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Graham Groom, Inquiry Manager
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27 June 2005

Dear Mr Groom

Thames Gateway Bridge Inquiry Phase 2

Thank you for your letter of 21 June inviting me to send you the outline of my objections to the Thames Gateway Bridge.

I enclose a copy of the submission jointly sent by John Austin MP and myself to Greenwich Planning setting out our objections to the bridge and calling for this inquiry to be held. This document gives the outline of the objections we wish to raise at the inquiry. John Austin has agreed that I should respond to your letter on behalf of us both.

I hope this is sufficient for your needs, if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact either myself or John Austin MP.

Yours sincerely

Clive Efford MP

Thames Gateway Bridge planning application

Submission of Clive Efford MP for Eltham, John Austin MP for Erith and Thamesmead

We are writing to register our opposition to the Thames Gateway Bridge (TGB). We believe that the case supporting the bridge is not sustainable on the basis of its environmental impact and its benefits to the local economy.

Lack of involvement of local community in the development of plans

We wish to express our concern about the lack of meaningful consultation with local people and the absence of independent assessments of the arguments made in favour of the Thames Gateway transport schemes. We note that the scheme formed part of the Mayor's transport plan ahead of any consultation. The public have not been given access to independent assessments of the scheme's overall impact through a proper consultation.

Public Transport

We are also concerned that the maximum public transport option has been rejected as economically unviable without proper investigation of their impact on traffic levels in the Thames Gateway area. It would appear that if the criteria used to reject the public-transport options were used on other similar schemes, few would be given the go-ahead. We believe that traffic reduction should be a priority for any transport strategy for The Thames Gateway. A transport strategy for the whole area should be drawn up with various options put before local people for consideration incorporating all aspects of the local transport network such as Docklands Light Railway and Cross Rail.

Traffic Generation

The size of this bridge suggests that the level of traffic generated by the scheme will be greater than current estimates put forward by those proposing the bridge. TGB will be six lanes which makes it the biggest river crossing in London. While two lanes will be designated as bus lanes this still leaves the bridge sufficient capacity to accommodate a significant increase in traffic leading to congestion on an already overburdened local road network. We believe that an independent traffic impact assessment needs to be carried out to give an objective assessment of the traffic levels that will be generated.

This scheme will generate a significant amount of new traffic and is contrary to the stated objectives of both the government and the Mayor for London to produce a modal shift from car use in favour of public transport. Of the three river crossings contained in the Thames Gateway plans TGB is the one that will inevitably generate more new car use than the alternatives. The scheme is also inconsistent with government objective to increase proportion of freight carried by rail.

The lack of a thorough assessment of the overall impact that increased levels of traffic will have on the wider road network makes it impossible to assess the consequences this scheme will have on the local community. The new river crossing will inevitably result in displacement from other major roads such as the South Circular. Insufficient

consideration has been given to the communities that will suffer the environment consequences of increased pollution associated with traffic as a consequence of this.

Inner Ring Route

Many local people fear that this scheme will lead to the reintroduction of the former East London River Crossing (ELRiC). This proposal was overwhelmingly opposed by the local communities in southeast London. Local people showed their determination to protect Oxleas Wood and their communities from the threat to the local environment from increased traffic levels. The problem of the traffic generation remains the same with this scheme. Where other bridges in London have been temporarily closed, such as Hammersmith, the local communities campaigned to keep the bridge closed because of the environmental benefits they experienced due to the reduced traffic levels. Residents of the communities close to the TGB will experience a significant increase in traffic which will have a detrimental impact on the local environment. This will inevitably lead to calls for a further road scheme to relieve local traffic levels. These calls can only be met by reintroducing a scheme identical to ELRiC. The fact that TGB is six lanes clearly indicates that this has been anticipated and means that the proposal for an inner ring road linking with the A2 is likely to be resurrected.

Air Quality and Noise Pollution

This part of southeast London already experiences a great deal of traffic-associated pollution. A considerable amount of evidence exists which highlights the fact that this problem has existed for a considerable time. Prior to the Rochester Way Relief Road being built it was discovered that children at a primary school close to the A2 had blood-lead levels which were among the highest in London. We are concerned that no assessment has been made of the current levels of pollution associated with traffic, including air quality and noise. The scheme seems to assume that the current levels are acceptable and therefore can be added to. The Air Quality Strategy, 2000 highlights the fact that a significant amount of London's road network has levels of nitrogen dioxide above annual objective targets. We believe that there is a need for local people to be provided with a map of current air quality exceedencies and projected areas of exceedencies post opening of the bridge. Insufficient information has been provided for a full assessment of the impact on the local environment which would allow people the opportunity to make a valued judgement on whether they want to support the new bridge.

Jobs and Regeneration

A great deal of emphasis is placed on the economic gains that it is claimed that the bridge will bring to the Thames Gateway. No attempt has been made to balance this against the long term detrimental effects that the new river crossing will have on the wider community in this area.

We are concerned that the new river crossing will facilitate the removal of jobs from the south of the river placing people in this part of London at a greater disadvantage when seeking employment. Opening up access across this part of the river is likely to result in jobs being relocated north of the river. A road bridge will not provide efficient and economical transport for the most disadvantaged members of the local community. A

proper assessment must be made of which sections of the community will benefit from the bridge and whether it represents value for money in tackling exclusion. The emphasis should be on the creation of jobs close to the where people live. In its Bread Line Greenwich reports of the 80s and 90s the London Borough of Greenwich highlighted the problems of disadvantaged people. The report indicated that significant numbers of residents did not own a car and that for many of these affordability was the issue. We believe that this is further evidence to support the public transport proposals if the most disadvantaged of our communities are not to be excluded from the regeneration of the Thames Gateway area.

We also believe that the case that the bridge is essential to the creation of jobs in the Thames Gateway is overstated. We have seen the comments of Professor Whiteleg, in his 2002 report, Thames Gateway River Crossing: a social, economic and environmental assessment, section 7, where he points out that the case in favour of the bridge on the basis of the jobs it will create is not robust. Professor Whiteleg notes that the emphasis on the creation of 48,000 jobs has been omitted from the Mayor's current transport strategy. He states that Halcrow's own figures show minimum contribution of Thames Gateway Bridge to regeneration objectives.

Although extravagant claims have been made about the contribution the bridge will make to regeneration and job creation there is very little detailed evidence of what kind of jobs it will create. We would expect to see detailed estimates of the types of jobs to be created and plans for meeting those new demands through the development of new training opportunities. The approach seems to be wait and see, on the assumption that jobs of some kind or other will be generated. This appears to be a form of trickle down economics and we believe that a more specific estimate of the type of jobs and who will benefit should be made before the TGB can be given approval. We agree with Professor Whiteleg that an assumption has been made that if the bridge is built then jobs will be created. This is not the basis on which a scheme of this magnitude, particularly one with such far reaching consequences, should be approved.

Conclusion

Local people have little opportunity to shape the plans for the development of the future transport network in the area. We feel the claims regarding the economic regeneration that will take place as a consequence of the bridge being built are not borne out by the statistics. Most of the reports on the significance of the bridge in the creation of jobs and regeneration have been commissioned by those who want the bridge to be built. We feel that these issues require further examination and that this can only be achieved through a full public inquiry. We therefore call for this planning application to be rejected until the potential benefits of all of the alternatives can be properly assessed.