



Transport Committee

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

Monday 9 February 2015

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 9 February 2015.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [ITS UK](#)
- [Association for Consultancy and Engineering](#)
- [Department for Transport](#)

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Members present: Mrs Louise Ellman (Chair); Jim Fitzpatrick; Karl McCartney; Mr Adrian Sanders; Chloe Smith and Martin Vickers.

Questions 135-187

Witnesses: **Eur Ing Sharon Kindleysides**, Chairman, ITS United Kingdom, **Mike Llywelyn-Jones**, Chair, Roads Sector Interest Group, Association for Consultancy and Engineering, and **Tim Healey**, Deputy Chair, Road Sector Interest Group, Association for Consultancy and Engineering gave evidence.

Q135 Chair: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Transport Select Committee. Could I have your name and organisation, please?

Sharon Kindleysides: I am Sharon Kindleysides. I am the chairman of ITS UK.

Tim Healey: I am Tim Healey. I am representing the Association for Consultancy and Engineering.

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: I am Mike Llywelyn-Jones. I am also representing the Association for Consultancy and Engineering. I am the chairman of the roads sector interest group.

Q136 Chair: In its written evidence, the association says that the abolition of regional planning bodies has made co-ordination between local and national Government more difficult. Could one of you tell us why you think that? How far do you think that the local enterprise councils have addressed that problem?

Tim Healey: I will pick that up. The local economic partnerships—the LEPs—are in their infancy, to a degree. Not all are fully mature; some are, and some are gaining momentum. They do not always correspond to boundaries that encompass a river crossing. They are doing a good job in terms of providing the link to support economic growth through

partnerships with local authorities and local business, but the situation has probably been confused over the last five years because there has been the transition process between the RDAs and the LEPs.

Q137 Chair: Is the solution to the problem to make the LEPs bigger, or to combine them? Would you say that this issue is being addressed by Government?

Tim Healey: The LEPs have to find a way of working together where there is a boundary issue. To some extent that is already happening. There is the example of an organisation called One North, which has pulled together across the Pennines a case for the trans-Pennine crossing between Manchester and Sheffield.

Q138 Chair: If we look specifically at strategic river crossings, is the issue being addressed by combining local enterprise partnerships or in similar ways?

Tim Healey: The solution is certainly to combine LEPs, where a river boundary is the boundary for the LEPs. For some LEPs, the boundary is beyond the river crossing. With the Thames, for example, there is one LEP involved. If you were talking about Devon and Cornwall, two LEPs would be involved.

Q139 Chair: Mr Llywelyn-Jones, do you want to add something?

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: Yes. It is a case of facilitated collaboration, or something like that—to look at the strategic objectives and to try to achieve consensus on what they are. A bottom-up approach, in which each of the LEPs, the local authorities or whatever would state their priorities and those would gradually be grouped into what was the regional priority and, ultimately, what were the national priorities, strikes me as a way in which local opinions could be given; but a strategic overview would have to be taken, because the nature of a strategic crossing is that its impact will be far wider than the area that is considering whether or not to put money into the venture.

Q140 Chair: In your experience, looking specifically at strategic river crossings, who takes the initiative in having that overall perspective?

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: It has been a real mixture. It depends on the leaders of the organisations concerned. Mersey is a very good example. Halton borough council, which is a very small authority, took the initiative and got the Mersey Gateway project going. If you look at the crossings in east London, there has obviously been a lot of difference of opinion over the years.

To me, at one level the issue is very analogous to the reasons why Highways England is being set up, in that what is needed is strategic decision making and then periods of stability while projects can be progressed. To a certain extent, the more organisations that are involved, the more the changes of view that will occur. Because it takes so long for projects to progress, you might progress on one path for three or four years and then there might be a change, but you will not have reached the point where you have achieved something, so you are then around the circle again. There is a big analogy to the reasons why Highways England is occurring.

Q141 Chair: The Government have said that their national infrastructure plan helps to deliver projects by providing clarity and visibility for industry and supply chains. Do you think that that has occurred for transport projects, and for river crossings specifically?

Tim Healey: It is a good start. We would like to see a vision for what the transport map of the UK would look like in 2050, so that it can be worked towards progressively over the years in a logical, sequential way. At the moment, the national infrastructure plan sets out a framework for sensible infrastructure investment, but it does not go as far as setting out a definition of what the transport map would look like in, say, 2050.

Q142 Chair: Has the infrastructure pipeline brought investment from private sector partners? Has it helped?

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: It has worked to some extent. It is certainly an awful lot better than the situation when there was no pipeline, but improvements are still needed. As these things are developed, they need to be refined. Its format needs to be refined to reflect industry feedback, in terms of what people thinking of investing or getting involved are actually looking for. It certainly needs to be up to date. I had a look at it yesterday in preparation; some very large road projects are not on it.

Q143 Chair: Would you like to tell us what those are?

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: The M4, to the south of Newport in south Wales, with a construction cost estimate of £1 billion, does not appear to feature. I may not have found it, but I tried quite hard to find it.

Q144 Chair: There is a priority list, isn't there—a top 40?

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: Yes, but this was in the whole spreadsheet pipeline.

Q145 Chair: Does the top 40 priority help to make things happen?

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: I am not sure that it does. Could I finish on the pipeline first? If I were somebody who was thinking of getting involved, the most useful thing to me would be a distinction between which schemes are still available and which schemes are, effectively, spoken for, because a contractor has already been appointed or whatever. That is not necessarily clear, because a contractor might be appointed, yet construction might not commence for three or four years. You might look at the pipeline and think, "Oh, there's an opportunity," if you looked at the spend profile, but actually somebody has already been appointed.

A distinction between projects that are still available and projects that are spoken for, because various appointments have already been made, would be very useful, as would a security of funding indicator, which might be as simplistic as green-amber-red, in terms of how certain the funding was, or something along those lines. You could look at that and say, "Okay, I can be reasonably certain that that one is going to happen in those years. Clearly, that one is only going to happen if money is available." Then you could prioritise the ones you were really interested in by which were available and which were likely to receive definite funding. The top 40 is good, but, if all of that was in place, the top 40 would almost wither on the vine, because you could determine the top 40 from the more robust and useful pipeline information.

Q146 Chair: Presumably that is not happening now, so what does the top 40 show?

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: The top 40 sends a bit of a mixed message at the moment. Some of the top 40 are single projects, but No. 1, which I looked up, is a group of four projects, all of which are separately in the pipeline. No. 7 has four projects in it; two are separately on the pipeline, but two are in a group. You start to think, “Are these really the top 40? Are they actually the top 100, but in groups, so that there are 40 in total?” There is not a clear message to people who are looking to get involved as to which are the top 40, and within the top 40 you might have one item where three of the projects have already been awarded but the fourth one has not. That information would not necessarily be clear, if you were looking at it from outside; if, say, you were a continental firm looking to get involved, it would not be that obvious.

Q147 Chair: Mr Healey, do you want to add anything to that or to dissent from anything that has been said?

Tim Healey: That is fine.

Q148 Chair: We heard that the Tyne tunnels are too small to cope with long-term traffic flows, because there was insufficient funding when they were designed and constructed. Is that a common problem?

Tim Healey: It is a very common problem. It has been happening for years. If you look at the major river crossings in this country—the Mersey, the Severn, the Forth and the Dartford crossings—all of them have been duplicated. When they were first constructed, there was not future-proofing, or the means of catering for capacity 20 years or so into the future. It is happening acutely at Dartford again, in that we started out with a single tunnel, 20 years later we got a second tunnel and about 20 years later we got a bridge. Now, four lanes in each direction are at capacity, and there is a need, generally accepted, for a further crossing on the lower Thames, either duplicating Dartford or somewhere close to it.

We have also seen a situation with crossings of rivers such as the Trent. Fifteen or 20 years ago, in the early 1990s, the A46 was taken over the Trent by construction of a new viaduct. That was a single-carriageway viaduct, albeit a wide single carriageway. The cost at the time of providing a viaduct wide enough to be able to cater for a future dual carriageway would have been very small in relation to the cost of the overall scheme at the time. We might have been talking about something in the order of £3 million in the early 1990s. Now, 20 or so years later, that section of road is at capacity. To put a duplicate crossing of the Trent there now, with a viaduct for the Trent flood plain and the River Trent, would be very complicated indeed in engineering terms. It would be impacted upon by the fact that you have a road there with traffic on it and it would be many, many times the £3 million or so that it would have cost to do it in the first place in the 1990s. Examples like that abound around the country.

Q149 Chair: Ms Kindleysides, what is your experience of this problem?

Sharon Kindleysides: It is not my technical area, but I certainly concur that it is one of these situations where, as soon as you build something new, the traffic diverts to go on to that route and fills up the capacity, when it may not have been there before. On the

converse side, £3 million 30 years ago is probably comparable to what it would cost today to build the extra capacity. I can only offer an educated bystander's view, I am afraid.

Q150 Chair: Can technology or design help to limit the environmental impact, if it is a negative one?

Sharon Kindleysides: Absolutely. This is where intelligent transportation systems can come into their own. I live in Ely, where at the moment they are contemplating a bypass, which will cost £X million. The solution that I am proposing is that you could use ITS to hold lorries back and meter them through a controlled crossing. You could hold them somewhere where they were not sitting at a road junction with their engines running. If you knew that you had time to get five lorries through, you would let five lorries through on a red phase of the traffic lights and then hold them back, so that the engines were not running.

You can look at problems in a different way to avoid building infrastructure. We need to manage it better and to make considerations such as, "Do we want lorries using this at a certain time of day?" Would it be better to say, "Okay, all lorries come later in the evening. Lorries over a certain weight have to go on a different route"? You can use intelligent transportation ways of managing the traffic, rather than just saying, "Everybody has to go the same way at the same time of day."

Q151 Chair: Would you say that that approach is being adopted for new river crossings now?

Sharon Kindleysides: No. The only one I know of is in Dublin. For the port of Dublin tunnel, they set the toll on purpose so that lorries would use the tunnel to get them to the port side. They set the toll high enough to dissuade cars, so that they would go around the M50 and split the traffic.

Q152 Chair: Why do you think that these issues are not considered pertinent when new river crossings are being considered?

Sharon Kindleysides: I think it is partly that our industry is not very good at selling the benefits of how to manage a situation. Everybody knows what a bridge or a tunnel looks like, but if you explain to somebody, "Actually, you can do stuff electronically, with signals and sensors," it is very difficult for people in local authorities to get their head around that—it is not something physical that you can see—whereas with a bridge you can be seen to be doing something. It is a fault on our side for not selling the benefits better and explaining that you do not always have to go the infrastructure route.

Q153 Chair: You mentioned local authorities. Is this to do with the people promoting the schemes not having sufficient knowledge or not being sufficiently aware of the possibilities?

Sharon Kindleysides: It is a mixture of both—not having the knowledge and not being aware of the technologies. The automatic assumption is that you need a bypass, a tunnel or a bridge. It is not at the forefront of people's minds that there are other ways of doing it.

Q154 Karl McCartney: You mentioned electronic signs, which we see on motorways all over the place. People read those messages, but there is a push-pull factor. Looking at the one toll on a motorway that we have, if you are driving anywhere near Birmingham, do those

messages work? Do they increase or decrease the amount of traffic— although I don't think the owners would want to decrease the amount of traffic on the M6 toll road?

Sharon Kindleysides: I am not sure that they work on the M6 as such. I have seen them work very well in America, where they are used on the high-occupancy tolling lanes. They are a lot more widespread there. They show you that congestion is coming up and that you have a chance to get on to the high-occupancy tolling lane in 2 miles—the congestion ahead is x and the time to y is whatever. That seems to work very well. It works to some extent on the M6, but people are still not as used to the idea of being able to take route A or route B, even though it has been there for quite some time.

Q155 Chair: Is enough information made available—for example, traffic modelling information? Is that part of the problem?

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: In my view, yes. We in this country are extremely good at informing the public of the various impacts of various options—the traffic predictions and the environmental impacts—at all the stages. We spend a lot of time doing that, and I think it is right that we do, because the public need to understand the implications of decisions when they are deciding whether they support them or not. We do a lot on that and I think we are good at it.

Q156 Chair: Is there any sound evidence that new river crossings promote economic regeneration?

Tim Healey: At Dartford, for example, we have seen significant development and economic growth in the areas on either side of the tunnel, bridge or crossing. Over the years, we have seen the development of major shopping centres at Lakeside and Bluewater, and major development of industrial and commercial parks to the south of the Dartford crossing. If you were to analyse that and to look at what it meant to the economies of those boroughs of Kent and Essex, I am sure you would find that significant economic activity has been stimulated as a result of the crossing being in place. That does not always happen, but at most crossings it does. One where it is questionable is the Humber crossing, which does not seem to have led to much development on the southern side, in south Lincolnshire. However, generally speaking, the presence of a crossing seems to—

Q157 Martin Vickers: That is my cue, so I will come in at that point. Since the tolls were reduced, the use of the bridge has increased considerably. It is too early to produce academic research and so on, but there is anecdotal evidence that there has been a very considerable boost to the local economy at the southern end of the bridge, around Barton-upon-Humber. To take one example, Wren Kitchens, who took over what was the Kimberly-Clark factory, are building 300 new homes on that site in order to accommodate what is now a boost to the local economy, not only through a boost to local industry but due to the fact that it is now a commuter area for Hull. It is by far and away the best suburb of Hull, without any shadow of a doubt. Miss Smith, who was a Treasury Minister at the time when we were campaigning on the tolls, will perhaps confirm that one of the major considerations was that evidence was coming forward from local industry and so on that it would boost the local economy. That is a statement, rather than a question, but I would be interested to hear your comments.

Tim Healey: I would certainly accept that. If you get the toll right, so that you do not suppress demand, it should be a stimulus for the local economy.

Q158 Chair: You are agreeing with Mr Vickers.

Tim Healey: I am.

Q159 Jim Fitzpatrick: Good afternoon. Mr Healey, can I take you back to a point that you made earlier about future-proofing? I will talk about the Thames, if you will forgive me, as it is my part of the world. Specifically at Dartford, you described it as 20 years, 20 years and 20 years. It is almost crisis management, isn't it? There is no future-proofing at that crossing, and certainly in east London we are at crisis point. The Mayor of London has now been forced to do something, and DFT has been helping with that. Is that replicated in the rest of the country? Do we look at additional crossings only when the congestion is such that we need to do something, or is there better future-proofing outside London? Given the density of traffic on the Thames, can ITS play a part? Surely there is just so much traffic that it is very difficult to introduce intelligent systems to help, or would IT systems help a lot more?

Tim Healey: You are right. London is a particularly acute case, but it is not unique. In my view, in London there has been a case for further crossings of the Thames—you will notice that I use the plural rather than the singular—for many years. I recall my own company working on a scheme to provide a further crossing at Blackwall some 20-odd years ago. There was a case for it then, and the arguments for multiple crossings of the Thames downstream of Tower bridge are proven beyond doubt.

You asked whether it happens further afield only when it reaches crisis management stage. Examples such as the Forth and the Severn are perhaps instructive. We reached the stage where the first Severn crossing was absolutely at capacity before we got round to building the second crossing. On the Forth, they are in the process of building a parallel crossing now. It seems that it always takes much longer than we think to get one of these projects in place, so, by the time it happens. It is not only needed but has been desperately needed for some years.

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: One of the issues is that, when you design the capacity of a new capital road scheme, you design it such that it will flow in an acceptable way, in the peak periods, 15 years after the road is opened. If it is a new road across the countryside, the additional cost of widening is proportionately not that high. There would be a case for a policy decision that when it is a strategic crossing, where the cost of additional widening of a bridge or a tunnel is vast, you design it not for 15 years afterwards but for something like 30 years after, because the cost of being wrong, as it is sometimes described, is very large indeed. That does not occur at the moment. Everything is designed for 15 years after. There would be a case for a policy change when it is a strategic crossing.

Q160 Chair: I would like to turn to tolls; we have a number of questions on that. Could you tell us what the current situation is in relation to the European electronic tolling service?

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: I cannot, but I am sure that Sharon can.

Sharon Kindleysides: I do not know what your knowledge of EETS—the electronic tolling act—is, but the idea behind it was to enable drivers to have one contract and one box in their car and to make one payment for use on all the 200 or so tolling systems in

Europe that were deemed to need to be interoperable. It has proved quite an uphill struggle, mainly because nobody has yet registered to become an EETS provider. My understanding is that one company is currently going through the registration process, but, because you have to be interoperable with 200 systems and provide the same level of service as the in-country provider, it is something that only very large companies might be interested in. At the moment, nobody has found it attractive enough from a financial point of view to want to become an EETS provider. The law is in place and people can register to become EETS providers, but nobody has done it yet.

Q161 Chair: Is there sufficient interoperability between charging systems in this country and those in the rest of Europe?

Sharon Kindleysides: Absolutely. Most of the charging systems in the UK are based on microwave technology, which is called DSRC. That is controlled by European CEN standards, so every tolling system operates on the same wavelength, for want of a better word. It is like a mobile phone handset. Everything is designed in the same way, to work on the same frequency. There are a couple of extra systems—Italy has its own, slightly different standard—but, as a rule, most of the systems are technically interoperable, because there is the same standard.

Q162 Chair: Does free-flow technology increase the risk that users will not pay? That is what we have been told in evidence.

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: Absolutely, because you do not have to drive through a barrier. The 407 highway, on the outskirts of Toronto, was the first free-flow toll road in the world. They have had some legislation passed that makes it an offence to evade a toll. If you go through and your number plate is recognised, but you do not have a transponder on the windscreen, you have to pay by a certain day, and, if you do not, you get a reminder. In the end, because of the legislation, when you come to renew your car tax, they know that you have not paid and you cannot renew your car tax. It has taken a bit of time, but it has proved very successful. It has vastly reduced the number of people who avoid the tolls, although, as a slight aside, they have some great videos of people driving under the cameras with somebody sitting in the boot with a piece of cardboard over the number plate so that it cannot be recognised.

Q163 Chair: Does free-flow tolling require technological ability from users?

Sharon Kindleysides: No. I knew that this question was coming, so I am afraid that I have brought a couple of props. This tiny little plastic box is a free-flow tag. All you have to do is take off the sticky-back plastic and put it in the windscreen. There are no buttons—nothing. This is the same as is used on the M6, the Dartford crossing and the M50 in Ireland; it is quite widely used throughout Europe. It requires nothing at all. Slightly more complicated are the truck tolling ones, where you have to tell it how many axles you've got. You press a button until the light changes the number. It is incredibly simple.

Q164 Chair: So there is no problem.

Sharon Kindleysides: No problem whatsoever. That is all it is.

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: The issue is for people who are non-habitual users and do not have one of those in the car: how are they going to pay? One of the most user-friendly systems

that I have seen on the continent is where there is a separate barrier to the side, if you wish to pay with money. It is like putting coins into a pay-and-display car park machine. You can divert off, put the money in, go through that barrier, and away you go. You do not then have to find some way of paying afterwards because your number plate was recognised or whatever. For people who wanted to do that—to pull off the main route and just put some coins or notes into the machine—it was a good alternative.

Q165 Chair: Where is dynamic charging used?

Sharon Kindleysides: It is used an awful lot in America, and it is also used in Singapore. You can use it both ways. You can use it as a deterrent; in Singapore, for example, as congestion rises they increase the toll or the congestion charge for going into Singapore. In America, they vary the price on the high-occupancy lanes. If the main freeway is getting blocked and they would like people to go into the high-occupancy lane, they may drop the toll; if the freeway is not so busy, they can set a median price. It is very good. The slight downside is that people have to know how much they are paying. All of these involve having plenty of road signs, which I think the gentlemen here would agree with. You put up as many signs as you can: “You are entering the zone and this is what it is costing you.”

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: It is extremely good for people who want a reliable journey time. You get the signs in advance. If you want to use the free-flow lane, it will cost \$2, \$3 or whatever the price is, which is worked out continually by an algorithm. If you want to get to the other end, say 10 miles, in a guaranteed time, you say, “Okay; I’ll go in there,” and you will get to the other end in that guaranteed time. If too many people start doing it, the toll goes up and fewer people do it. It continually varies, but you know you can get to the other end in a guaranteed time.

Q166 Chair: You make it sound very easy, but what problems have emerged, or are you telling me there are no problems?

Mike Llywelyn-Jones: I am aware that a couple have opened in Texas, but I am not aware of any issues, because it is too recent.

Sharon Kindleysides: The main problem is like the one the London congestion charge had. If 6 o’clock in the morning is when you start paying your congestion charge, people might think, “I was on it at the cheaper time of day.” You get the usual quibbles you heard from whoever the radio presenter was. It is more that people feel hard done to because they paid more than they thought they were going to than there being any technological issues.

Q167 Chair: No problems. So all of these systems can be used?

Sharon Kindleysides: Yes.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Mr John Hayes MP**, Minister of State, Department for Transport, **Graham Dalton**, Chief Executive, Highways Agency, **Penny Mordaunt MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government, and **James Hooson**, Project Director for the Lower Thames Crossing, Department for Transport, gave evidence.

Q168 Chair: Good afternoon, and welcome to the Transport Select Committee. The two Ministers have come here for the first time today. Could we have the positions of everyone? We know the Ministers, but for our records could we have the names of the teams as well?

James Hooson: I am the Department's lead for the lower Thames crossing.

Penny Mordaunt: I am a Minister in DCLG but also Minister for the Thames Gateway.

Mr Hayes: I am Minister of State at the Department for Transport.

Graham Dalton: I am chief executive of the Highways Agency.

Q169 Chair: Thank you. Mr Hayes, I think you wanted to make a statement.

Mr Hayes: I just want to say thank you, Madam Chairman, for inviting us to give evidence on this important subject. It is important given that it is timely, as the Department, the Mayor and the local authorities are embarking on this consideration of new crossings. I know from the previous evidence you have taken that the Committee is interested in the effectiveness of the approach we are adopting in respect of new crossings and the management of existing ones—in particular, how well central and local government are working together. I see that in your terms of reference, and given your distinguished history in local government, Madam Chairman, I am not surprised that it is in your terms of reference. It is quite right that it should be. I share that passion and interest.

We have many positives to bring to you, and we thought it would be helpful to have Graham here as the person who is in a sense dealing with some of the delivery issues associated with that, and James, too, who is leading for the Department on these matters. I do not want to take up too much of your time beyond that, except to say that we are pleased to be here and will try to answer your questions to the best of our ability.

Q170 Chair: Thank you. Minister, you referred to delivery issues, so let us start with that. It has taken five years for the three options for a new crossing on the lower Thames to be reduced to two options, and the Government have said they will not make a final decision until December 2015. Why has this taken so long?

Mr Hayes: If I may say so, Madam Chairman, you are understating how long it has taken, because these matters were first considered in 1994. I have the report here—the review of the future of the lower Thames crossing capacity, which I have studied in considerable detail. It sets out the brief “for the Department for Transport’s review of options for the future of the lower Thames crossing capacity in the context of the Department’s

comprehensive spending review”. The 1994 report led to the further report commissioned under the previous Government in 2009, with which you will also be familiar. The “Dartford River Crossing Study into Capacity Requirement”, which in a sense is the successor to the 1994 document, says that the study is designed “to relieve congestion at the existing crossing; improve the resilience of the crossing and approaches to the crossing, including safety and the reduction of incidents; explore the potential of the options to contribute to wider economic benefits for the Thames Gateway growth area; and avoid significant environmentally sensitive areas and committed development”. As you suggest, this goes back a long way.

In response to that, given that these matters have been considered since 1994 under the previous Government and this one, it is important that we get this right. We have narrowed the options, as you know. We have been engaged in extensive consultation under this Government, and we can talk about that at some length. My judgment is that doing the diligence now probably will save time later, in that we need to build consensus. I think that was the phrase used by one of your previous witnesses on this very subject during this very inquiry. Consensus is necessary, and it is essential in building that consensus to be as thorough, detailed and consultative as we can in developing and delivering our thinking. Yes, it has taken a long time, indeed since 1994, but it seems to me absolutely right that we do this job well and thoroughly.

Q171 Chair: Are you saying, Minister, that it is inevitable that this sort of time is taken to look at all the issues and to try to reach consensus, and that it could not be made shorter or dealt with more efficiently by a different procedure, perhaps with more devolution to local areas?

Mr Hayes: From now on in, having done a substantial amount of work—I think I have illustrated that in what I have said already—we can look at how things can be moved ahead with greater alacrity. I understand the frustration. Of all the parts of our strategic road network—no doubt Graham will elaborate—the one where capacity is most pressing is probably the existing Dartford crossing. Given that as an imperative, and given that we have done this homework, we can move with reasonable alacrity from now on, but we can do so only on the basis of building consensus and taking people with us. It is important that whatever we do we get right, and that seems to me to depend on building that consensual approach.

Q172 Mr Sanders: If you could be in charge of all things planning and transport, what one thing would you change in order to speed up important transport infrastructure projects?

Mr Hayes: I often dream—I hesitate to say fantasise—about being in charge of all things, not just in the field of transport.

Q173 Mr Sanders: Can we just leave it with transport for now?

Mr Hayes: I will limit myself for the purposes of this answer. The critical thing is probably making sure that we see this development in the context of our overall thinking about the significance of a strategic transport plan. As you will know, for the first time we have developed a road investment strategy which looks long term; we are planning a strategy that runs through to 2021 with money to match. Up until relatively recently—Jim and others will comment on it, given their rich history in this field—part of the problem

has been the absence of strategic thinking. If there is one thing I want to do, it is to take that model of more strategic thinking about transport planning and extend it across a whole range of modes of transport, to talk about how we blend our thinking on all kinds of means and modes of transport and build our strategy in that way.

Q174 Mr Sanders: But would that actually speed anything up, other than help prioritise?

Mr Hayes: I think it would. Perhaps I have made my point insufficiently persuasively. The trouble with a piecemeal approach to transport is that in the end it slows things down. If you have a very clear long-term view—a roadmap, if you like, of the destination you want to get to—I suspect it is much easier to navigate your way forward. When you are dealing with annualised funding and reactive policies, I suspect that leads to greater delays. I think that long-term planning and a more strategic approach is likely to lead to the greater alacrity I described earlier. I am not sure that has always been in place in the past. We are beginning to get that right, but what we have established needs to be the model for the way we plan public policy in this area.

Q175 Chair: Would you say that the local enterprise partnerships are effective in helping projects like these to move forward quickly?

Mr Hayes: Certainly, in terms of understanding their wider economic impacts. It is very important that we understand the work we are going to do in terms of river crossings, and all our strategic thinking in terms of transport, in the context of the wider economic impact that the policy has. Engaging local enterprise partnerships, as well as local authorities, seems to me to be very important in contextualising any decisions we make on this in that way. I have already had discussions with them in Parliament. I am planning to meet the local authorities in respect of the Thames crossing—the one we are talking about here—very shortly. That engagement is already taking place with Graham’s team. We have had stakeholder meetings; we have had significant local consultation. You are right, Chair, that local enterprise partnerships have a part to play, and we certainly need a good level of engagement with them.

Q176 Jim Fitzpatrick: On the LEPs and regional planning authorities, and the Centre for London and Lord Adonis’s commission recommending that there should be a separate delivery agency set up for east London and the lower Thames crossings, is there a need for a separate organisation? Is the way you are processing these potential developments going to deliver in due course, or is there another way to try to speed up the process?

Penny Mordaunt: I will leave the vehicle to my colleague. I do not think there is. Clearly, the Department for Transport is the lead Department on this. One thing I have been trying to do as Minister for the Thames Gateway area is to give that area a bit more of a voice and a profile, and create momentum behind a whole raft of projects that need to happen in the area. Some of the tensions you have probably identified from previous witnesses you have seen are that the area is part of a huge LEP in the south-east; it also has London, which has a very powerful voice, and sometimes it feels that its issues do not necessarily get the profile required.

Having said that, the Thames Gateway partnership is becoming more effective. LEPs are very much the vehicle for economic regeneration, and they are evolving. There is a range in their capacity, skills and quality across the country. We are always looking for more

improvements and for them to learn from one another in terms of being strategic and plugging in, but whether it is the planning process or the projects going on within the area, there is very clear stakeholder engagement and it is very well joined up, and that applies in Whitehall as well. I do not think you need to tweak that. What you need to do is enable there to be a focus and momentum on the issues in that area, about which we have met in the past. That is how DCLG can contribute. Clearly, we have a role in the planning process, which I think works well. There is good evidence. Going back to points made previously, a strategic river crossing has not been through the NSIP process, but for the projects that have, it is much quicker than its predecessors. I echo the points John makes about the front-loading of that process, making sure that people are engaged, even before there is a necessary preferred option on the table, to hold formal consultations. That appears to speed up the process and you get a better quality result at the end of it.

Mr Hayes: I note Lord Adonis's proposal, or suggestion, in that respect, but I do not think one should underestimate the role of Highways England in this regard. This is going to be part of the strategic road network. It is already. Not to leave that responsibility with Highways England would seem to me to emasculate that body. This is going to be linked closely to the M25, and there are considerations of the continuing salience of the M25. I put it no more strongly than this, because Lord Adonis often has interesting ideas and he certainly adds to the conversation, but it would certainly be odd to rob Highways England, as it will become—the Highways Agency as it is now—of responsibility for dealing with a crossing that is so central to the rest of their considerations for traffic around London. I think there is a good point about how you co-ordinate liaison between the different partners in this process, and probably what he was getting at is the need to think carefully about how you blend the work, which the Chair mentioned, of the LEP and the local authorities—in this case, the consideration in Thurrock, and south of the river too—and in the county councils and local highways authorities, and ensure there is good joined-up thinking across those agencies. There is a strong point there, and that may have lain behind Lord Adonis's proposal.

Q177 Jim Fitzpatrick: Given that there may ultimately be some local authority opposition—a minority; one or even two of all the local authorities, county councils and the Mayor of London, as you mentioned—and the significance of the east London and lower Thames crossings for the national strategic network, as well as for sub-regional or regional regeneration, how do you overcome that local objection in the regional, or even national, interest, other than by Government deciding they are going to drive this through, if you do not have a vehicle to do it; or do you think the vehicle exists but you can overcome local objections ultimately and deliver these crossings?

Mr Hayes: In an earlier evidence session, Jim, you said that this had been considered for 30 years in prospect, as you described it, and you pointed out that the debate about Crossrail had been running since 1888. You know that sometimes Government are not as good as they might be at, as you put it, driving through major infrastructure projects. I suspect that at the heart of it there lie two simple things, as is true of so much of life: a combination of absolute clarity of purpose and strength of will. When that is coupled, in terms of local liaison, with a certain degree of charm, you probably get the job done. Sadly, sometimes strength of will, clarity of purpose and charm have been too lacking.

Q178 Martin Vickers: On partnership working and the inevitable delays that causes, you mentioned projects that have been on the go for many years before they reach a satisfactory conclusion. Partnership working complicates matters. Would it not be better to have much more all-powerful local authorities?

Mr Hayes: In these major infrastructure projects, Government have a key role to play. Let me be blunt: the Committee knows well that in democratic politics there is always a problem with Government taking decisions, and that is for two reasons: first, because the payback for those decisions is not within a five-year span, and people are acutely aware of the electoral effects of the decisions they take; secondly, they are reluctant to bind the hands of their successors. That is a perfectly noble aspect of our politics. We do not tend to forward-commit funding and we do not tend to want to bind the hands of our successors. For those two reasons, and perhaps a third, that people do not want to get these things wrong, Governments, perhaps understandably, have not always been as clear or decisive on infrastructure as they might be.

What we are trying to build in creating consensus around infrastructure is a circumstance where there is sufficient confidence on the part of the political class to take these big steps knowing that they have built a degree of shared vision which will build confidence that affects investment decisions and so on. You can only move forward when you have a consensual approach to infrastructure. That is what I have tried to do as Minister and what I think the Government need to try to do too. When you do that you can perhaps, to some degree, cut across some of the reservations and hesitations I have just outlined.

Q179 Chair: Mr Dalton, from a Highways Agency point of view, what obstacles are there? What could change to make movement quicker?

Graham Dalton: It is about clarity and sense of purpose. It is quite rightly a Government and departmental role to determine whether some infrastructure is needed, and in the case of transport, by mode. Going back to Mr Fitzpatrick's question about delivering it, if we take the lower Thames or Thames crossings we have Transport for London and the Highways Agency. We co-operate. There are different needs and purposes, but both of those are capable delivery vehicles. We both know how to build large complicated projects once we have the brief.

Q180 Chair: But are there any particular obstacles you have identified?

Graham Dalton: The delivery bodies are there, which is one of the questions. I am not sure that it goes into different local authority structures. In particular, estuarial crossings by their very nature go from one area to another, and from one administration to another. Transport links tend to cross boundaries, so we are used to dealing with that. The thing that really helps is going to another stage around national infrastructure planning, and building a level of cross-party support, so that we get certainty and follow-through and so that we know that, if a scheme is going to go through, we can take it to the next stage, and—

Q181 Chair: Mr Dalton, would you stop a moment, please? I want you to answer the point I am putting. General support is a very good thing. We all know that. What I am trying to work out is whether there are any obstacles that you have identified—things that could be changed to make progress quicker in terms of structures and organisations.

Graham Dalton: If we have support, an infrastructure plan that is set down and confidence that it will run, we can run at it, and that will take quite a bit of time out of the pre-construction process.

Q182 Chair: It is just to do with that.

Graham Dalton: Yes.

Q183 Chair: How are we going to deal with short-termism, Minister? A number of representations have been made during this inquiry that decisions taken are short term, and capacity is not sufficient over, say, a 15-year period. How is that issue to be addressed in terms of river crossings?

Mr Hayes: The road investment strategy we published just a few weeks ago is indicative of the determination to deal with just that—short-termism. This is a long-term plan, with funding to match, based on a series of empirical studies to ensure that what we spend has best effect. It has been built on a series of engagements with local communities, with local authorities and all kinds of stakeholders, and it is, I hope, a model for how Government should approach infrastructure. It seems to me that the crossings, being a critical part of that strategic road network, have to form part of that long-term thinking. We have travelled a long way in building a new paradigm in respect of a strategic approach to road investment, and that has been built with a degree of consensus. During the passage of the Infrastructure Bill, which was the means by which we tried to put statutory methods in place to support that strategy, I worked very hard to build with Her Majesty's Opposition consensus about the need to do these things. I think we have had some success in that regard. I would not put it more strongly than that.

Q184 Chair: What part does tolling policy play?

Mr Hayes: Sorry? It isn't your imperfect diction, but my imperfect hearing. I want to emphasise that.

Chair: Tolling systems—in terms of traffic management and dealing with additional capacity.

Mr Hayes: At the moment, the Government have no plans to introduce further tolling.

Penny Mordaunt: The only thing I would add to the previous point is that we should not underestimate the role of LEPs in providing that continuity. They have the local perspective, but they add a degree of continuity that is not there with just local authorities.

Q185 Chair: Are you satisfied that you have access to sufficient technology to deal with traffic management and unanticipated traffic flows in terms of tolling systems?

Mr Hayes: We have invested very significantly in technology. You will know that the way the network is currently managed relies very heavily on technology, which Graham will describe. I have had the privilege of being able to see some of the control centres by which the network is observed and managed. You will be familiar with our smart motorway schemes, which I think set the tone for the future. The work we are doing in examining how drivers interface with roads and what information is provided to make best use of the network has been groundbreaking. We intend to build on that as the technology grows.

Before Graham fills in some of the detail, the important thing in public policy terms is not to make decisions which are so rigid that we cannot take advantage of changing technology. The truth is that the way people drive, what they drive and the way they interface with the road network will change dramatically for the remainder of my lifetime and in my children's. Insufficient flexibility about public policy could inhibit the benefits that stem from those changes, so it is important that we are as flexible as possible to take advantage of further technological change.

Q186 Chair: Before Mr Dalton answers, there is one other issue I want to put to you. Some witnesses in this inquiry have said there is not any firm evidence that new river crossings improve economic regeneration. We have heard some anecdotal evidence that it does. Is there a clear body of evidence to show that?

Mr Hayes: The evidence we have gathered suggests that it does, but, if there is a need to provide more information to the Committee as part of this inquiry, I will be happy to do so. Indeed, why don't I go further than that? I take the role of Select Committees extremely seriously. I will ask my Department to put together pieces of data which show the very connection you ask for. It seems to me that if I am right, and we need to contextualise these schemes against the wider economic background, we need to provide the data to support that, and I am happy to do so following this meeting of the Committee.

Q187 Chair: That would be very helpful, Minister. Mr Dalton, was there anything specific you wanted to say?

Graham Dalton: Traffic technology is a fundamental part of managing any intensively used part of the network, and crossings in particular, whether it is charging, and managing and monitoring it, fire and emergency protection, or whatever it may be. Increasingly, with changing vehicles, it is about getting information to road users in the vehicle, which is the next generation of technology that is quite exciting and that will help us get more capacity out of the network.

Chair: Thank you all very much.