

In addition, Medway Council is concerned that Option B would put at risk the successful development of the whole Ebbsfleet Valley - whilst these sites are not in Medway, they are a top priority for the regeneration of the North Kent part of the Thames Gateway.

Option C and C variant: Medway Council believes that Option C would have the greatest positive economic impact for the Medway area. However, Medway Council considers Option C will be challenging to deliver because the scheme passes through Green Belt land and has greatest impact on environmentally sensitive areas, passing through Kent Downs AONB, ancient woodland and the Thames Marshes Ramsar site. This constraint could potentially delay delivery, which would be detrimental to the regeneration of the area. Taking into account the M20 is the most attractive route to Channel ports, Medway Council strongly considers that Options C must include the variant that involves the widening of the A229 including capacity improvements to M2 Junction 3.

Medway Council does not support option B but believes Option A or C (variant) merit further consideration.

Question 3. Please indicate how important the following factors were in influencing your preference for the location of a new crossing, in answer to Q2. Please mark whether they were very important, important or not important.

	Not important	Important	Very important
Forecast contributions to the national economy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Forecast reductions in congestion at the existing Dartford-Thurrock Crossing and forecast improvements to the resilience of the surrounding road network	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Forecast reductions in greenhouse gas emissions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Smaller forecast adverse impacts on environmentally sensitive areas and larger forecast improvements in quality of life relative to other location options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Smaller forecast adverse impacts on planned development relative to other location options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The distribution of forecast impacts on people within a range of different income groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lower estimated costs relative to other location options	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Forecast value for money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other

If other, please provide details:

<p>Medway Council considers the following factor should be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The prospects for sustained economic growth and job creation within the Thames Gateway, which is a nationally recognised growth area. <u>Very important</u>
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Question 4. Is your preference for the location of a new crossing, in answer to Q2, conditional on whether a bridge, bored tunnel or immersed tunnel is provided?

Yes

No

Medway Council's view on the location options are not conditional on whether a bridge, bored tunnel or immersed tunnel is provided. However, for any location option, the preference would be to minimise any adverse environmental impacts.

Question 4a: If yes, please indicate which type of crossing you would prefer:

Bridge

Immersed tunnel (a shallow depth tunnel submerged in a trench in the riverbed)

Bored tunnel (a circular tunnel at depth, constructed using a tunnel boring machine)

Question 5. Do you wish to add any further comments?

Previously discounted Options: Medway Council seeks confirmation from the DfT that options D and E or variants of these options that were previously discounted will not be reconsidered.

Cost and Value for Money: In terms of cost Option A is clearly the cheapest option. However, Medway Council believes that value for money is the more important criterion. The Benefits Cost Ratio (BCR) figures quoted vary between options depending on the engineering solution chosen. At this stage Medway Council sees no reason to rule out either Option A or C on the basis of BCR. However, Medway Council is concerned that Option B does not offer value for money because costs outweigh the expected benefits.

Lower Thames Crossing Stakeholder Advisory Panel: Medway Council considers that the Lower Thames Crossing Stakeholder Advisory Panel is extremely useful and recommends that this group is maintained and that Medway Council continues to have a place on the group.

Freedom of Information

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

If you want information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence.

In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

