

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND
REGIONAL TRANSPORT BOARD**

Date: 1 February 2007

Subject: **Dartford Crossing Consultation and Funding Options**

Report of: Planning Implementation Director
South East England Regional Assembly

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Board agree Annex I as its response to the consultation on proposed changes to charges at the Dartford-Thurrock River Crossing.

Purpose of the Report:

To set out the key proposals of the consultation and to seek approval for the attached consultation response.

1. Context

- 1.1 Having passed back into public ownership in March 2003, the Dartford River Crossing now experiences traffic flows as high as 180,000 movements a day leading to regular congestion on the Crossing. These flows however generate a significant revenue stream of £69million per annum. This is collected by HM Treasury, with between 5-10% returned to Local Transport Authorities in the immediate area.
- 1.2 The consultation document sets out the Government's proposals on future charging policy and how the revenues arising could be used. It invites responses in the areas of:
- The proposed changes to the charging regime.
 - Exempted Vehicles.
 - Vehicle Classifications.
 - Impact on businesses.
- 1.3 It is recommended that the Board's comments focus principally on the proposed changes to the charging regime, and the future use of the resulting revenue, reflecting its role as an advisor on issues of strategic significance.

- I.4 The consultation proposes extending the present revenue arrangements hypothecating funds to local traffic measures in Dartford and Thurrock to allow funding of transport improvements more widely across the Thames Gateway Growth Area. It also indicates that funding could be used to support measures more widely to aid access to the Crossing, and this could lead to further possibilities for bring forward improvements most notably on those sections of the Highways Agency Strategic Road Network presently subject to regional advice.
- I.5 A proposed response to the consultation, which closes on 9 March, is contained in the Annex to this report.

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4 January 2007

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**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL TRANSPORT BOARD
CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

**PROPOSED CHANGES TO CHARGES AT THE DARTFORD - THURROCK
RIVER CROSSING**

FEBRUARY 2007

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The South East England Regional Transport Board is a Partnership Body made up of representatives from the Regional Assembly, the Regional Development Agency (SEEDA), Government Office for the South East, the Highways Agency, Network Rail, the Confederation of Passenger Transport and the Environmental sector.
- 1.2 The Board's comments principally focus on the proposed changes to the charging regime, and the future use of revenues reflecting its role as an advisor on issues of strategic significance.

2. Comments on Changes to the Charging Regime and Use of Revenues

- 2.1 The Board notes the high levels of use of the crossing, up to 180,000 vehicles per day in 2005. It agrees with the proposition that future use of the Crossing needs to be managed in order to maintain public safety both through the northbound Tunnels and southbound bridge.
- 2.2 The Board also notes that only 3% of trips using the Crossing are under 30km and that 61% are over 100km, supporting the notion that the Crossing is a key link on the national motorway network. As such the Crossing is a national asset, albeit one which provides essential access to and from the region's international gateways and the largest of the Government's Growth Areas along the Thames Gateway.
- 2.3 The Board supports the proposed changes to the charging regime for car drivers as set out in the consultation document. It also supports the proposal to increase charges for freight movements.
- 2.4 The Board believes the proposed changes fairly reflect the need to maintain economic competitiveness for the route while introducing a proportionately lower increase for daytime freight movements vis-à-vis car-based movements. We welcome the decision to propose scrapping night-time charges for freight movements as a measure that will assist in increasing economic competitiveness, reduction of congestion and encouraging better use of the asset across any given 24-hour period.
- 2.5 The Board agrees with the Government that one-way charging is inappropriate at the Dartford Crossing due to the traffic management effects both in the locality and on the wider Strategic Road Network.

- 2.6 The Board welcomes the proposal to extend hypothecating the use of revenues from local schemes in Kent and Thurrock (which should in any case continue) by reducing the proportion directed at the central funding pot. At present a very small percentage of the revenue raised is returned directly to support investment in transport infrastructure and services in the environs of the crossing.
- 2.7 In addition the Board would welcome further discussion on increasing the percentage of revenue raised that is returned to the region (as opposed to being retained by Government centrally). It proposes that this element of the revenue raised should be allocated in accordance with strategic priorities identified by the region through the Regional Transport Board. Such an approach is appropriate for two main reasons.
- 2.8 Firstly, substantial investment is already proposed or underway to widen the overwhelming majority of the M25 corridor to four lanes. Secondly, the presence of the Dartford Crossing gives rise to pressures on the region's transport network that extends beyond the Crossing's immediate hinterland. For example, other sections of the Highways Agency network remain in need of investment, such as the A2 at Bean Interchange and the access routes to the international gateway at Dover Harbour. Improvements to the A21 corridor may also be an appropriate recipient of revenue raised from the Dartford Crossing.
- 2.9 Through its work associated with the prioritisation of funds available through the Regional Funding Allocation process the Board has significant experience in identifying investment priorities on a robust and transparent basis. The Board's approach focuses on the allocation of funds to deliver regional objectives on an outcome basis.
- 2.10 It is therefore the Board's view that the Government's proposal to hypothecate the revenue raised for issues affecting the Crossing and the wider area be supported and that this be actioned as quickly as possible by Government.

3. Other Key Consultation Questions

- 3.1 The Board has no comment to make on the other three key areas of Exempted Vehicles, Vehicle Classifications or the Impact on Businesses other than to point out that no measures should be implemented that potentially jeopardise the South's East competitiveness both within the U.K. and in Europe.

South East England Regional Transport Board 1 February 2007

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