



Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Strategic river crossings](#), HC 714

Monday 12 January 2015

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 12 January 2015.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Greater London Authority](#)
- [London Chamber of Commerce and Industry](#)
- [Kent County Council](#)
- [London Borough of Newham](#)
- [Councillor John Kent, Thurrock Council](#)

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Members present: Mrs Louise Ellman (Chair); Sarah Champion; Jim Fitzpatrick; Mr Tom Harris; Karen Lumley; Jason McCartney; Karl McCartney; Mr Adrian Sanders; Chloe Smith and Martin Vickers.

Questions 1-70

Witnesses: **Michèle Dix CBE**, Managing Director, Planning, Transport for London, **Isabel Dedring**, Deputy Mayor for Transport, Greater London Authority, and **Colin Stanbridge**, Chief Executive, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon and welcome to the Transport Select Committee. Could you tell us who you are and who you represent?

Michèle Dix: My name is Michèle Dix. I am the managing director of planning at Transport for London.

Isabel Dedring: I am Isabel Dedring. I am the Deputy Mayor for Transport.

Colin Stanbridge: I am Colin Stanbridge and I am chief executive of the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Q2 Chair: Thank you. I would like to take this opportunity of congratulating Michèle Dix on her CBE—a very well deserved award.

Michèle Dix: Thank you very much.

Q3 Chair: Could you tell us what you think the barriers are that prevent the delivery of new crossings? No new fixed river crossing has been built in London east of Tower Bridge since 1967. Why do you think this is? What is the problem?

Michèle Dix: Perhaps I could kick off because I have been involved in river crossings since the early 1980s—at that time I worked for the GLC—in terms of trying to promote the east London river crossing, and on the east Thames appraisal framework and the Thames Gateway bridge. We are now looking at the river crossings.

The barrier has been one of lack of consensus. It is not that there isn't a need for river crossings; there is a strategic need for river crossings, but no consensus on the actual form of them, where they would be located and, importantly, the timing of river crossings. The location of a river crossing and the timing will affect the local impacts. Gaining consensus in terms of the actual form of crossings and the timing by which they are implemented has been our biggest challenge, and certainly over the past four years we have worked hard with the boroughs in east London to try to gain consensus. I believe that with the package we are now looking at there is more consensus to take these schemes forward.

Q4 Chair: More consensus? Is there consensus, Ms Dedring?

Isabel Dedring: There is a lot more than there was before. Clearly local politics are a barrier, certainly in the environment we are familiar with. Because there is an overriding agreement that we need more crossings, as Michèle says, there has been a lot of rapprochement over the last year or two. People understand that there are going to be winners and losers locally. I am happy that we could not have more consensus than we do at the moment and that we do not need any more in terms of bringing the crossings forward now.

Michèle Dix: Another point that people have raised in the past is that you do not need a road crossing; you need more public transport crossings. There has been more support for the provision of public transport crossings. Certainly over the last 40 years we have seen public transport capacity increase ten-fold across the river, from less than 7,000 passengers per hour. With Crossrail 1 going in place, it will be over 70,000 passengers per hour.

In road transport it has not changed; it has stayed at round about a low 4,000 passengers per hour. Whilst we have put all the public transport capacity in, people are now more accepting of the need for some road capacity, particularly because road capacity is not about providing for the private motorist; it is about providing for the goods and services that need to be taken across the river. That will be made on a road. It is also recognising that 80% of all trips are actually made on roads; many of them might be walking or cycling, but importantly it is using buses as public transport. The road crossings that we are seeking to promote now are very much about enabling more public transport on buses but importantly about enabling the delivery of goods and services.

Colin Stanbridge: That is our point in the London Chamber. The reason we have been so concerned about the lack of river crossings is that we have all seen—especially highlighted by the Olympics—the economic opportunity that the east of the city has, and then you look at the lack of river crossings there. You have 23 bridges west of Tower bridge and two river crossings east before you get out to Dartford.

If we are really going to have the houses, the businesses and the jobs there, we need the road transport to be able to make that happen. For example, if you are going to have warehousing or manufacturing, you are going to need the ability to cross the river to make it a real success. We believe it is obvious that, if we are to have the economic regeneration of the east that we all hope is going to happen, alongside it you are going to have to have better communications by road.

Chair: The issue seems to be moving from recognising the need to do something to implementing a scheme.

Q5 Jim Fitzpatrick: On the consensus issue that Ms Dix raised, it is fair to say that Mayor Livingstone was elected on a platform of being opposed to east London river crossings and it took five years to persuade him that he was wrong. Mayor Johnson was elected on a platform of being opposed to river crossings and it took three years to persuade him that he was wrong. The consensus has cost £61 million according to last week's *Evening Standard*. That is what TfL has spent on consultations during the past 14 years, so it has been quite an expensive consensus. The GLA evidence says that there are 18 river crossings from Vauxhall bridge west and five east from Tower bridge, as Mr Stanbridge said. Some of us count the figures as 22 and four and 22 and two because we do not count the Woolwich ferry as a proper crossing and the Dartford tunnel is far too east.

Is this consensus going to hold? How long before we see some river crossings in east London?

Michèle Dix: In terms of the consensus holding, the key to the consensus being built is having a package. What has happened in the past is that there has been a scheme put forward. It has been recognised that there needs to be more than one crossing, but one crossing has been picked as a scheme to take forward. Mayor Livingstone wanted to promote the Thames Gateway bridge. That caused local concerns either side of the bridge, particularly on the south side and there was opposition to it on that basis.

We said when that scheme was dropped that we would look to develop a package of crossings, not just one: a crossing at Silvertown to relieve Blackwall and a crossing in the vicinity of Gallions bridge to improve connectivity and support growth, also recognising that there were further public transport crossings coming along, and those two crossings could enable further public transport links. We also talked about the potential retention of the Woolwich ferry as an alternative to Gallions bridge, to be implemented in the shorter term and, if the need arose, to implement Gallions later. That was all consulted upon as part of the Mayor's transport strategy and accepted within the Mayor's transport strategy. What then happened was that people wanted to see Gallions bridge taken forward sooner, rather than the Woolwich ferry. The concerns there brought us back to where we were with the Thames Gateway bridge, because of the impact of a strategic bridge on a local area and whether it would suck in traffic to cross the bridge and bring traffic through local roads that were not necessarily suitable for that traffic.

We have done a lot of work on understanding that it is not just two crossings you need; maybe you need three crossings. Our last consultation looked at the potential for three crossings—one at Silvertown, one at Gallions, and one at Belvedere which would join north Bexley to the Rainham area—to spread the load. The concerns that people have

about a crossing in a fixed location would be diminished because you would be spreading the load. You would also be recognising that this is about local crossings. They are not to draw traffic in from the Dartford crossing; they are about connecting local areas. That is the step we took that has garnered more consensus. We are looking at providing a package of crossings, each one of which has the support of the local area that wants the crossing. Our challenge now is to try to take all three of them forward.

Q6 Jim Fitzpatrick: So the £61 million has been well spent and we are going to get three crossings.

Michèle Dix: You are going to get Silvertown crossing first because that is the most advanced.

Q7 Jim Fitzpatrick: When will that be finished?

Michèle Dix: That will be done by 2021-22.

Q8 Jim Fitzpatrick: And the others?

Michèle Dix: The others are scheduled for the mid-2020s, so around 2024-25. We still have a lot more work to do on those other two.

Isabel Dedring: I want to expand on one of the points that Michèle made. If you think about 10 years ago and the politics in terms of numbers of people complaining, or pro or con, a lot of people would have been negatively affected by the local impacts, but you did not have enough people crossing the river there because of the lack of regeneration and the lack of crossings. You do not have a constituency that is saying, “I am desperate to cross the river”; there is no way to cross the river, so nobody is trying to do it. It is a theoretical proposition. Nobody is going to be in favour of something that is 30 years from now or that maybe your kids are going to do, but over the last 10 or 15 years there has been so much change in that area, certainly on the south side of the river—it is only recently that we have seen some of those developments along the southern side of the river—that there is recognition among local politicians that they are interested in regeneration and development in that area. That has affected those numbers, so you are getting a lot more development and regeneration. Therefore, the voices of people who see the advantage of crossings start to get heard. That was part of the problem; it was all the local antis outweighing the very few pros. You get a lot more pros in the mix now as well.

Colin Stanbridge: It is understandable that local people should be worried about the effect on the local area. All of us as residents would be worried about that. That is one of the reasons why we decided we needed to keep making the case—to keep trying to do it—and why we started our bridge campaign last year. We kept banging on about the fact that the economic impact will be good for the area. For Gallions Reach bridge, Newham came up with a figure of nearly £56 million-worth of economic activity and 18,000 new jobs. We have to keep on saying that, yes, there is a price to be paid, and if you are a local resident there will be problems that will be created, but for the greater good you will see economic activity and therefore jobs. People’s lifestyles and wealth will increase by having that connectivity.

Q9 Karl McCartney: My colleague Mr Fitzpatrick has been quite forceful about the cost of consultation. Roughly, what would be the cost for the three bridges that you mentioned, Ms Dix?

Michèle Dix: In terms of the Silvertown bridge, which is the one that we want to take forward first, it is £700 million. The Gallions Reach bridge is of the order of £350 million to £600 million, and Belvedere is £500 million to £900 million. They have not been designed in detail in the same way as the Silvertown tunnel has been designed, but it is that order of magnitude.

Q10 Karl McCartney: Is that comparable to other capital cities on rivers of the scale of the Thames where these geographical locations are?

Michèle Dix: Yes, but this is at the wide end of the river. There are some pretty big distances to cross the further east you go. If you look at, say, Tower bridge, you are talking about Silvertown being three times Tower bridge. When you get out to Belvedere it is four times as big, because the river is getting wider. Nevertheless, you need to connect those two areas north and south.

Another point on why we have three now rather than the two we had before is the rate at which London is growing and is forecast to grow over the next 20 years. We have talked about its being 10 million in 2030. The work we have done to look at 2050 shows that it could be up to 11.5 million. That is huge. That is a brand new tube train full of people every week; it is that scale of growth. The growth will happen, and if we want to ensure that it happens in a planned way, we need to enable people to get across the river. As I say, it is not just about road traffic like cars and trucks. It is more about goods, servicing and public transport in the form of buses.

Q11 Chair: The Silvertown tunnel has been designated a “Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project”. What difference has that made?

Michèle Dix: It has made a big difference in the sense that it has raised the profile of the crossing and it allows us to gain the powers through one mechanism rather than having to put in a series of planning applications to a series of authorities. It provides a one-stop shop to get the powers needed to build the bridge. It also provides those same powers in order to be able to introduce a charging system on the bridge should that be what is concluded from the consultation. It gives us certainty about the programme in terms of having submitted the application for DCO and when we will get an answer back. If you are planning for an implementation, there is more certainty over the process.

Q12 Chair: What will the impact of new crossings be on London’s air quality targets?

Michèle Dix: Some of the problems related to air quality relate to congested traffic—vehicles sitting and not moving, and slow conditions. If we are able, through our planned crossings, to improve the flow of that traffic and make it more reliable, we will reduce the air quality impact associated with it, but, if London is growing anyway, those conditions will persist if there is no crossing, and they will be more congested.

In east London we are also looking at the impacts of the wider set of measures that we want to introduce to affect air quality across London. We have the proposed ultra low emission zone, on which we finished consultation on Friday. If that is taken forward, it

will help reduce air quality impacts not only in central London but also in inner and outer London. We issued the transport emissions roadmap document, which set out a whole range of other measures that we would seek to implement to reduce air quality hotspots across the capital.

Q13 Chair: Can you give an absolute assurance that there has been sufficient modelling to look at the impact of new crossings on local areas?

Michèle Dix: There is modelling taken at different levels according to the stage of the scheme. If you take the Silvertown tunnel work, we have just done a consultation on the Silvertown tunnel, where we have a detailed design, and we have done much more detailed modelling work on the traffic uses, the layout of the junctions and how traffic will affect those areas. We have done environmental impact assessment work on the local impacts of that scheme. For the next stage of the Silvertown tunnel, which will form the statutory consultation, we will do a more comprehensive environmental impact assessment to take forward that particular process.

Q14 Jim Fitzpatrick: I have a supplementary question. Will the modelling include an assessment of the impact of pollution from static vehicles, such as we see at Blackwall tunnel and Rotherhithe tunnel on a regular basis, as opposed to traffic which is flowing perhaps not completely freely but more freely in the event of releasing the pressure by having some local crossings? I understand that there is discussion or debate about the scientific evidence on how much more harmful static traffic is. For my constituents in Tower Hamlets—I am sorry to be parochial about this—we catch all of that static pollution, which ought to be more free flowing.

Michèle Dix: Certainly one of the anticipated benefits of the tunnel is that it will release that static traffic so you will not get it, and that should give rise to air quality benefits. We are looking at that in the context of growth. London is growing anyway. We know that the volume of traffic across the network, be it trucks, light vans and so on, will grow. What we are trying to do across London is ensure that, if traffic levels are growing, the vehicles that are being used are low emission vehicles; hence the approach with the ultra low emission zone. That said, we are doing a lot of monitoring in and around Silvertown and the area to understand in more detail what the air quality levels there are now, and reflecting those in our models for forecasting what the impacts will be in the future with and without Silvertown.

Q15 Jim Fitzpatrick: And that is very helpful, but the central question I was asking, having read different reports and not being a scientist, is that there are some who say that static traffic produces more pollution than flowing traffic, so will that be part of the environmental assessment?

Michèle Dix: Yes.

Q16 Chair: What will be the impact of the new crossing on public transport and cycling? Have you looked at that?

Michèle Dix: It depends which crossing you are talking about. If you are talking about the Silvertown crossing, it is a tunnel and has been designed as a tunnel because you are connecting two growth areas to maximise the development of the land above for

promotion. That will be for goods, general vehicles and buses. It is not designed for pedestrians and it is not currently designed for cyclists. A complementary scheme was put in place for cyclists and pedestrians to cross the river at that point, which is the Emirates Airline. When we are looking at crossings in the east such as Gallions bridge and/or Belvedere bridge, we will be looking for pedestrian links across those bridges alongside cycle links and bus links. We will also be looking at Gallions for the possibility of potentially having the DLR run along that bridge. We are looking at all those options. They are not just for car and truck traffic, but for as many modes as we can sensibly accommodate. We do not think it is suitable for people to be walking through the tunnel whilst it is being built, and that is why we provided the Emirates Airline.

Q17 Chair: Mr Stanbridge, how do you think new crossings are going to affect economic activity and urban regeneration?

Colin Stanbridge: I think they are vital to the economic activity and the economic regeneration of the east. The truth is that people are going to live in the east of the city whether there are river crossings or not, and Silvertown will help in terms of the Blackwall tunnel. If we are really going to see that economic regeneration and jobs locally, with people having access to those jobs, and people south of the river having access to the economic activity going on in the north, the only way we are going to achieve that—it seems to me blindingly obvious—is by having new crossings. It is not just one new crossing or two new crossings; we need a whole series of new crossings if that is to happen. That will undoubtedly help create the economic activity—I do not want to use the word “powerhouse”—that we all want for the east and that we all see as being obviously there. We are going to attract people to go to live there. We need to be able to create the jobs there and for people to be able to get to those jobs.

Michèle and I are both on the Outer London Commission. The truth is that there will be an increase in public transport. One of the things we see over and over again in the Outer London Commission is that roads are vital to people’s economic activity and also to their daily lifestyles. If you cannot get across that big stretch of water in the middle, it really limits the possibilities you have.

Q18 Chloe Smith: I would like to ask about financing such crossings. You have very kindly laid out some of the costs so far. How do you intend to go about attracting the necessary investment to do it? What are your views on tolling?

Michèle Dix: We have looked at different ways in which we might fund the scheme—whether or not we fund it from TfL’s business plan, seek to borrow more money or do a PPP and seek private finance for it. Given that our business plan is already committed to lots of essential things, if we were going to fund it from our business plan, we would have to make a swap, which is difficult. We have limits in terms of what we can borrow. If there was a different regime enabling us to borrow more, that would be a good thing. If we were able to do it ourselves, using public money ourselves, it would be cheaper. That said, we do not have the money and we need to get on with it. We cannot afford to delay and not deliver it. There is an interest for private finance to pay for the bridge. If you look at the net present value of borrowing that money, it is not that different from us spending the money ourselves from our plan, because of the way we would pay it back. The sorts of contracts that would be more attractive to the private sector wanting to finance it are ones where you transfer to them the risks they are most capable of dealing with and keep the

ones that we are better at managing to ourselves. The sort of thing that we are interested in is a design/build/finance/maintain contract with the private sector, but based on an availability scheme rather than a usage scheme, because many of the schemes handed over on a usage basis have been more difficult. It is harder to predict uses, particularly if you are using charging as a mechanism to help manage the traffic through the tunnel. Our interest is in making sure we can manage it properly, not just maximising revenue.

Colin Stanbridge: Obviously finance goes to the heart of the problem; it is at the heart of the reason for the lack of bridges, even though people have been talking about bridges in the east for many years. London has never really had the ability to fund it itself. In the longer term, we hope that a Government would realise that fiscal devolution for London and the other big cities would be something that allowed projects like this at least to get under way, even if you could not fully build them. We believe that a city like London should be able to have higher borrowing, because there is no doubt that you could get the money back in economic activity. It does not take long if it is £300 million to £600 million for a bridge for the economic activity that it generates to come back to London.

Obviously business does not want extra cost, but one of the things that business is very pragmatic about is that if it can see a real benefit then it will pay for it. If there have to be tolls, we would say, “Let’s have tolls.” We would rather have tolls and a bridge than no tolls and no bridge.

Q19 Chloe Smith: I have one short follow-up question. Ms Dix, on the types of contracts that you just referred to, could you give us a sense of what kind of metric you are thinking of when you say availability? Can you explain to us how you would intend to present that to the public? What are they buying for their contract when you talk in those terms?

Michèle Dix: They would be buying a tunnel; they would be buying a two-lane in each direction tunnel. It is likely to be one lane for buses and goods vehicles. In terms of availability, it is making sure that it is open. If it is not open because it is not being maintained properly or there are problems, we would not be paying for that section. It is usage of the tunnel, but we would want to control what used that tunnel, which is why we would not want a usage-based arrangement with them. We would want to introduce charging; it is not tolling. We have done a lot of work on understanding the impacts with or without charging. We want to manage the demand through there. We do not want to make it more attractive for someone who is otherwise using public transport at the moment to switch to using a private car. We want to create space through the tunnel so that goods and services and public transport vehicles can get through reliably. On the basis of the work that we have done to date, charging would help us deliver that. It would also help pay for the construction of the tunnel.

Q20 Chloe Smith: Are you looking at other examples around the world where they do this already?

Michèle Dix: Yes. The Merseyside tunnel will do it. It will be an availability-based contract.

Isabel Dedring: It is probably worth saying that we have a pretty big roads programme—investing in the road network to deliver a big increase in cycling infrastructure, improvements in the public realm and so on. Because we have worked very hard to build

up a much bigger portfolio and a capital programme for the roads, we have a lot of other things on which we need to spend our grant funding and our fare box revenue. This would be a great example of something where, if it can pay for itself through tolls, we would be seeking to do that because we are already so committed in a whole range of other areas.

Michèle Dix: The size of it is not humongous. It is substantial—and attractive for private investors to want to do.

Q21 Chair: Can local residents and businesses be protected from the cost of tolls?

Michèle Dix: We have not made decisions on that. It is one of the things that we would further consult on. Certainly we have had residents' discounts for the central area congestion charge, but we want to ensure that by introducing discounts we are not then failing to achieve the objectives of the scheme. We will need to look at that carefully.

Colin Stanbridge: We are certainly urging that there should be discounts for local people. We are also saying that, if you are going to have tolling, it does not necessarily have to be 24-hour tolling. Maybe it can change people's behaviour and make them use the crossing at times of the day when there is less traffic about. We think there are whole variations on tolling, but the principle of tolling is going to be important in the short term, before London has devolved tax-raising powers of a substantial nature. We are going to have to have tolling to make this work.

Q22 Chair: Will the technology be compatible with that used at the Dartford crossing?

Michèle Dix: It will be free flow, like Dartford.

Q23 Jim Fitzpatrick: Going back to the first response and the consensus that Ms Dix referred to, we are talking about political consensus as well as bureaucratic and business consensus. There are obviously concerns among some local residents and businesses, but overall is this supported politically by all the major parties?

Isabel Dedring: The key issue is that it is about the local authorities along the north and south side of the river, as you know, Jim. Michèle and I have worked very hard alongside a lot of other people to try to build the consensus we've got now. At the moment, I do not see anything that is going to change that, but everybody needs to understand that of course there is going to be significant growth in local concerns as we go through the process, because now we are bringing forward the actual details of the proposals and people are going to say, "I like the idea of a bridge but not when I discover that it is going to lead to a doubling of traffic on my road." That is inevitable with these kinds of projects. Hopefully, we can make the case that the strategic importance of it for London, and indeed for the local areas, outweighs the local issues. There is going to be that noise. That will be the immediate issue for the consensus. It is how loud the local issues become.

Q24 Jim Fitzpatrick: We will be hearing from some of the local authorities in a moment, but within the GLA is there political consensus between the Mayor and the lead opposition party?

Michèle Dix: I would say yes.

Isabel Dedring: I never actually thought there was a prospect that there might not be. I'll go and double check.

Michèle Dix: In terms of the consultation results, we have public support for these crossings. When we presented the package of crossings there was a barrel of support for the package. It is when you say, "I am only going to do this one," that consensus breaks down. By taking them all forward you will get that consensus. Certainly with Silvertown, we have over 76% of the public saying, "Yes, we want this," even though we have not described it in detail.

Chair: We will end on that hopeful note and we will discover the rest shortly. Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Councillor Rodney Bass**, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation, Essex County Council, **Councillor Denise Hyland**, Leader, Royal Borough of Greenwich, **Councillor Paul Carter**, Leader, Kent County Council, **Sir Robin Wales**, Mayor of Newham, and **Councillor John Kent**, Leader, Thurrock Council, gave evidence.

Q25 Chair: Good afternoon and welcome to the Transport Select Committee. Could you give your name and position for our records?

Sir Robin Wales: Sir Robin Wales, elected Mayor of Newham.

Councillor Hyland: Councillor Denise Hyland, Leader of the Royal Borough of Greenwich.

Councillor Carter: Paul Carter, Leader of Kent county council.

Councillor Bass: Rodney Bass, Cabinet Member for Highways on Essex county council.

Councillor Kent: John Kent, Leader of Thurrock council.

Q26 Chair: Is there consensus about new river crossings?

Councillor Carter: There is broadly, although we will perhaps hear a slight difference of opinion from Thurrock, where our preferred option—the option C crossing—would go east of Gravesend to just east of Tilbury into Thurrock. Gravesham borough council is not too happy about the prospect, and John Kent can speak for himself from the Thurrock perspective. Outside of that, certainly the two-tier local government in Kent totally supports it. The Kent and Medway Economic Board supports it, and generally the local enterprise partnership of East Sussex, Essex, Kent and Medway, Southend, Thurrock and the unitaries that are included in there—I have probably missed one—are very much behind the thrust for option C for a third Thames crossing to be built as soon as possible.

Q27 Chair: Councillor Kent, is there consensus?

Councillor Kent: I think there is a little more consensus than Paul Carter would have us believe. We are all of one mind that we need further crossings on the River Thames. You have already been talking about potential crossings in east London that we would support, and I think that leads inexorably to the need for another crossing further east. Where we differ is where it should be. I think that the Government were too quick and showed no transparency at all when they ditched what was known as option D. Option D opens up lots of important growth corridors within the south-east local enterprise partnership area—the M20, the A2/M2, the A13, the A2127, and then, via the A130, the A12 growth corridor—in a way that neither option A nor option C does. There is consensus that we need more crossings. I think the Government were too quick to ditch option D. My plea would be to persuade them that they should reopen that.

Councillor Bass: You will understand, Madam Chairman, that I take a slightly different view from that and align myself very firmly with Kent county council. Incidentally, Essex and Kent have worked very closely together on this. We must not forget that we jointly built the first Dartford crossing. We constructed it. We also commissioned a number of

surveys and a report which led to the pre-run of this consultation. We produced a report in around 2012.

There is a good history of working together in collaboration. I agree with John Kent that it is a matter of emphasis in his case. We are all committed to an additional crossing—of that there is no doubt—but we think it should be looked at from a strategic point of view as well, which is why, when we have made representations, we have included the fact that, whatever you do with the crossing and wherever you put it, there will be pinch points on the strategic network that you need to address.

Q28 Chair: Councillor Hyland, is there consensus?

Councillor Hyland: What I would say is that the Royal Borough of Greenwich supports the construction of a new tunnel at Silvertown and a vehicular crossing at Gallions Reach, but as part of a package of crossings between Blackwall and Dartford. In our view, it needs to recognise that the provision of public transport must be integral with any vehicular crossing. For example, we would like to see a London Overground extension—I think it is known as the GOBLIN line, Gospel Oak to Barking—come over to Thamesmead and Abbey Wood. In terms of Silvertown, we would like to see the DLR extension coming out as far as Eltham, and for the DLR as well to go to Thamesmead: the DLR at Thamesmead, one coming over to Eltham by Silvertown and also an overground rail. As we heard earlier from TfL, this is very much about helping business to get mobile across London, and to help people on to public transport.

Q29 Chair: Sir Robin, can you add to the consensus?

Sir Robin Wales: I do not usually, but I will see what I can do on this occasion. By and large I share Denise's view. Newham would take the view that a package of crossings is absolutely right for east London. It is ridiculous that we have 22 crossings west of Tower bridge but we are unable to build one east of that. Our view very strongly is that the Gallions bridge is the important one and that it needs to be built now. It has been unnecessarily delayed for seven years, much to our frustration and the loss of jobs in our area.

We know that London is moving east. We know that massively homes, jobs and opportunities are going to come for this country, not just for London, east of London. The Gallions bridge needs to be built urgently. One of our problems is that we worry that some of the consultation is a delaying tactic on that. For us it is clear: Gallions needs to be built now. We are not opposed to Silvertown—we get its congestion—but we do not think it contributes to regeneration in the way that Gallions will do. If I may say, I think TfL's views are always to ease congestion rather than look at development.

The growth boroughs—the former Olympic boroughs—have taken a view that this is one of the three key developments that they would support. Additionally, we would support the eastern extension of Crossrail because we recognise that that is about jobs and opportunities, whereas the current proposals, which TfL back, are about congestion. TfL will always look at congestion, and will always look at it for themselves. I found the comments being made earlier interesting—that they were trying to build consensus, which has been absolutely absent over the last seven years. We have run a campaign ourselves with Greenwich, with many of our colleagues here, and I have to say there has been

widespread support for the Gallions bridge. Of course we should build further bridges east of that. London is moving east, and it is extremely important that we have that connectivity. We are very supportive of further bridges as a package, but we are desperate to see Gallions now. That is 10,000 jobs, and it will also service many of the areas that we need to service if London is going to continue driving our economy. I think that is consensus, but give us the Gallions bridge and you will get even more consensus from us.

Q30 Mr Harris: This question of consensus is an interesting one. The consensus among the five of you seems to be that economic growth is good, so well done for having that consensus. When it comes to specific projects, there seems to be consensus that there should be consensus, provided it is for your own particular pet projects. I think what the Chair was trying to ask was, “Is there consensus over specific proposed crossings?” I completely understand why you have certain reservations over certain proposals, but it is not really good enough and it is not going to work if everyone says, “Yes, I agree with everyone else that there should be more crossings but it has to be my particular crossing.”

Councillor Carter: If we could differentiate the crossings east of London up to Dartford, the Dartford crossing is part of the strategic road network of this country. When we are talking about consensus, it is not just about where that strategic road crossing needs to be, outside of what London, inner London or within Dartford might need, or the outer-London ring. It is generally the connectivity of Dover docks to the north of England and the M11. There is a massive need to build the new crossing at Dartford or east of Dartford—as I say, our preferred option is C—and the strategic road network improvements that are needed from Dover docks to provide the opportunity to build in resilience. It would not necessarily connect up to the M25 but would look at connectivity to the M11 and the north of England by a different route, not involving the M25 at all. When you look at the number of lorry movements out of Dover, which are expected to double over the next 15 years or more, that is phenomenal.

Then you have the London gateway port—Dubai Port’s investment in Thurrock—which has only just started to tick and will be the biggest deep-sea container port bringing product closer to London and the southern half of England. The impact of that is going to be phenomenal even before you bring in the massive expansion in Kent/Thames side and the Essex/Thurrock side in housing growth and commercial growth; the UDC at Ebbsfleet; and the potential for Swanscombe Peninsula, with a massive leisure investment from Paramount. That is really significant; plus population growth in Kent is about 1% a year. Compound that lot, and if we don’t start building a strategic road network to get heavy goods vehicles moving trade around the country from London Gateway and Dover docks, this country will start to grind to a halt.

I do not know about the need for the London Thames crossings. I am sure there is, and from what I heard in the previous debate about the number of crossings in central London compared with the massive growth that is already taking place in the east of London, obviously there is a compelling case for that, but I think our case trumps all of that in the strategic need to get freight and commercial travelling around the southern half, and in and out of London.

Councillor Bass: I think we are talking a bit about apples and pears. We are all trying to achieve consensus, but, understandably from the perspectives from which we come, some things are more important than others. That is understandable and that is what we have the

debates about. In our joint study with Kent in 2012, we showed that, if you went for option C, you would produce over 25,000 extra jobs in Essex and Kent by 2031; you would probably create about 21,000 or so extra homes; and it would be a catalyst for major economic activity. The gross value added for doing that sort of project is enormous. It is more far reaching than simply the actual crossing point itself. Obviously it is felt right down to Dover and right up the M11 corridor to Cambridge.

Certainly we have made observations on the more inner-London crossings and we are totally supportive of them, but they are serving a slightly different need from the strategic trunk network. If I may just be controversial for a moment, the problem is that we have an M25 that does not actually exist all the way round London. There is a bit of it—I think it is still called the A282—which is the present crossing, and does not qualify as motorway standard. If you like, the proxy for an additional crossing is to try to get that meaningful structure into the trunk system. That is a very important ingredient for us.

Councillor Kent: I want to come back to this bit about consensus. As a very small county borough, Thurrock sometimes feels a bit bullied sitting between Kent and Essex. It is not particularly helpful when it comes to building consensus when they commission a report in 2012, do not consult us on it and then draw lines through our borough. It is not a good way to build consensus. I think Rodney is right on the difficulty with the M25. I think you need to start looking at that kind of outer orbital road, and you don't do that by building option C. You do that by revisiting option D. I say again that it was taken off the table far too early and too quickly.

Q31 Mr Harris: That short exchange is quite illustrative of the fact that there clearly isn't consensus on the specific subject we are talking about. You all want the same aim, but I do not think there is really any agreement about which option you all want to support.

Councillor Hyland: We need to separate inner and outer London.

Sir Robin Wales: There are two separate debates here. I get the debate that is going on, and rightly Kent, Essex, Thurrock and other people out there should be taking a view about what is right for them. It is a different thing from the proposal we have for London, which should have been built seven years ago. We are ready to go. It is there if we want to do it. It is not going to be difficult to get it started. It can be done very quickly. We absolutely need more crossings out to the east, so I am entirely supportive of my colleagues. It is just going to take a bit longer. If we had any sensible transport strategy in this country, we would be building both as fast as we can because we would recognise that transport is how we generate jobs. Why do you think we got the Olympics? Because we had the best connected place in the country, with Stratford. When the IOC came and looked at the trains that were buzzing round this big bit of land, they went, "Yes, that's a no-brainer." It is obvious. Greenwich and Newham have offered to build the damned thing and to fund it. We are against tolls, but even if it is tolled it is a no-brainer. We can do it tomorrow and it has frankly been held up for political reasons because of Bexley. Everybody else thinks it is the right thing to do. People locally want it. Even Bexley residents are saying, "Yes, of course we want another bridge, because it will generate jobs and opportunities."

The Silvertown crossing is more about congestion. We are not against it—we really are not—but it will not generate the jobs and opportunities that Gallions will.

Q32 Chair: From what you are saying, Sir Robin, there is just one area that has caused this problem. What could have helped you to make quicker progress? Would a different structure have been better? Could Government have done more? Could you have been brought together, or was it just inevitable differences depending on where everyone is?

Sir Robin Wales: For Gallions, a different Mayor. The Mayor opposed it and the Mayor was clear about wanting to stop it. People are allowed to have differences. The Mayor of London takes a London view and he took that view. He was wrong. We all think he was wrong, but that is politics. There is nothing wrong with that. We keep looking for consensus, but sometimes it is all right in politics to have disagreements. We were ready seven years ago. We are ready now and we think we should now proceed. I think TfL were sitting here basically saying, “Let’s do it.” The idea that they would consult on a ferry was just ludicrous; it really was. I would like to say—because Boris likes these classical allusions—it might be good enough for the River Styx but it is not good enough for London in the 21st century.

Councillor Hyland: The difference is that the Thames Gateway bridge was a really enormous structure. What we are looking for are local bridges for local people to give access to the jobs. If you take areas like Thamesmead—areas of low value that are underdeveloped—and if we want to kick off regeneration and give people access to jobs, those crossings are needed, and they are needed with public transport. That is both Gallions and the Silvertown tunnel. It does not mean that there are not concerns around such issues as air quality, and other issues like displacement or rat-running, congestion and noise. Those will all have to be mitigated, but, in essence, yes, there is support for these crossings. I think you have to separate the Kent and Essex third crossing from the London crossings.

Q33 Chair: What would have made the difference? Should there have been better leadership on what was going to happen? I note the comment made about the Mayor by Sir Robin, but apart from that particular view should Government have done more to bring people together? What could have made a difference?

Councillor Carter: I endorse what Denise Hyland said; I think they need separating. The needs of London for additional Thames crossings within London are completely separate, from not our pet projects in Kent and Essex but strategic national projects that need to be built as part of the strategic route network of this country. We get all the disadvantages of all the HGVs running through Kent and virtually no advantage at all, other than the inconvenience that it places upon people going about their daily business within Kent. It is not right to perceive it as a Kent and Essex pet project. It is a national project that needs to happen.

You asked what is holding things up. Obviously the Government have had a consultation on various options, A, B, C and D. Option D was rejected and I think for good reasons. Other than Gravesham and Thurrock having concerns about option C, the general consensus of the local enterprise partnership, all in local government and all our business partnerships is support for option C as a top priority for Government in national transport infrastructure, and it needs to be got on with. The Forth bridge, from being thought about to being constructed, happened in very short order in Scotland, and they then relieved the Scots of the tolling charge on the Forth bridge as well. Going back to getting the strategic network improved in our neck of the woods, the opportunity to have design, build and

operate private finance coming in to help support and fund it—there may have to be some public subsidy—and the tolling income from an additional strategic Thames crossing, with the utilisation of the surplus on the existing Queen Elizabeth bridge and the Dartford tunnels, will go a very long way to provide the capital and the finance to get this constructed and under way.

Q34 Chair: Taking the point you made, are you saying that, if it is decided that infrastructure is needed for national strategic reasons, local concerns should be overridden?

Councillor Bass: If I can just endorse what has been said, I understand the very local concerns right there where the crossing takes place, but you need to examine the broader needs of communities. We have taken soundings across the county of Essex and I know Kent have done the same. There is very wide support, and indeed demand, for this additional crossing if only because of the resilience—

Q35 Chair: Is that widespread support for the specific proposals or for the concept?

Councillor Bass: Because, as Paul said, option D was rejected some while ago, you need to consider the actual resilience of the bridge crossing itself. That tends to require that it should be slightly offline to the existing crossing. Those are matters that weigh very heavily for the thousands of motorists and thousands of truck drivers who use that crossing every day.

Q36 Chair: But is there support for the specific proposal?

Councillor Bass: Yes, absolutely.

Q37 Chair: Councillor Kent, you have written about the need for the twin-tracking of local and central Government planning processes. Can you tell us what you mean by that and what difference it could have made?

Councillor Kent: Clearly we need to work more closely together than we have done until now. It was interesting listening to Paul Carter talking about the widespread support for option C. I have to say that among the business community in Thurrock there is widespread opposition to both options A and C. That includes London Gateway port, and the port of Tilbury, which people tend to forget about. They know that the prime problem in delivering growth and jobs in Thurrock is not about another crossing; it is about dealing with the congestion that we suffer on a day-to-day basis. You do not do that by attracting more vehicles into the borough by putting another crossing there. This is not about somehow being a nimby. We already have three crossings going through the borough, and we already have some of the worst air quality anywhere in the country as a result. I have yet to meet anybody who can tell me how putting another motorway through the borough actually improves any of that.

Q38 Jim Fitzpatrick: Notwithstanding Mr Kent's last response, I think this session has been helpful in separating the Kent/Essex and strategic road network issue from the London issue. There is general consensus that we need more crossings, but how are they to be delivered?

I want to go back to the comment that Sir Robin and Ms Hyland made—that, given permission and with the appropriate incentives, the Royal Borough of Greenwich and

Newham could build tomorrow. What is the obstacle to that? Is it the Mayor of London's office? Is it the Department for Transport? Is it being given permission to go ahead with a specific financial package and incentive? What is stopping you doing that?

Councillor Hyland: It is in the Mayor's powers. They would have to devolve those to us—to the boroughs.

Sir Robin Wales: We are clear in Newham. Bridges in the west are not tolled. Bridges in the east should not be tolled. It is an economic development that is taking place. It is effectively a tax on east London, which west London, which is wealthier, does not pay. One of the arguments of the growth boroughs is about convergence—the argument about bringing east London up to the London average over a period of 20 years in employment, skills and health—all the things that would make a difference.

We would not personally favour tolls, but you have to finance it. People ask where the money will come from. I think the Government's job is to create an infrastructure and make opportunities happen. You have to build transport infrastructure. I know you have Michael Heseltine coming shortly. I heard him make a wonderful speech: "If you build it people will come. People will use it." We think it stands there ready to be done. It only takes political will. Denise's comment is correct. We have said all along that we are willing to do it. We know that if it is tolled it will make money. It is worth 10,000 jobs and it connects all sorts of places where employment is taking place. It will open up parts south of the river for employment in the future. It is worth pointing out that at the moment we are getting to a difficult place—certainly that is the view of the growth boroughs. With some of the transport we have built, we are starting to fill up areas that are well served for that transport. We need a different view about how we develop east and north-east London, and that means more transport infrastructure. Having said that, if you build it in Silvertown, there needs to be a question about the roads that support it. There are all sorts of issues here, but we had better get to grips with them if we want to keep the developments going that generate jobs in east London and generate wealth. We should understand that east London is the area with the greatest level of unemployment, or non-employment, in the country. It is something we should be doing to transform and change the nature of east London, but, coming back to Jim's point, that is the problem; it was opposition from London that stopped it. When we surveyed people, everybody supported it, including people in Bexley.

Q39 Jim Fitzpatrick: I want to follow up Ms Hyland's comments about the extension of London Overground and the Docklands Light Railway. Canary Wharf is located in my constituency and it is anticipated that the 100,000 jobs there at the moment will go as high as 160,000. They need access to south-east London and north Kent for people who have the skills and want the jobs to be able to get to Canary Wharf. Is there a plan for the extension of the overground and the DLR, in co-ordination with these crossings, bridges and tunnels, or are you further backstage in terms of lobbying for those to be included?

Councillor Hyland: The latter. We have put a lot of pressure on TfL to put public transport as an integral part of the crossings. We have been informed by them that both would be possible. Financially nobody quite knows where the money is coming from for all this infrastructure. While I support what Robin is saying about the need for convergence—I am completely in agreement on that—there is a realism that charging has

to take place, otherwise these crossings just will not be built. If Government are prepared to fund them, that is fantastic, but, as Sir Robin says, they will make money and from that point of view they will be self-sufficient.

In terms of the railways, it is an absolute plan to bring the Gospel Oak to Barking overground out. All they now need to do is pop it under the Thames to Thamesmead and Abbey Wood. That has been accepted as quite feasible by TfL and Sir Peter Hendy. In terms of a DLR extension, I imagine that would be an either/or option, and equally feasible. We are looking at a tube going through. In fact, I believe that the Peabody Housing Association are saying that maybe the Gallions bridge could be a tunnel because it would not take so much land grab either side. We are not worried; we just want a crossing and we want our people to get access to those 160,000 jobs at Canary Wharf. Canary Wharf needs people from east London and south-east London.

Q40 Mr Sanders: I am intrigued by this idea that you should not have to pay tolls on your bridge. In my area, Devon, we pay tolls to go to Cornwall, and Cornwall to go to Devon. Those taxpayers are now presumably being asked to help towards the cost of a bridge in the east of London that they might never use. Surely tolls are the only obvious way forward if you yourselves do not have the capital, the capacity or even the permission to borrow to do it.

Sir Robin Wales: If you build the bridge, you will generate economic opportunities and housing that will pay for it. Our problem is that, if you are going to have them, we also want special rates for locals and all the rest of it, as other people would have. My problem is west London, which is one of the wealthiest areas of this country. It does not pay tolls on the bridges it has. There is an inequity in London. The wealthier parts of the city do not pay for this, while we are paying for it out east. You could do something different. You could tax people in west London. That is the inequity of it, and that is part of our concern. I get the question about elsewhere, but in London there is inequity and we need to understand that. You might then say, “Well, if you are going to toll, local people shouldn’t be paying it, or should be paying a substantially reduced toll,” or sometimes it might be free. I just think it is important to feed into this the point that west London, with 22 bridges, does not pay anything, while east London, where all the economic regeneration is going to come, is expected to pay.

We saw it in the extension of the tube. They extended zone 2 to Stratford, but they have not extended it to the docks. As London marches eastwards, when are we going to be treated in the same way as an equivalent area in west London? That is something we need to keep arguing in east London. East should be getting at least the same treatment as west within London.

Councillor Bass: I simply want to make the point that we already pay the tolls. Indeed there are some local exceptions, and rightly so, immediately on either side of the crossing, but I say again that this is part of the strategic trunk network. The people who are paying tolls to use that particular very busy crossing, which is more than paying for itself, are in essence entitled to say, “When is the next stage of our strategic network going to be completed? When is the M25 going to be completed?” I do not detract in any way from what is being said by our colleagues who are concerned about the growth of the east end of London, but it is a different issue.

In terms of the use of tolls, I do not think any of the three of us here are averse to the principle of tolling, if it will get the additional crossing that is so desperately needed.

Councillor Hyland: If charging is brought in, it needs to be consistent for these crossings. It needs flexibility to manage traffic demand in terms of numbers and the volume of vehicles, and it should be based on emission levels as well. It should be common sense really. If there is no traffic coming south in the peak times, why charge? There should be some common sense. The technology should be free flow—completely.

Q41 Sarah Champion: I have a specific question for Sir Robin and Ms Hyland. You say that you have done all the surveys, and everything is in place for your crossing but it is being blocked by the Mayor's office. Can you specify what their objections are or what blocks they have put in place to prevent it from happening?

Councillor Hyland: We did not mean to mislead you there. It is the actual building of the bridge that we are not able to do; we do not have the powers to build the bridge. The Mayor has the power to build the bridge. The GLA and TfL would have to devolve that power to us. That's all it is. All the surveys and environment impact assessments are done by the promoter of the bridge and the tunnel, and that is TfL.

Q42 Sarah Champion: Would it require a change in legislation for them to hand those powers over?

Sir Robin Wales: The Mayor should say, "Let's build it." We have seen movement there; TfL are moving. Their original consultation was on a bridge or a ferry. A 21st-century London crossing being a ferry would be just plain stupid. We are seeing movement and I think that's sensible. We all think it will now get built. We just want it as quickly as possible. Perhaps this Committee can put pressure on and say, "You should be building this quickly." It is an obvious thing to do. It would have been built seven years ago but, I think, for the objection of Bexley.

Q43 Sarah Champion: It is not a no; it is just glacial in its movement forward.

Sir Robin Wales: No; it was a no. It has been a no for the last six and a half years. It was definitely a no. There was a yes beforehand, then it was a no and now I think we are seeing some movement. Things move on and we have had to wait. It is frustrating.

Councillor Hyland: It has always been a yes by us.

Sir Robin Wales: It has always been yes from us; yes.

Q44 Chair: What caused the change? You say it was a no and then a yes. What changed?

Sir Robin Wales: Boris is going to Parliament—come on. The Mayor took a political decision, as is his right when people are elected. It was his right to take that decision. He was wrong to take it, but he took the decision. Now we are beginning to move and that is sensible. I am very confident that the new Mayor will be supportive of this bridge. It is really a no-brainer—it really is. There are issues about the environment. The only arguments that you can put up are environmental; everything else works, so that is the only debate you have to have. There are legitimate cases, but I think they are

overwhelmingly defeated by the need to develop the jobs, the opportunities and the homes that we desperately need.

Q45 Chair: You mentioned environmental questions or challenges. Are any of you concerned about environmental issues connected with new crossings?

Councillor Carter: There is consensus in our neck of the woods for a tunnel, rather than a bridge, because it would be less environmentally damaging and we are told that the cost is similar. That is important. Remember that for the poor residents of Dartford who live close to the M25 the air quality is frankly appalling. One of the DfT options is to look at building an additional Thames crossing at Dartford which would be fed by the same road and would make the environmental impact on air quality absolutely disastrous. That is another reason why we support going towards the estuary, a little bit further east of Gravesend, as the preferred option. While we are looking at that as our preferred option, you have to look at the cost. The river widens quite substantially further east of Gravesend, which is why, if we are to get this additional crossing, it has to be affordable. We believe that by utilising the surplus from the building of the last crossing—it is interesting to note that the Queen Elizabeth bridge paid for itself in about 15 years and not the 25 years expected—and the opportunity to create the additional potential from the new crossing, with the predicted growth in HGVs and travel movements, and in the population in the Thames Gateway, Essex side and Kent side, it begins to become, in the words of Mayor Wales, a no-brainer.

Q46 Chair: Councillor Hyland, do you have any concerns on environmental issues—on air quality or congestion?

Councillor Hyland: Yes, indeed. There is a concern that has been voiced to the council that if you build it they will indeed come. That is why charging, if it is to be used, should be used to control traffic demand in terms of both emission levels and the number of vehicles, as I said earlier. There is concern about displacement and rat-running. I believe that was a major concern, for another London borough that neighbours us, around the Thames Gateway bridge, and I think that is one of the reasons why the Mayor cancelled the Thames Gateway bridge. There are also concerns for residents around noise. Mitigation needs to be put in place by TfL who are the promoter not only of Silvertown tunnel but also of Gallions bridge. That work has yet to come forward.

Q47 Chair: Are you confident that Transport for London is addressing those issues properly?

Councillor Hyland: We are confident that they are on the road to it—if you will pardon the pun.

Chair: That is a very qualified yes.

Councillor Hyland: It is going to be dealt with, as you know, by the development control process. All that evidence will be in public. We expect a lot more work to be done, and there needs to be improvement in sensitivity testing for air quality in our area.

Q48 Chair: Councillor Kent, are there any environmental issues that concern your council?

Councillor Kent: I guess the environmental issues are on two levels. We have already spoken about the air quality problems around the Dartford crossing, both north and south of the river. It is some of the worst anywhere in the country, and I really sympathise with those people in Dartford who live right above what is now the toll plaza. I think we have already covered that one.

As far as option C is concerned, it would have a devastating impact on the green belt in Thurrock. It would look to build something like an 8 km highway through really quite important green belt, which includes the only fenlands in the country outside Suffolk and Norfolk. It would have quite a devastating impact on sites that are both locally and internationally important. It would go through heritage sites and do real damage to the possibility of proper flood protection and mitigation.

Councillor Bass: I thought the fens were actually in Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk, but never mind. The point I wanted to make, just to add to that, is that if we have the additional crossing, the lower Thames crossing, it also gives the opportunity to manage exactly how you want, through tolling arrangements or differential tolling arrangements, the traffic flows across this very important crossing. That is the only additional point. That should have regard to environmental considerations.

Councillor Carter: This links to my previous point. It is not just about where you strategically place the lower Thames crossing—it is the connectivity with Dover docks and the other road improvements that are needed to make sure that it mitigates some of the considerable restraints on the transport network elsewhere in Kent, and I am sure in Essex as well.

Q49 Chair: What impact will the proposed crossings in the lower Thames and east London have on each other?

Councillor Bass: I think they would be complementary. We cannot see any real case, other than that traffic is going to grow very substantially at the Dartford crossing. We have looked at, and indeed commented upon, the other options, including Gallions and others for which we have expressed broad support. We think from all that has been said that innately economic activity all the way along the Thames corridor, north and south, is growing at such a rate that frankly, it is going to cause a slow-down if we don't take these strategic decisions quickly. Almost the quickest way to build up economic activity is to do these very important infrastructure projects, so I would argue most strongly that probably they are indeed complementary. Certainly, as far as we have looked at it, we have supported the more inner-London crossings as being important.

Q50 Chair: Is that an agreed view? No one has any different view from that.

Councillor Kent: All I would add is that we should look at the Transport for London figures. They suggest that crossing at Belvedere would take up to 800 vehicles an hour in the peak away from the Dartford crossing, which clearly is useful when it comes to maximising the current infrastructure. The second thing to add is that free-flow tolling, introduced on 1 December, has had a hugely positive impact. We now have people complaining that they got speeding tickets on the bridge on a Friday afternoon, which would have been unthinkable only two months ago.

Councillor Hyland: The vast majority of traffic that goes north in the Blackwall tunnel does not begin its journey in the Royal Borough of Greenwich. If people wish to avoid the charge at Dartford they come up to Blackwall tunnel, so we get everybody else's congestion. It is crucial that there is a package of river crossings across the Thames going east so that people start thinking about their geographical destination rather than about escaping a charge.

Q51 Chair: How big do you think that problem could be?

Councillor Hyland: It is a very big problem now because of the lack of river crossings between Dartford and Tower bridge. You have Blackwall and Rotherhithe, which has its own restrictions, and you have the ferry. That has a third of the capability of a vehicular crossing and is of course awfully badly affected by fog.

Councillor Carter: London only has one direction to expand in significantly, and that is east into Kent. If you do not get forward funding for the investment that is needed in the infrastructure, the whole lot will stagnate; you will not get the private sector investment needed, and there will be a massive missed opportunity for commercial growth and significant housing growth. It needs to be made fast because it is getting worse, other than the free tolling, which has made a difference and will help for a couple of years. But just look at the statistics for projected freight growth from the Department for Transport, from Dover Harbour Board, from London Gateway et al. It needs to be made urgently. I would just like to emphasise that building another crossing at Dartford would be a massive missed opportunity, and should not be supported in any shape or form. It is where I think some civil servants in the Department for Transport are looking to go. I make that plea now.

Q52 Chair: Sir Robin, you said very forcefully that you felt the impediment to progress had now been resolved. What will happen now?

Sir Robin Wales: I am optimistic—I am always optimistic. I think we will get a bridge at Gallions fairly quickly. Most people recognise the need for it. There have been lots of studies, properly done and properly researched. We have all the arguments there. I think Silvertown will happen at the same time. They need to be seen together. The comment from Denise is correct; you need to see them as a package of crossings. We would love a tunnel rather than a bridge, but whatever would be effective at Gallions. It needs to be seen as a package, recognising that London does not stop at Dartford but goes on, or rather that the country doesn't stop at Dartford, and recognising the need for other crossings.

I have to say that I despair at our inability in this country to recognise the importance of strategic transport. We sit with the Olympics as the example and we don't learn from it. If you build stuff, things will happen. What we need is a few Victorians back because they seemed to understand that.

Q53 Jason McCartney: Are you a big supporter of HS2?

Sir Robin Wales: Absolutely, but the idea that we build another really fast rail network and then say, "Oh actually, we are not going to connect it with the one we've already got," is ludicrous. The idea that we would build an international station and not stop at—

Jason McCartney: This is why—

Sir Robin Wales: You asked for this.

Q54 Jason McCartney: Sir Robin, I do not know who any of you are. I am a Member of Parliament for Yorkshire, and you have just proved why the strategic transport infrastructure does not happen. You have just come up with all the reasons for it not to happen.

Sir Robin Wales: No, no; I am a fan of HS2.

Q55 Jason McCartney: No; you are why it doesn't happen. I have just listened to all of you for over an hour. You say you support it but you come up with 100 reasons why it shouldn't happen.

Sir Robin Wales: No. I am entirely a fan of HS2. Our position will be to protect the HS2/HS1 potential link, which should be built later. Build HS2 now, get on with it, connect it up with HS1 and then stopping international trains at an international station is not a major task. We can do that anyway. These are just my pet projects that I wish to get out.

Chair: This session is about river crossings, so I think we will bring it to a conclusion. Thank you all very much.

Examination of Witness

Witness: **Lord Adonis**, gave evidence.

Q56 Chair: Good afternoon, Lord Adonis, and welcome to the Transport Select Committee. We were expecting Lord Heseltine to join us, but I think he has been delayed so we will continue.

Detailed proposals for new river crossings in east London and the lower Thames have been ongoing for almost 35 years. Why do you think there has been so little progress? We have just heard from a witness that it is all the fault of the Mayor, but over 35 years I do not think that can be the full answer. Why do you think it has taken so long?

Lord Adonis: There have been two different but complementary reasons why lower Thames crossings have not been built. The first is the controversy surrounding particular schemes, particularly bridge schemes; the east Thames river crossing saga goes back decades. The second, which explains the failure over the last 10 years, when the case was especially pressing given the priority for developing the Thames Gateway, has been the lack of continuity in policy between administrations. Whereas for many big transport projects there was continuity of administration between the mayoralities of Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson, that unfortunately has not proved to be the case in the specific instance of the Thames Gateway bridge, which was a project that probably would have gone ahead—almost certainly would have gone ahead—if Ken Livingstone had remained Mayor, and which the present Mayor scrapped as one of his first acts on becoming Mayor. My strong sense from all the recent statements of the GLA is that the Mayor is quite anxious to revisit that decision. The latest consultation, which sets out options in respect of river crossings, is part-testimony to that. The other, of course, is the Mayor's decision to take forward the Silvertown tunnel, which hopefully will break the logjam in terms of policy on new river crossings. It is a combination of controversy about individual schemes, plus the lack of continuity and policy between administrations, which explains it.

Q57 Chair: Do you think there is an inevitable clash between strategic needs and local concerns?

Lord Adonis: I do not think it is an inevitable clash. In all transport projects there are always local issues that need to be addressed and resolved. I do not think there has been a powerful enough champion for the strategic interests. That is the way I would put it. Of course, from the mid-1980s until 2000 there was not an elected strategic authority for London, and a project as big and controversial as this is very difficult to take forward without that.

Since the mayoralty of London was established there has been a growing head of steam behind a new bridge. As I say, it would almost certainly have happened if the mayoralty had not changed in 2008. The strategic authority for London—the Greater London Authority—now puts the need for additional east Thames crossings high on its list of priorities. It has published a consultation. The current Mayor is out at the moment with his plan for the Silvertown tunnel. The strategic interest is being represented, but at the crucial moment of transition between administrations in 2008—how shall I put it?—it faltered.

Having said that, I know you have been taking evidence on the lower Thames crossing as well. I just caught the end of your last session with the leader of Kent county council, where they have a keen interest in it too. To be blunt, there has been a failure on the part of the Government itself to take timely decisions. When I was Minister of State for Transport before becoming Secretary of State in 2008, we put out a consultation on the three options for a new lower Thames crossing to relieve the Dartford crossing. Only very recently was that narrowed down to two, so it took the best part of five years to get from three options to two options. The Government is not showing—how can I put it?—any alacrity in making a decision between those two options. The Government is of course the guardian of the strategic road network, and it is down to the Government to see that arrangements are put in place for a new lower Thames crossing.

Q58 Jim Fitzpatrick: Good afternoon, Lord Adonis.

Lord Adonis: We were Ministers together, so he bears a lot of the responsibility.

Q59 Jim Fitzpatrick: I never did roads. In terms of trying to share out the political responsibility for the delays, notwithstanding that, as the Chair said, this has been on the drawing board for over 30 years, Mayor Livingstone was elected on a platform of opposing river crossings in east London because of the vested interests he was beholden to. When Mayor Johnson got elected, he was elected on a platform of being opposed to river crossings in east London. Yet after a number of years both Mayor Livingstone and Mayor Johnson came round to accept the argument that we need river crossings in east London. From what you have just said, and from evidence previously from Ms Dedring, the Deputy Mayor, there is now clearly political consensus between the two major parties—certainly those that supplied the Mayors—that we need river crossings in east London, notwithstanding the strategic issues around Dartford, the M25 and the M11. We need river crossings in east London. Do you think they are going to happen soon? Do you think we are going to get both Silvertown and Gallions, let alone anything else?

Lord Adonis: The imperative for new housing developments in east London and on both banks of the Thames—Barking going east and Greenwich going east—is now so strong that it simply will not happen until you have better connectivity. Look at the whole saga of Barking Riverside. The problem is that these are island communities at the moment. You cannot get across the Thames. There is a realisation that it simply won't happen without some additional road crossings of the Thames. That is driving policy now—the realisation that this cannot be further delayed.

To be fair to the current Mayor, he was not elected in 2008 on a policy of opposing all river crossings. He was elected on a policy of opposing the particular one which was proposed to go forward. He said when he cancelled it that he was open to other schemes. Also to be fair to him—I try to be very fair-minded on these issues—he has now, six years on, come forward with the plan, which is proceeding, for the Silvertown crossing. He said when he cancelled the Thames Gateway bridge that he thought there was a strong case for a crossing at Silvertown. Those of us who have looked at the data—in particular the economic imperatives in terms of housing and business developments in east London—have come to realise that the Silvertown crossing, though it is welcome and appears to be making good progress, is unlikely to be enough on its own. The issue of a further crossing at Gallions and/or at Belvedere is now very much on the agenda. I hope it will be on the agenda whoever is Mayor in 2016.

Q60 Chloe Smith: Lord Adonis, I understood that the DfT work in 2009 started with five rather than three, so there was a slightly wider funnel. You described it as having taken too long to get from three to two, but it was indeed five to two. Could you talk us through your views on those options and the options as they currently stand?

Lord Adonis: You will be taking a lot of evidence on the pros and cons. Another crossing right next to the Dartford crossing of course provides immediate relief for Dartford and the Dartford crossing itself. It is cheaper and could probably be built quicker. A crossing further east provides a wider range of new connections but is more expensive, and therefore of course it will take longer to pay back the costs of it. Those in summary are the arguments, but you will be deluged with data making all those points in greater detail.

Q61 Chloe Smith: But what is your opinion? What is the best option?

Lord Adonis: The answer is that I am not absolutely sure. Not having wrestled with all of the consultation responses, I do not think it would be appropriate for me to give a firm opinion. When the consultation was launched, I can say that the view of the Highways Agency was that the most practical proposition, and the one that was most likely to go forward because it was the cheapest and likely to be the least controversial, was a direct relief of the existing Dartford crossing.

Q62 Chloe Smith: Considering some of what you heard from the previous panel, do you give credence to any particular drawbacks of the remaining options that are on the table?

Lord Adonis: As I say, the other option is more expensive and will therefore, if it is going to be paid back substantially by private finance, be a tougher business case; but there is a wider range of connectivity. I know those who have a keen interest in connections to East Anglia will be mindful of the wider benefits of a crossing to the east.

Q63 Martin Vickers: One of the terms of reference for our inquiry, Lord Adonis, is, “How well does local and national government work together to plan and deliver river crossing projects?” It has been very evident from the evidence we have heard this afternoon that they do not work very well together at all. What changes would you like to see take place?

Lord Adonis: My take on the reason why the river crossings have not happened is not that there is not sufficient co-operation between national and local government but that there is not sufficiently strong leadership. If the Mayor had led decisively to take forward the Thames Gateway crossing, it would have happened. There had been huge processes of consultation taking place, with public inquiries and so on. In 2008 central Government had made available the PFI credits for the bridge to proceed. The reason why the Thames Gateway bridge did not proceed in 2008 was not inadequate consultation with or co-operation between central and local government; to be blunt, from my point of view, I would see it as a failure of leadership on the part of the GLA. If you were opposed to it, you could say that it was simply the decision taken by the Mayor not to proceed. Similarly in the case of the lower Thames crossing, the reason why it is not proceeding at the moment, or is not in the serious planning stage, is because central Government itself has not led. It obviously has to resolve differences of opinion among local authorities, but part of the reason why it has not sought to resolve them is because it did not want to take a decision.

My view on this, as is my view on many infrastructure projects, is that what people say are very deep and intractable differences of opinion are not in fact the case. It is the failure of the responsible body either to lead or to resolve differences where they exist. In the case of the Thames Gateway bridge, it was a decision by the Mayor not to proceed with it, which was the reason why he did not proceed. There was sufficient agreement between central and local government for it to proceed. In the case of the lower Thames crossing, the Government still have not made up their mind.

You can see that in respect of Silvertown, where the Mayor has decided to lead. The project is going through the planning phase at the moment. Central Government has been entirely constructive in the development of the project. Not everyone is happy; of course they are not. There are a lot of concerns about the impact on roads to and from the Silvertown tunnel in local communities, but the Mayor has managed to resolve local differences of opinion and take a decision.

Martin Vickers: Just as an aside, Chair, the Mayor has come in for quite a bit of criticism this afternoon. Is it your intention to ask him to come and give evidence?

Chair: We have not currently decided. That is a matter for members.

Q64 Martin Vickers: Could I just come back on what Lord Adonis said? Our report is critical of the fact that we have been discussing the London crossings in particular for 35 years. Presumably your criticism of Government extends back to Governments for the last 35 years, and you would accept criticism of your own Government in that respect.

Lord Adonis: Yes. This goes back a long way. It is important to separate the two. The Queen Elizabeth II bridge was completed in 1991—I am waiting to be corrected, but no one is correcting me, so that must be right. Of course, you would not have built an additional crossing immediately after. It took some time for the congestion issues relating to the Dartford crossing to become apparent. I do not think the failure is as long running in respect of the lower Thames crossing as it is in respect of the east Thames crossing, where it goes back to the 1940s.

Q65 Chair: There have been some suggestions about setting up a development corporation or a mayoral corporation to progress this scheme. Do you think that that is not necessary? Are you saying it is solely about the Mayor?

Lord Adonis: A recommendation in the report of the Centre for London Group, which I chaired, was that there should be a mayoral development corporation to take the bridges forward, and to take over the management of the existing Blackwall tunnel as part of that. It was just a pragmatic judgment that we formed. If you had a special purpose vehicle with a relentless focus on developing the bridges as projects and then on managing them effectively after, the development of the bridges would happen faster and better. It was a pragmatic view. We recommended a development partner; we did not say a development corporation in the end, though there had been people who suggested a development corporation. We said that there should be a special purpose vehicle which would have a development partner working alongside TfL, and they would be joint venture partners in this special purpose vehicle. That is the recommendation we made. My view was that the same concept could be applied in respect of the lower Thames crossing too—a special

purpose vehicle specifically to plan, build and operate both the existing Dartford crossing and the new crossing, probably as a joint venture with Government.

Q66 Chair: Why do you think neither of those things happened?

Lord Adonis: They have not taken any decision to proceed at all. It was perfectly open to the Mayor and/or the Government to propose such a special purpose vehicle if they wished to do so.

Q67 Jim Fitzpatrick: The consensus that we heard about in the past two evidence sessions quite clearly separates the strategic crossing at Dartford and the London crossings. As an east London MP, I have Canary Wharf in my constituency, and they are quite clearly saying that they have the potential to expand from the 100,000 jobs there at the moment to 160,000, but they need access to the potential work force in south-east London and north Kent. River crossings are critical for the business community to be able to continue to expand. Given that east London is London's engine for the next 30 years, as it has been for much of the last 30 years, and with Mayor Johnson's approval of the Silvertown crossing which we heard was going to be good for congestion, and the Gallions Reach crossing which is really important for more local needs, those two crossings really need to complement each other and need to go ahead together. Yes?

Lord Adonis: When I was leading the Centre for London study, all the evidence we received from business supported that, both in respect of jobs and also crucially in respect of housing. Both the north and the south bank of the Thames getting significant housing developments under way, for example at Barking Reach and Thamesmead, crucially depended upon cross-Thames road connectivity.

Q68 Jim Fitzpatrick: Have you taken a view on the public transport element of these crossings and what that should be? We heard earlier from witnesses about extending the overground and extending the Docklands Light Railway. Have you gone into that much detail in respect of this?

Lord Adonis: Part of the benefit of having road crossings is that you can get buses across the east Thames. Remember that there is only one bus route that crosses the Thames east of Tower bridge. That is a big part of the problem about people accessing jobs and being able to get around. If you had road crossings, you would also be able to get a network of buses across the Thames too.

Of course, there have been a significant number of rail crossings of the east Thames. There is the Jubilee line and the extension of the Docklands Light Railway. There is clearly a case, if the overground is to go into Barking, for seeking to take it across the Thames too. That should be looked at as an option, particularly if the Gallions crossing is going to be developed.

Q69 Chair: What is the best way of funding river crossings?

Lord Adonis: There clearly needs to be a public-private partnership. There seems to be a consensus that that would involve tolls, as with the proposal for the Thames Gateway bridge. Obviously you would need an arrangement for discounts on tolls for local residents to make it more acceptable locally. A new lower Thames crossing would of course extend the current tolling regime that applies to the Dartford crossing.

Q70 Chair: Lord Adonis, thank you very much for coming. We value your evidence even though you are here in a different role from the last time you came.

Lord Adonis: Thank you very much. All the best for your inquiry.