



Mersey Gateway Project Consultation on possible modifications

Thank you for coming to today's exhibition.

The Mersey Gateway Project is a major scheme to build a new six-lane toll bridge over the Mersey between Runcorn and Widnes.

It will also bring major highway improvements, employment, inward investment and regeneration opportunities to the area.

The project was approved in the Government's spending review (CSR) last year and received full planning approval in December 2010.

Funding approval was granted to the project by the Transport Secretary in October 2011, confirming that the Government is to invest up to £470million in the project over its lifetime. This investment confirms that the project will go ahead.

Our discussions with Government, local residents, councillors and others have identified ways that could improve value for money and better meet the concerns of residents along the Central Expressway.

Although the changes identified are relatively small, our estimates show that this amended approach

could reduce the cost of the scheme by at least £30 million.

To deliver the changes identified would require minor amendments to the existing planning approvals but before any planning applications are submitted we are keen to hear your views.

Consultation outline and process

This consultation and the proposed new applications relate specifically to the minor modifications presented at this exhibition. They do not propose any major changes to the fundamentals of the project or the benefits it will bring.

This is a chance for you to give your views on these revised arrangements before any planning applications are submitted. Please review the plans, ask our team any questions you may have about the changes and complete a comments form.

Once we have reviewed all the comments received the project team intends to submit applications before the end of 2011. The proposals will then be considered by Halton Borough Council, which will undertake a further consultation exercise as part of its work to determine the plans.

If any such applications are not progressed, then the approved scheme that was discussed at the public inquiry in 2009 is likely to be taken forward to construction.



Scheme plan

The modified plans include possible modifications to the infrastructure of the new bridge and to the proposed access roads at a number of locations in Widnes and Runcorn.

These modifications will allow a more flexible approach to the design for the specialist contractors to improve the construction process and maximise value for money.

This map shows where any proposed changes could alter the detail along the route. The following boards explain these changes in more detail.

- 1** – Open road tolling and physical removal of toll plazas
- 2** – Victoria Road
- 3** – Widnes Loops
- 4** – The new bridge
- 5** – Central Expressway slip roads
- 6** – Busway bridge and Lodge Lane Junction



1 – Open Road Tolling and Physical Removal of Toll Plazas

The Mersey Gateway Project team wishes to use an Open Road Tolling (ORT) system, which would mean using cameras and modern technology to record vehicle details for the collection of tolls for crossing both the new bridge and the Silver Jubilee Bridge.

This would mean that vehicles would still be charged for crossing the river, but there would be no need for toll booths or barriers along the route.

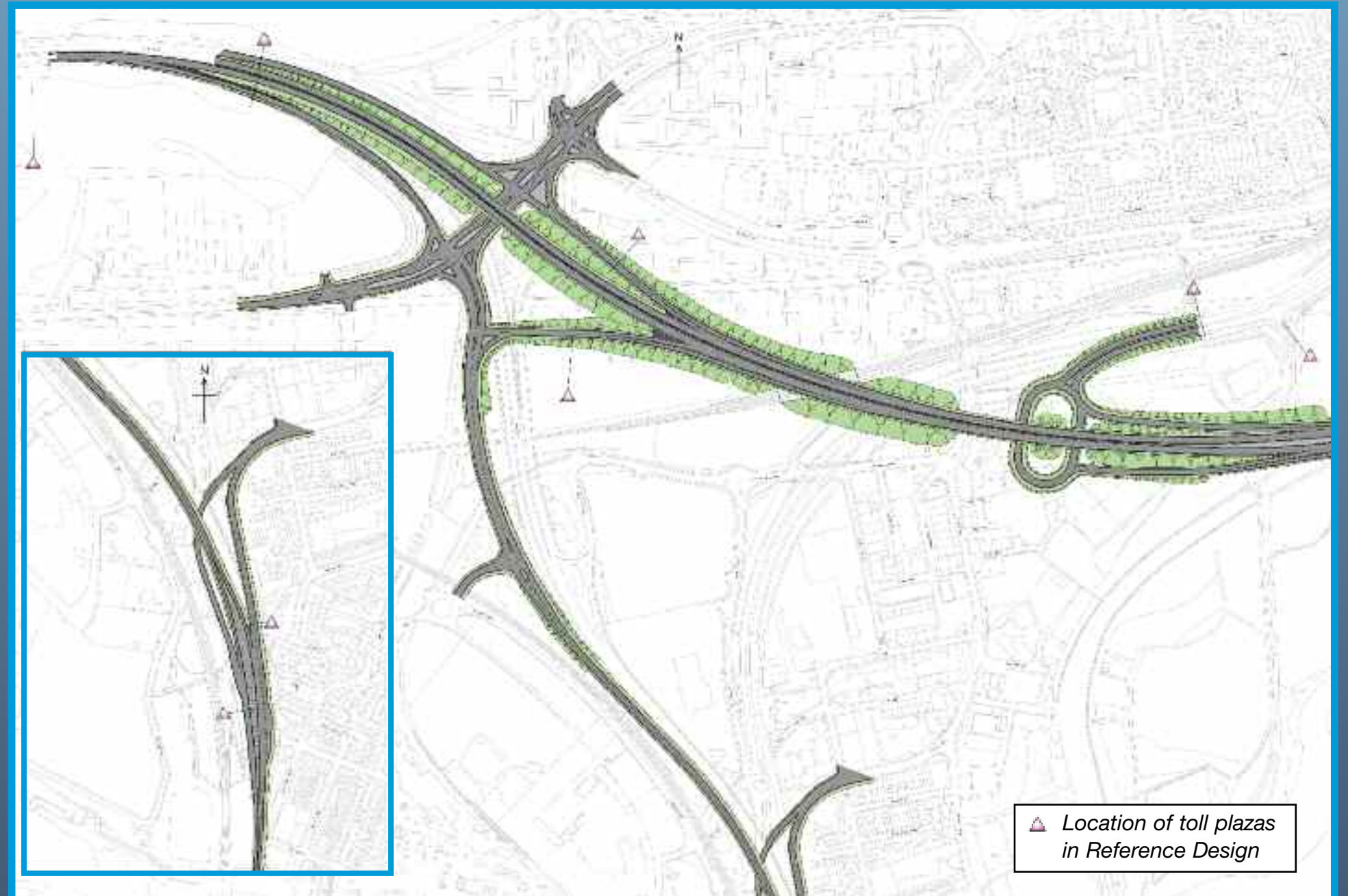
The benefits of this approach would be:

- faster journey times for motorists with no need to carry means of payment at every crossing,
- cost savings during the construction process and in operating the toll collection system, and
- an improved landscaping scheme alongside the main route.

There would be no need to build toll plazas at four different locations in Widnes, which allows us to plan a simpler and quicker route.

The proposals mean that traffic would still access or leave the new bridge via the A562 Speke Road. However, the construction work would stop at the western limit of the slip roads from Ditton Junction.

The existing and proposed links from the Silver Jubilee Bridge into West Bank and along Queensway towards Ditton Junction that were part of the original plans would be retained.



2 – Victoria Road

The removal of the proposed toll plazas would mean that the bridge structures between the Garston to Timperley Rail Freight Line and Widnes Loops could be modified.

This area includes the proposed bridge over Victoria Road, which was previously being planned as a multi-span viaduct.

This lower height means that an alternative option for this area is now to have a landscaped embankment between the railway and a two-span structure across Victoria Road. A visualisation of how this could look is shown to the right.



3 – Widnes Loops

Without the need for toll plazas a more compact and conventional roundabout could be built to the north of the new bridge to allow traffic travelling to or from the A557 Widnes Eastern Bypass to move to or from the new bridge.

This proposed new roundabout, which would be built on the site of the Catalyst Trade Park, could also accommodate future links to West Bank as part of the regeneration strategy.



4 – The new bridge

The new bridge would still follow the same route across the river.

However, the proposed modifications would permit more flexibility in the design allowing specialist contractors who will build the bridge the opportunity to improve the construction process and maximise value for money.

The areas that may be modified are:

- 1) the form and construction of the bridge deck,
- 2) the spacing and form of the bridge supports and the geometry of the cables that support sections of the bridge deck, and
- 3) the selection of materials used to construct the bridge, specifically the use of steel and concrete for the towers and bridge decks.

The council is still committed to accommodating a river crossing for light rail should a route be promoted in the future. By modifying our planning permissions, it would mean that any future light rail services that might be developed could be carried across the Silver Jubilee Bridge (SJB) instead of the new bridge.

Results from our research into this option show that it would be a feasible alternative. Using SJB for public transport, including possible future light rail services, would also be more compatible with the council's sustainable transport and regeneration plans.



Approved reference design



A possible alternative design

5 – Central Expressway – slip roads



Reference design arrangement

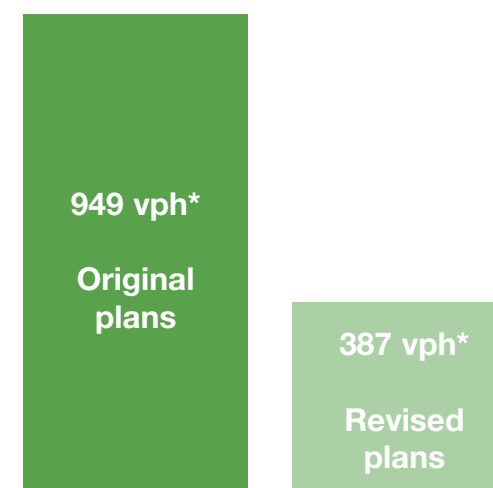
Proposed alternative

 Main access route for traffic between the Central Expressway and Halton Lea

We have listened to the concerns of local residents and councillors and adjusted the plans to reduce traffic levels along the slip roads at either side of Halton Brow.

The proposed changes to the plans would mean:

- a reduction of up to 60% in projected peak time traffic levels using the slip roads at either side of Halton Brow alongside Warrington Road,
- there is no longer any need to alter Calvers, and
- there would be improved access for traffic between the Central Expressway and Halton Lea to/from the north.



Traffic levels on slip road next to Warrington Road

*vehicles per hour – forecast morning peak time traffic flows for the opening year.

6 – Busway bridge and Lodge Lane Junction

The revised proposals would allow the existing Busway bridge over the Central Expressway, which was previously due to be replaced to accommodate the realigned Central Expressway, to be retained.

This would avoid the need to divert a number of major services carried over the bridge, and would reduce the disruption to road users, and bus services in particular, during construction of the scheme.

As a consequence of this there would be some minor adjustments to the proposals for Lodge Lane Junction, and the impact on footpaths and landscape areas to the east of Central Expressway would be reduced by this change.





Thank you for coming today

All of the modifications proposed to the Mersey Gateway Project in this consultation are aimed at improving the plans and maximising value for money for the taxpayer by saving up to £30 million on the cost of the project.

We would like your comments on the specific proposals presented on the panels so we can take these into account before any planning applications are submitted.

Please complete a comments form and leave your details so we can keep you updated about the project in the future.

Please provide your comments and feedback to this consultation no later than Friday 28th October.