

A bridge to prosperity



The Mersey Gateway Project is a major scheme to build a new six lane toll bridge over the Mersey between the towns of Runcorn and Widnes that will relieve the congested and aging Silver Jubilee Bridge.

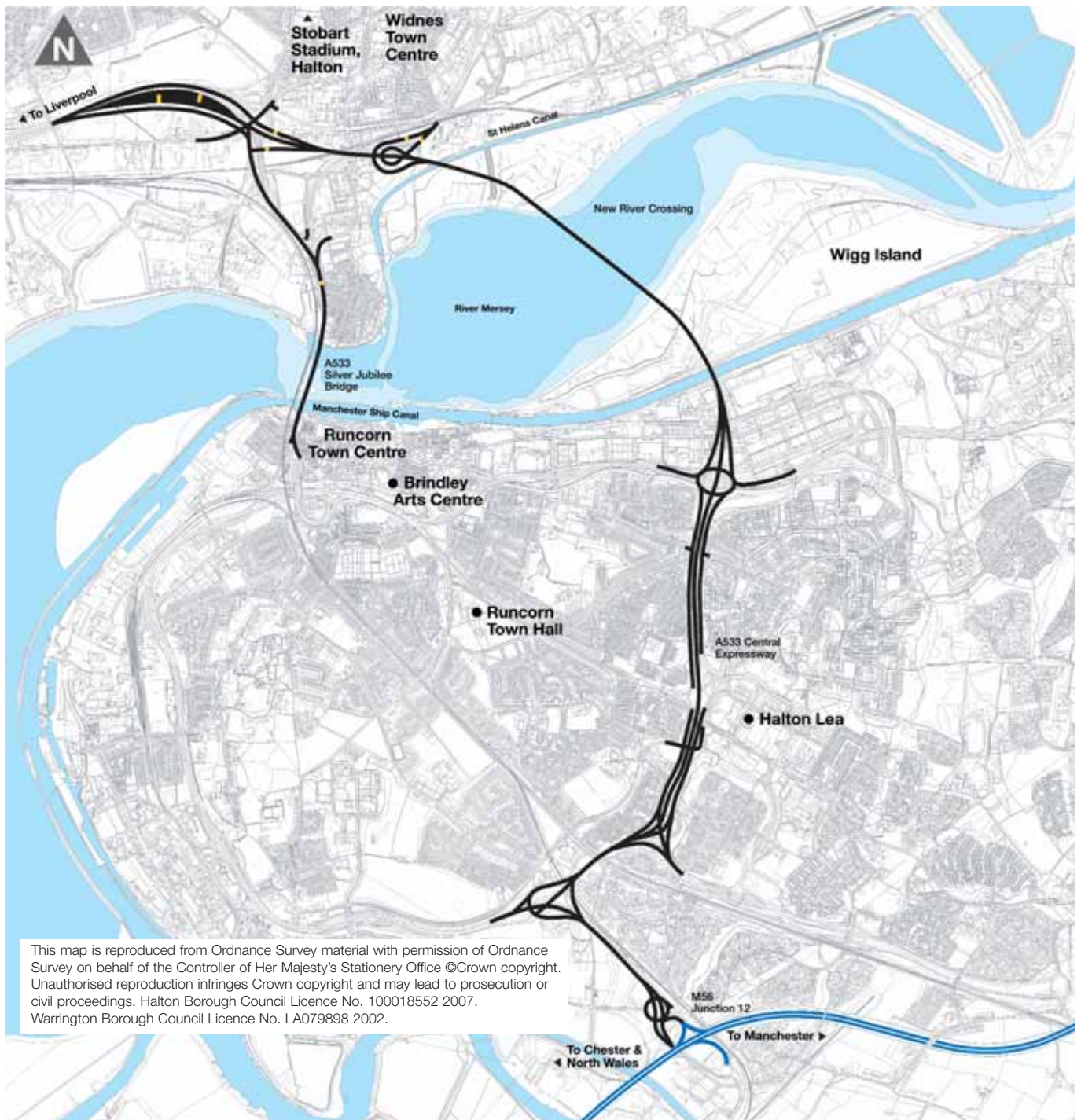
The project team is aiming to secure planning approval from government at the earliest opportunity.

The project also includes or facilitates:

- plans to develop and integrate public transport, cycle and pedestrian links across Halton
- plans to kick start a major 20-year regeneration programme for Halton
- improving regional transport links to encourage new and inward investment, and
- road user charges on the existing Silver Jubilee Bridge between the two towns.

The new bridge will:

- be over 70% funded by the private sector
- mean an estimated 4,640 new jobs through direct employment, regeneration activity and inward investment
- generate an estimated £61.9 million a year in Gross Value Added from the new jobs by 2030
- cross the river around 1.5 km to the east of the Silver Jubilee Bridge
- be a tolled crossing with a speed limit of 60mph
- have three lanes across the Mersey in each direction
- form the centrepiece of a new and improved high standard link road (9.5km long) connecting the national motorway network in north Cheshire with Merseyside.



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Key: — Mersey Gateway Project – main works — Likely location of toll booths

Objectives

The objectives of the project are to:

- relieve the congested Silver Jubilee Bridge (SJB) and better provide for local transport needs
- apply minimum toll charges to both the new bridge and the SJB to allow the project to be funded
- improve accessibility to maximise local development and regional economic growth opportunities
- improve local air quality and enhance the general urban environment
- improve public transport links across the river
- encourage the increased use of cycling and walking, and
- restore effective network resilience for transport across the River Mersey.



The new bridge

The proposed bridge design is based on a cable-stay structure similar to the second Severn Crossing, but with three towers. It will be 2300m long with a river span of 1000m. The main bridge spans will be supported by cable stays attached to the towers rising up to a maximum of 145m above the river bed.

The new bridge will be designed to carry up to six traffic lanes forming part of a new and improved high standard road (9.5km long) connecting north Widnes and Merseyside with Runcorn and the national motorway network in north Cheshire. Traffic would benefit from congestion free uninterrupted travel across the Mersey for the foreseeable future.



How the new bridge (top) will look next to the Silver Jubilee Bridge

Benefits

The project will bring huge estimated benefits for people and businesses in Halton, the Liverpool city-region, Cheshire and across the north west.

Economic benefits:

- 470 permanent full time equivalent jobs on site during the construction phase
- 4,640 permanent new jobs as a result of the operation of the Mersey Gateway, regeneration activity and inward investment
- £61.9 million a year in Gross Value Added from the new jobs by 2030.

It will also support sustained growth at Liverpool Ports and Liverpool John Lennon Airport and improve business

productivity throughout the Mersey corridor (known as agglomeration impacts).

Transport benefits:

- reductions in journey times of up to 10 minutes in peak periods
- increase in journey time reliability
- less congestion resulting in lower carbon emissions
- reductions in the cost of accidents of up to £39 million
- 85% less traffic using the Silver Jubilee Bridge, freeing it up for use as a local bridge
- increased network resilience and civil contingencies
- reductions in maintenance delays as a result of reduced congestion, and

- a major strategic new transport route linking the Liverpool city-region and the north west to the rest of the country.

Social benefits:

- improvements to public transport facilities
- improvements to walking and cycling facilities
- improved health as a result of reduced air pollution
- safer new routes for cyclists and pedestrians across and around the river, and
- more reliable access to emergency services and more robust emergency civil contingency planning.

The Silver Jubilee Bridge

Built in 1961, and now crossed by over 30 million users every year - more than ten times the amount it initially carried - the Silver Jubilee Bridge (SJB) is the only route for cars to cross the Mersey through Halton and a notorious traffic bottleneck.

Incidents and routine maintenance result in extensive delay where the local and regional road networks become 'gridlocked' for several hours.

To deliver the traffic and environmental benefits when the new bridge opens, the SJB will be subject to road user charges – but it will be free for buses, cyclists and pedestrians.



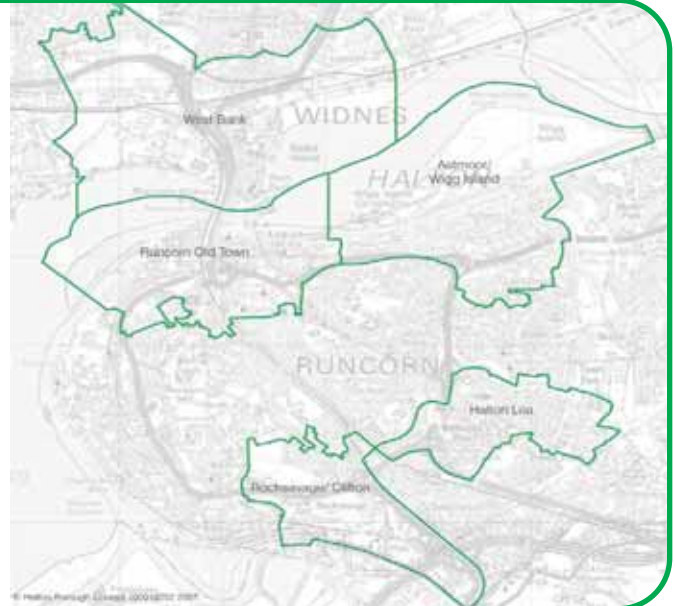
Artist's impression of how the SJB could look

Around 80% of traffic will use the new bridge and the SJB will be reconfigured as a local bridge – with one lane of traffic in each direction, alongside dedicated space for cyclists and pedestrians.

Regeneration areas

The Mersey Gateway Project is a unique opportunity to kick-start a long-term regeneration programme in Halton and to provide essential support for the delivery of economic growth across the region. The communities to benefit are some of the most deprived areas in England. The local regeneration strategy covers five of the borough's most deprived areas (see map right). It spreads across 20sqkm and provides a bold and challenging 20-year vision for regeneration in Halton.

Across the region, Mersey Gateway is seen as a transformational project that will drive economic recovery and in particular support expansion at Liverpool Ports and Liverpool John Lennon Airport.



Sustainable transport

A long-term, sustainable transport strategy has been commissioned to identify alternative means of transport not subject to tolls to ensure that accessibility and links across Halton are maintained.

The proposed options, which will be partly funded by toll revenue, include:

- a green sustainable transport corridor across SJB
- enhancement of borough-wide walking and cycling facilities
- improvements to the Runcorn Busway
- branding of popular bus routes
- a 'smart card' ticketing system for all forms of transport
- reviewing bus stop locations to link services more effectively, and
- expanding real-time information displays at bus stops.

Tolling

Under the project proposals, both the new bridge and the existing Silver Jubilee Bridge will be subject to tolls/charges. The exact toll/charge levels are still to be determined but they are likely to be similar to the cost of travelling through one of the Mersey Tunnels.

The project team is actively investigating the best way to provide discounts to groups like local people and regular users.

Although it is not practical to confirm exactly what opening toll/charge levels will be at this stage, the proposed funding structure includes a significant sum to subsidise revenue, which will help to reduce tolls/charges.

Environmental

The Mersey Gateway, embracing the elegant cable stay design, is a 'green' project that will bring major environmental benefits to the local area, including a new 28.5 hectare nature reserve around the bridge.

This new nature reserve will protect the local environment over the next 30 years. A new charity - the Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust - will be created to manage it.

These plans will ensure that the Mersey Estuary and local wildlife are protected. Other health and environmental issues are also being addressed to minimise the overall impact of the new crossing and maximise the benefits.

Costs and funding

The total projected outturn cost of the Mersey Gateway is around £600 million.

The majority of funding comes from the tolls paid by road users. A government funding package for the project agreed back in 2006 is subject to review as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review which will take place in autumn 2010.

Should this be confirmed, central government would provide funding of £86 million plus Private Finance Initiative (PFI) credit, which would supplement toll revenue, with the remainder being raised through private finance. In overall terms, the private sector through the tolling charges is funding over 70% of the project.

The latest economic estimates show the economic benefits the project would bring to Halton and the surrounding areas are almost four times greater than its cost.

Timetable

Subject to government approval in the autumn of 2010, the new bridge is scheduled to open in late 2015, but before that happens, there are a number of important key stages along the way.

Government approval

Commence the procurement process where the Council invites expressions of interest from the private sector for a Design, Build, Finance and Operation contract (OJEU notice)

Award contract to successful private sector partner

Three year construction process

Bridge opens



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