

# Media Briefing, April 2007

## THAMES GATEWAY BRIDGE DECISION DUE

Following the public inquiry into the scheme, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is expected to make an announcement shortly on the application by Transport for London (TfL) to build a 6-lane road bridge across the Thames between east and south east London.

The Government has been considering the inquiry Inspector's report on the controversial Thames Gateway bridge (TGB) since November 2006, together with information that has been submitted to the Government since the end of the inquiry.

If the scheme is not rejected outright, and more information is needed, objectors to the TGB have called on the Government to re-open the inquiry to properly evaluate information which has come to light since the inquiry ended, and which has been submitted to the Government.

National campaign organisations Friends of the Earth and Transport 2000 have called for plans for the £1/2billion Thames Gateway bridge (TGB) to be scrapped. TfL admit the scheme would create more traffic, pollution and carbon dioxide emissions.

As well as adding to climate change and producing unacceptable environmental effects on the local area, Transport 2000 and Friends of the Earth also criticised TfL's flawed and uncertain regeneration case (see section 4 below), failure to comply with key policies (see section 5 below) and failure to consult the public adequately (see section 6 below).

The two organisations are calling for better ways to help solve the area's economic and transport problems to be properly considered, such that London can be built as a compact city, and the Thames Gateway developed sustainably.

As well as a background section, this briefing will look at some key points on the scheme:

- 1. Traffic
- 2. Public Transport
- 3. Air quality and noise
- 4. Regeneration
- 5. Policy
- 6. Consultation
- 7. Remaining issues

The air quality and noise effects referred to, as well as the climate change emissions the TGB would be

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responsible for, come from TfL's traffic figures.

## Background

### History:

The Thames Gateway bridge (TGB) is the successor to the previous East London River Crossing (ELRC) that would have cut through the ancient Oxleas Wood to the A2, but was defeated in the 1990s. The results of a public consultation in 1995 on possible river crossings east of Tower Bridge were not published - they were only referred to in a Government document. This document showed that respondents were most enthusiastic about public transport crossings, that there was mixed reaction to proposals for a mixed road with public transport crossing, and that a 3rd road crossing at Blackwall was the least popular. Yet the Government brought forward proposals including the road crossings.

The Government's package of 3 river crossings in 1996 were a rail crossing at Woolwich, a mixed road with public transport version of ELRC called the Thames Gateway Bridge and a 3<sup>rd</sup> road crossing at Blackwall (the Silvertown link). This 1996 TGB was planned to follow the same route across the river as the ELRC but would not go through Oxleas Wood to the A2.

Plans for the TGB were brought forward and the TfL Board approved the scheme in 2002 only with the casting vote of Mayor Livingstone. Consultation on the scheme was held in 2003 and in 2004 there was some further consultation when the Environmental Statement was ready and planning applications were submitted to Greenwich and Newham councils. Both councils approved the scheme, Greenwich only narrowly. The scheme was called in by the Government for a public inquiry in early 2005.

### The public inquiry:

The public inquiry began on 7th June 2005 and was originally scheduled to last for 4-6 weeks. It was held at Charlton Athletic Football Club, in Greenwich.

Following evidence from London Borough of Bexley, which objects to the scheme, showing that traffic figures TfL had modelled for 2001 were wrong, TfL's traffic witness admitted that its traffic modelling and forecasts were "not reliable". There was an adjournment in early 2006 while TfL compiled new figures and revised its case.

Bexley Council's evidence showed that there would be more traffic on the local roads without the scheme than TfL had predicted, and so less space for extra traffic generated by the scheme if built. TfL's revised case had to cap the amount of traffic generated by the bridge to avoid what it called "unacceptable congestion" on local roads. To achieve this a higher peak time toll for using the TGB was proposed and the size of the local area (and thus the numbers of local people) eligible for a discount on tolls was reduced. As a result key deprived parts of Bexley would now be left out of the discount area and would have to pay £3 instead of £1 in peak times to cross the bridge by private vehicles. TfL's revised case meant a loss of 25% on its claimed regeneration benefits and 30% on the benefit cost ratio of the scheme.

At the end of the public inquiry even these revised traffic estimates were considered unreliable by Bexley Council. Furthermore, inconsistencies were exposed - and remain - between two of TfL's key witnesses, leaving uncertainties over the effects of the scheme (see section 7 "remaining issues" below).

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The inquiry closed on 3rd May 2006.

Objectors to the Thames Gateway Bridge who appeared at the public inquiry include the London Borough of Bexley, MPs from all three main political parties, national campaign groups Friends of the Earth and Transport 2000, and many local community groups and individuals. There were thousands of individual local objectors to the scheme, from communities on both sides of the river.

The objectors' case was assisted by advice from a group of expert consultants funded by £65,000 from TfL in an unprecedented agreement between Mayor Livingstone and the Green Party Group on the Greater London Authority. This still left the objectors in a considerably weaker position than TfL which had a budget of millions of pounds to develop the plans for the TGB.

The public inquiry website is still available at <http://www.persona.uk.com/thamesgateway/index.htm> where transcripts and sections with documents from TfL, supporters and the objectors can be viewed.

#### **After the Public Inquiry:**

The Inspector's report was delivered to the Government on 17 November 2006, but this document will not be available to the objectors or the public until it is published with a Government decision.

At the end of the public inquiry the Inspector stated that "any new relevant important material" could be forwarded to the Government for it to consider. A number of objectors, including Friends of the Earth and Transport 2000, and a group of five key transport and regeneration academics and consultants (from the group who appeared on behalf of the objectors at the inquiry), have submitted material to the Government after the inquiry closed. Submissions include recent information and announcements on climate change including from the Government and the Mayor of London, submissions on more local issues such as the Government's proposed changes to tolls on the Dartford crossings, which objectors consider would affect traffic levels on the TGB, and the very case for the scheme.

If the Government does not reject the scheme outright, objectors and the five experts are calling for the Government, as a minimum, to re-open the inquiry to evaluate the information which has come to light since the inquiry ended.

#### **The scheme:**

The Thames Gateway bridge would connect the A406 North Circular Road dual carriageway in Newham (which links to the M11), with the A2016 dual carriageway in Greenwich (which links to the M25). The proposed scheme is 6 lanes with 4 lanes for general traffic, and 2 planned for public transport. A TfL Board member expressed concerns over the possibility of all 6 lanes being converted to use by general traffic if public transport usage on the bridge dropped off (which could happen if Crossrail were built TfL admit).

TfL claims that the TGB would be merely a local road. The 4 closest London boroughs to the scheme are Greenwich, Bexley, Newham and Barking & Dagenham. These are referred to as the "local" boroughs by TfL. Rather than local traffic being defined as that within the local boroughs, TfL considers all traffic that would either begin or end its journey in one of the local boroughs (which is most traffic) as being "local". Thus TfL defines journeys such as from Brussels to Beckton or John O'Groats to Greenwich as "local". Tolling is proposed on the scheme with lower tolls for people in a local discount area.

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## 1. Traffic

TfL considers that if the bridge were built the traffic increases would be manageable through tolls, which would ensure priority for "local" traffic, however:

- 17m vehicles a year would use the TGB, and by 2016 levels of traffic would grow in the local boroughs of Greenwich, Bexley, Newham and Barking & Dagenham by between 10% and 36%, according to TfL's Environmental Statement. This includes traffic generated by the TGB, which in Newham is 16%. Traffic would grow for five more years after the year of these figures TfL admits.
- Traffic flows would more than double on many roads due to traffic generated by the TGB, according to TfL figures. The North Circular A406 and the A13 roundabout would have heavy jams, TfL's traffic witness's evidence admitted. Most traffic using the TGB would not be travelling within the local boroughs (see section 5 on page 6 below).
- Existing traffic congestion would be hardly - if at all – relieved and flows at the Blackwall Tunnel would remain about the same, TfL admits. TfL's revised case showed that there would not even be reduced queuing at the Blackwall Tunnel in the AM peak hour if the bridge were built. TfL's original case had expected that there would be less queuing. Businesses and the public cited expected reduction of existing congestion as one of the key reasons they supported the scheme in response to market research and consultation.
- Greenwich Council admitted that it expects to fail its target set by the Mayor for reducing traffic growth in the borough. The scheme can only make it more difficult to meet targets, yet car travel demand can be cut by up to 33% in large urban areas, according to Lynn Sloman in a 2003 report.
- The traffic effects of the TGB (mentioned above) and the dis-benefits of the scheme eg on air and noise pollution and climate change emissions (see below) are just from people changing their travel habits as a result of building the new road bridge. According to the objectors' expert Professor Goodwin, traffic attributable to the TGB could be 80% higher in the local boroughs than TfL has stated - if the traffic caused by the TGB included traffic from increased jobs and population which TfL claims the TGB would bring about, (see section 7 below on remaining issues).

## 2. Public Transport, cycle and walking

TfL considers it is providing adequate and valuable public transport, however:

- TfL's original case showed that 94% of the benefits of the scheme would go to car, van and lorry users, and only 6% to public transport users. The scheme is not designed around walking, cycling or public transport, nor designed to complement Crossrail.
- Only a quarter to a third of residents in the wards closest to the scheme, on both sides of the river, own cars - according to the 2001 census. Less than a quarter are car owners in nearby wards.
- Fewer people would use public transport if the scheme were built than if it were not, according to TfL. Fewer people would also walk and cycle, and accidents would increase, TfL admits.

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- TfL admits that the Woolwich Ferry - a much shorter river crossing than the TGB route, and much valued by local people - would be expected to close if the TGB were built.

### 3. Air quality and Noise

TfL's Environmental Statement and evidence to the inquiry characterised the environmental disbenefits from the TGB as being "minimal" in the long term, or impacts as "insignificant", however:

- There are already high asthma rates in some areas, there is no safe level for some pollutants according to the World Health Organisation. Traffic fumes from the TGB would add to breaches of EU air quality limits, TfL admits. One air quality monitoring receptor would breach an EU limit, when this would not happen if the scheme were not built, according to TfL modelling. Several areas would have "significant" increases in air pollution according to Association of London Government criteria, as shown by TfL in its evidence.
- Despite mitigation measures, there would be more noise affecting local residents TfL admits. Noise would mean some schools suffer a "moderate/substantial adverse effect". The noise from the scheme would mean that some people would be unable to sleep with their windows open, according to TfL, based on World Health Organisation guidelines.
- As poorer people are more likely to live near main roads, as TfL admits, they would suffer disproportionately from the pollution from the extra road traffic. The scheme would thus add to environmental injustice. It is likely to worsen health inequalities, which the Mayor has a duty to address.

### 4. Regeneration and job creation

Based on comparison with west London which is less deprived and has better accessibility and higher density of jobs and population than east London, TfL claims regeneration effects from improved accessibility to jobs for residents, and to employees for businesses in east London. It says "other things being equal" improved accessibility would bring forward development and thus potential new jobs and population growth. However:

- Newham is close to Canary Wharf and the jobs it offers, and TfL evidence shows Newham already has above average accessibility, but also that the borough remains the 3<sup>rd</sup> most deprived in England.
- The Government's Social Exclusion Unit's 2003 report said that only "two out of 5 jobseekers find lack of transport a barrier to getting a job". Problems such as lack of skills and childminding facilities, and also the affordability, reliability and safety of existing transport facilities can cause accessibility problems.
- The 5 local boroughs in the east of London (the main 4 'local' boroughs plus Redbridge) which TfL use for its accessibility calculations have higher levels of the population with "no or low qualifications", as compared to those in the 5 west London boroughs which TfL used as a comparison. This correlates with higher proportions of people claiming jobseekers' allowance in the 5 boroughs in the east, than those in the 5 boroughs in the west.

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- The scheme is not targeted at those people most in need. The London Development Agency (LDA) cites Newham as one of London's most disadvantaged areas, where it aims to raise employment rates more than the rest of London. Greenwich is a less disadvantaged borough than Newham, according to the LDA, yet TfL's evidence shows the claimed improved accessibility from the scheme - to jobs for residents and to potential employees for businesses - would be greater for locations in Greenwich than in Newham.
- Building new transport infrastructure in poor areas can result in a "2-way street" effect as locals lose out to competition (for jobs and for customers) from those outside the local area. This could happen in areas such as Newham if the TGB were built, objectors' experts said.
- Indeed, this scheme is not even best targeted at the needs of local people - as the scheme is overwhelmingly of benefit to road users rather than public transport users. This is in an area where there is very low car ownership (see section 2 on page 4 above).
- It is possible the scheme would not have a job creating effect. The best that Professor Rosewell, TfL's main regeneration witness, is quoted in TfL's closing statement to the inquiry as saying is: "...the most likely outcome is that there will be some kind of increase ... (in potential employment and population in the area)". Bexley could end up with no extra jobs whatever, according to TfL figures. East London is inherently different to west London, and a new noisy polluting road could be a deterrent to many.
- If the scheme did result in new development, experts for the objectors say that the scheme would make high density development more difficult to achieve as such a road scheme would generate demand for road and parking space. Indeed a report by CB Richard Ellis expected warehousing and distribution businesses (which are low density and low employment) to be the main business beneficiaries of the bridge. It is public transport (not highway) accessibility that has a strong link with employment and population density, TfL's evidence showed. In turn compact development can justify building high quality public transport infrastructure.
- Less than 400 local people would use the bridge to travel to new local jobs across the river. TfL's regeneration evidence shows that only 120-150 people would cross from the 'local' boroughs on the north side to the 'local' boroughs on the south (Greenwich and Bexley) to fill new jobs (with none going to Bexley). Only 270-290 would cross the other way - from the 'local' boroughs on the south side to the 'local' boroughs on the north (Newham, Barking & Dagenham and Redbridge).

## 5. Policy and alternatives

TfL says the scheme conforms to national, regional and local policy and that it did not have to consider alternative ways to help the area. However objectors say the scheme does not conform to policy in many ways including:

- Recent Government policy on Sustainable Development and on climate change emissions requires respect for environmental limits and for reductions of climate changing CO2 emissions. Yet the TGB would add to breaches of EU air quality limits and increase CO2 emissions. The CO2 emissions are a serious addition to road transport emissions in London and the local area, and adding to CO2 would be expected to make achieving the necessary cuts in CO2 harder and more expensive later.

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- Policy requires that long distance commuting by car should not be encouraged but, as well as being mainly a road scheme, most trips projected by TfL to use the bridge in the AM peak hour are not local, ie within the local boroughs. Trips which only start or end in a local borough (which is most trips on the bridge) will include many longer distance trips, TfL admits. TfL however only aims to discourage long-distance through traffic, not long-distance traffic per se. Even trips within the local boroughs could be 20km in length.
- The scheme does not comply with the Mayor's London Plan policy 3C.15 which sets out criteria which road scheme proposals should fulfil. TfL admits the scheme fails some of the criteria, and is therefore required to show that other benefits would "very substantially outweigh" the disbenefits, which has not been shown to be the case. Government and regional policy requires the most deprived areas to be targeted, but this scheme does not do that (see section 4 above).
- TfL have not properly assessed if there are better ways to achieve the objectives. The only time that local people were asked, in 1995, they preferred more public transport to road crossings (see Background, History section on page 2). A walk, cycle and bus only crossing would be cheaper, according to Professor Whitelegg. High quality public transport schemes such as DLR or tram have not been properly examined as better ways to help the area.

## 6. Public consultation

TfL says it has adequately consulted local people; however there has been a catalogue of consultation failings including:

- The consultation on the Mayor's Transport Strategy included a question that sandwiched river crossings (without stating that these included road schemes) between public transport mode references. This meant that respondents did not have the opportunity to support more public transport without also, perhaps inadvertently, supporting road crossings.
- TfL's consultation in 2003 was flawed as TfL produced higher traffic figures in the middle of the consultation, and even these new figures were only interim figures. Despite these flaws TfL continues to use the results of the consultation without qualification. The Environmental Statement was not available until 2004, and so was not available to the public as part of the 2003 consultation.
- In 2003, after TfL distributed consultation materials to local people and held exhibition roadshows, 90% of people in Newham were not aware of such materials and events, a consultation document submitted to the inquiry by the objectors shows. The figure for Greenwich was not much better.
- When in 2004 Friends of the Earth went door to door in Beckton to ask people about the scheme, many were not aware of it, or what its effects would be. In one street of 30 homes, 19 signed a letter objecting to the scheme, 6 did not want to, and 5 could not be reached (because they were out etc).

## 7. Remaining Issues

TfL claimed and continues to claim that its case is reliable, and that there is no need for further statistical work. However at the end of the inquiry there remained:

- a) Bexley Council's criticisms

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b) Inconsistency between TfL's traffic and regeneration witnesses

a) Bexley Council's criticisms

TfL admitted that its modelling and forecasts had been "unreliable" following Bexley Council highlighting problems with TfL's figures. This led TfL to revise its case for the scheme. Bexley Council's closing statement to the inquiry maintained that it considered that TfL's revised traffic modelling and forecasts were "unreliable" and that "further work is needed", and that there could be effects in other boroughs (see also Background, the public inquiry section on page 2).

b) Inconsistency between TfL's traffic and regeneration witnesses, which undermines TfL's case.

There is an inconsistency between TfL's traffic and regeneration witnesses. Despite calls to do so, TfL has not done any further statistical work on this, and the inconsistency remains. This means that even after the public inquiry the true traffic effects attributable to the scheme are unknown – and this could affect air quality and climate changing effects attributable to the scheme as well.

Professor Phil Goodwin, on behalf of the objectors, presented evidence on the inconsistency existing between TfL witnesses on transport (Richard Smith) and on regeneration (Professor Rosewell) (28th February 2006). He produced papers suggesting how work could be done on how to resolve this. When TfL said that it would not do any further work, Professor Goodwin presented the inquiry with a paper on 21<sup>st</sup> April on the estimated effects of this inconsistency (inquiry document 4985/3).

The inconsistency:

- TfL's traffic witness based his traffic estimates on the same number of jobs and population existing in the area in 2016 in 2 situations - if the scheme was built, and if it were not built. These are based on projected increases in jobs and population in the Mayor's London Plan for 2016.
- TfL's regeneration witness says that building the TGB would attract more jobs and population.

This could mean one of two things:

1. the TGB **would not** bring any more jobs or population to the area, and TfL's traffic witness's figures are right on this point, and the TGB is not necessary.
2. the TGB **would** bring some of the jobs and population to the area and TfL's regeneration witness is right on this point. If this is so, and TfL claim those benefits from the TGB, then the TGB should also be responsible for the disbenefits from those extra jobs and population, and the extra traffic should be reflected in the figures for extra traffic caused by the TGB.

At the moment the traffic increases that TfL says are caused by the TGB (the difference between the situation if the TGB were built and if it were not) arise only from:

1. people switching to road vehicles because the TGB is built, and
2. vehicles choosing the TGB as a new route in preference to previous use of another river crossing such as the Blackwall Tunnel or the Dartford crossings. (This would free up space on the other crossings for more traffic to be generated.)

If extra traffic from any jobs and population the TGB brought to the area were included in the total of extra traffic caused by the TGB, it would show the TGB as being responsible for more traffic increases than TfL's figures have indicated (although this would not affect the overall traffic figures).

Using TfL data, analysis presented by Professor Goodwin showed that taking into account traffic from

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increases in jobs and population which TfL says the TGB would bring to the area; the scheme would be responsible for more traffic:

- 119% more in the London Borough of Bexley
- 80% more averaged over the 5 local boroughs (the main 4 local boroughs and Redbridge)

**Thus just building the road bridge results in huge increases in traffic, but if there were any jobs and population increases as a result of the TGB, these would come at a huge additional cost in terms of extra traffic generated by the TGB in the local area. More traffic attributable to the TGB also means more air pollution effects and more climate changing effects would be attributable to the TGB than TfLs figures have admitted. ENDS.**

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