

The Lead Inspector
Thames Gateway Bridge – Public inquiry
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Thames Gateway Bridge – Planning Application – Public Inquiry etc

For the attention of the Lead Inspector

Prior to the Pre Inquiry Meeting I spoke to Mr Groom and discussed the issue of previously presented materials and their availability for inclusion in the Public Inquiry. It was suggested that to avoid the oversight of any material that I should submit a summary of my concerns, already raised. To that end, please find my summary dating back to September 04.

I am now writing, prior to the Public Inquiry to express my fears and concerns regarding the potential traffic issues and environmental impact that will arise should the Thames Gateway Bridge scheme go ahead. After attending public exhibitions, various planning meetings and public meetings my concerns have only worsened. Many simple questions were put to various representatives from TFL and the like but no satisfactory answers were forthcoming.

As I have suggested many times in many letters, the main issues for residents in my particular area and throughout the borough are those of congestion, air pollution and how the health and lives of residents will be affected if the bridge is built and traffic rushes through Bexley to get to other destinations.

The plans for the North side were conceived many years ago when the ELRC was proposed but never went ahead. The infrastructure was put in place, indeed the roundabout at the end of the A406 (north circular) is just waiting for the road to be added. The A13 and the A406 are both 6 lane dual carriageways and suited to take and clear vast amounts of through traffic.

Coming south, the road network is some what different. TFL suggest that most traffic will be moving through new and existing main roads leading onto local existing roads. These will lead west towards Woolwich and east towards Erith and Dartford and most traffic it is suggested will be short distance travel to and from work, as part of the regeneration scheme. Through traffic will be discouraged by a high toll each way.

I have grave concerns as to how much of the traffic will be for short journeys, I doubt that it will stick to the very small area around Thamesmead where the dual carriageway is. I am convinced that it will work its way through towards the A2 and southwards towards Sidcup, Orpington, Bromley and towards the south of the M25, areas with little or no suitable links to the North of the river. Erith and Dartford are already easily accessible by using the M25 and the Dartford Crossing. Woolwich will primarily lead towards London and is already accessible from the Blackwall Tunnel, Woolwich ferry and the Rotherhithe Tunnel, why join the back of the queue at Thamesmead.

This route south will use Knee Hill, Long Lane and Brampton Road plus many side roads all edging towards the A2 and onwards via Danson Road and Gravel Hill.

If a major link route through the borough effectively splitting it in half was being considered and planned the story would be a different matter and indeed a very different argument.

Brampton Road and Long Lane will bear the brunt of this through traffic despite the best intentions of Traffic Mitigation schemes, but they are already running at capacity or more through peak times. For example at the Public Exhibition held at St Andrews Church, Brampton Road this became evident later in the day when the Council and TFL representatives could actually see the queues from the roundabout passing the church door. Currently the Council are implementing a Road Safety scheme for Brampton Road as I compose this letter. This scheme is being carried out because the Council has confirmed the need for road safety improvements because of the injury accident rate along this route.

If a bridge is built, regardless of tolls, traffic will travel through the borough and clog up the roads. The traffic will find quieter routes and use them as rat runs (Ken Livigston categorically stated that this will not happen) and slowly the area will come to a grinding halt. The bridge will not be used to get from Thamesmead to Ilford or Barking to Erith it will be used for long distance through traffic!

Accepting that this is the case (and most Bexley Councillors showed real concerns about this at their planning meeting) then perhaps we should be looking at alternatives. But other than building a 6 lane highway up Knee Hill, Brampton Road and Danson Road like the A13 and A406 in the North there is not a viable alternative. Unless of course this is what will be offered up once the problem is in place and nothing else can be done.

These roads are not suitable and will cause gridlock in the local area, but drivers will use them anyway. They will find it a quicker, convenient and/or a more direct route through the borough and be prepared pay a higher toll to use it. As we all know, if you build a new road then people will use it!

The general consensus is that if difficulties occur once the bridge is completed, there will be funds available to ease the problem. This will be too little too late, we would by then already have suffered years of construction traffic and the area would be blighted and split by roads too busy to cross. Our air quality will suffer and with it the health of residents.

Many figures relating to traffic flow have been produced and these, it appears were originally designed to pacify residents or perhaps pull the wool over their eyes. The figures did not add up, common sense seemed to have vanished. In the traffic modeling and forecasts published in the Greenwich planning meeting agenda (para 9.42) suggests that there are a few areas of concern. For example, it suggests an increase in northbound am peak traffic on Brampton Road and that using traffic mitigation, through traffic should be directed to use Wickham Lane. This simply would not work.

If this through traffic is travelling from the A2 down Danson Rd it will be encouraged to turn left at the junction with Park View Rd & onto the junction with Upper Wickham Lane turning right. From here it is to be encouraged down into Wickham Lane & right into Plumstead High St / Bostall Hill, then left into Basildon Rd, then either left into Eynsham Drive & onto the A2016 or straight ahead into McLeod Rd & onto Manorway to join the A2016. There are already problems with traffic turning left into Parkview Rd because of the width restriction of the left turn lane. Left turn traffic frequently mounts the pavement. An increase in traffic will worsen this situation. Parkview Rd has traffic calming measures planned for 2005 which I have been told includes restricting the road width at certain points. More traffic is likely to cause even more congestion. Traffic will take short cuts through side roads such as Westbrook Rd to avoid the traffic lights at the junction with Upper Wickham Lane. When the traffic travels along Upper Wickham Lane it could choose to turn right into Oakhampton Rd & follow through to meet up with Brampton Rd again. It could also turn right into Oakhampton Rd & left into Lodge Hill to access Knee Hill (via West Heath & Brampton) or Bostall Hill via Longleigh Lane. Please also take into consideration that this traffic will also need to travel home (if it is local traffic as predicted) & so a similar situation will occur in reverse during evening peak times. Bexley Council have documented that Danson Rd is also expected to be close to the National Air Quality Objectives in 2005 for Nitrogen Dioxide & PM10. The increase in the traffic predicted for some of these roads is between 70 & 115%.

By encouraging traffic to travel the route of Wickham Lane will not take away the fact that these roads are all residential roads which will increase air & noise pollution to residents. You will also have traffic leaving the A2 at Gravel Hill which will use Brampton Rd via Long Lane & traffic leaving the A2 at Upton Rd which will access Brampton Rd via Cook Log. The Upton Rd / Crook Log junction is another expected to have PM10 close to NAQO's for 2005.

I assume that the word encourage is used because if you restricted traffic you would cause many problems to locals trying to travel around their own borough but this also means that traffic 'given a choice' would use the quickest/easiest route which normally means rat-running. This is what many local residents recognise will happen but that no-one else seems prepared to acknowledge.

Living off of Brampton Road I am very aware of the growing congestion within the area and how it has grown over the last 20 years. Brampton Road and Long Lane are currently feeder roads for access to and from the A2 in addition to normal local routes. It is plain to see for anyone who is interested that the level of congestion at junctions in these areas in the run up to and after the rush hour is considerable. During the day this declines to a steady flow. These roads are in built up residential areas with schools, sports centres, small shopping parades and pedestrians. In other words they are roads where road safety is paramount or at least should be. I was told some years ago when we were campaigning for a crossing in Brampton Road near to the end of Fairlawn Avenue and Bason Road that the road was already far too busy to consider one any where near that junction.

I hope that these comments and concerns give you a flavour of how I and many of the residents of Bexley feel. I have purposely avoided issues and figures for asthma within the borough, pollution predictions and the whole issue of % increase in traffic flow in the main as these are things that I do not fully understand or have figures to support.

I know that others do!

But do not let my apparent lack of understanding and that of other residents within our borough be an excuse to allow an environmental disaster to fall on Bexley and the surrounding areas.

I am also sending back the completed Inquiry form as I now feel that I must speak.

Yours sincerely

Glenn Cook