

1. Introduction

Following the Highways England consultation in March 2016 on proposals for a Lower Thames Crossing, the Government has announced its decision on the preferred route. The new road (Option C) will link the M25, near North Ockendon, Essex, with the A2 near Shorne, Kent, passing through greenbelt land. It will cross the A13 at Orsett and connect land east of Tilbury to land east of Gravesend via a 2-mile bored tunnel under the River Thames. The Government argues that a new crossing is needed to reduce congestion at the existing Dartford crossing and unlock economic growth, supporting the development of new homes and jobs in the region.



Computer generated image of the tunnel portal (Highways England)

2. Essex Wildlife Trust's Initial Response to the Lower Thames Crossing

The Trust has fundamental concerns about the impact of these proposals on the wildlife and semi-natural habitats of Essex. We accept that the choice of a bored tunnel avoids direct impacts on the internationally important wetland and coastal habitats of the Thames Estuary Ramsar/Special Protection Area. However, the location of the tunnel portal to the north of the crossing (and, in particular, the potential works area associated with the tunnel portal) would destroy an area of historic coastal grazing marsh and Local Wildlife Site (Goshems Farm), which supports a diverse range of *Red Data Book* invertebrates and is likely to provide functionally linked habitat (e.g. high tide roost) for the qualifying bird species of the SPA. This site is also likely to support water voles.

The new road will result in impacts on a further 3 local wildlife sites and 4 areas that support UK BAP priority habitats. One of the affected local wildlife sites, Low Street Pit, is an important site for rare Thames Terrace invertebrates and is likely to provide important high tide roosting habitat for SPA qualifying bird species.

Overall, the new road will result in loss or damage to important habitats and fragmentation of the habitats that remain; the cumulative impacts of noise, road lighting and the visual intrusion of ‘man-made’ infrastructure will combine to reduce the remoteness and wildness of the landscape and its tranquillity. Highways England will now undertake an environmental impact assessment (EIA) so the full impact on biodiversity can be properly assessed.

The Trust will rigorously seek appropriate mitigation and compensation for the lost or damaged habitats and opportunities to enhance, restore or create new habitats as part of the local ecological network. Our aim will be to ensure that there is no net loss to biodiversity as a result of this infrastructure project.

We will also seek to ensure that all opportunities are taken to:

- reduce environmental damage through good design
- secure net biodiversity gain by creating, enhancing and managing ecological networks, associated wildlife habitats and key species populations
- ensure any landscaping is appropriate to the natural character and ecological functionality of the area.

We will also seek to impress upon the Government and Highways England the importance of species recording and long-term monitoring. This would be essential in relation to both the impacts of the new road and the enforcement and implementation of any mitigation/compensation measures undertaken.

For further information on the scheme visit the Highways England website [here](#)

3. The Wildlife Trust’s National Policy Position on Roads¹

The Wildlife Trusts nationally believe that poorly planned and assessed road developments can have a negative impact on the natural environment (sites, habitats, species and ecosystem function). We believe that road developments should be considered as part of a sustainable transport strategy for England, which must be strategically planned and fully integrated with conservation objectives and the land use planning process. This should:

- prioritise environmentally sensitive maintenance and improvement of the current road network over new road schemes;
- reduce the need to travel, for example through well designed towns, cities and neighbourhoods, and improved transport technology;
- promote less carbon intensive forms of transport;
- promote reductions in private vehicle use in order to reduce traffic levels, fuel consumption and vehicle emissions, including fiscal measures and car share schemes;
- minimise dependency on private vehicle use by increasing and improving public transport and active travel routes, which are well connected to essential services;
- promote walking, cycling and other forms of active travel and promote active travel routes which are easy, safe and attractive to use; and
- ensure no net loss to biodiversity.

12 April 2017

¹Source document: TWT position statement on roads and transport infrastructure.

