

# **THE MERSEY GATEWAY PROJECT**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **CHAPTER 1.0**

## INTRODUCTION

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This Environmental Statement (ES) accompanies certain applications and orders that are required to authorise the construction of the Mersey Gateway Project (the “Project”). The details of the Project are set out in Chapter 2 of this ES. This ES has been prepared on behalf of Halton Borough Council (the “Council”) by its professional team. The applications and orders to which this ES relates include:

- a. Applications for planning permission in respect of certain works to the highway network in the Borough of Halton;
- b. An application for an order under Section 3 of the Transport and Works Act 1992 authorising the construction of works that interfere with navigation of the River Mersey (the “River”) and other waterways;
- c. Applications for listed building consent for the effect of the Project upon listed structures including the existing Silver Jubilee Bridge (“SJB”);
- d. An order conferring powers to levy charges for the use of the SJB; and
- e. Other works and applications conferring powers (*inter alia*) to acquire land compulsorily and interfere with public rights of way (“PRoW”).

### 1.2 Background

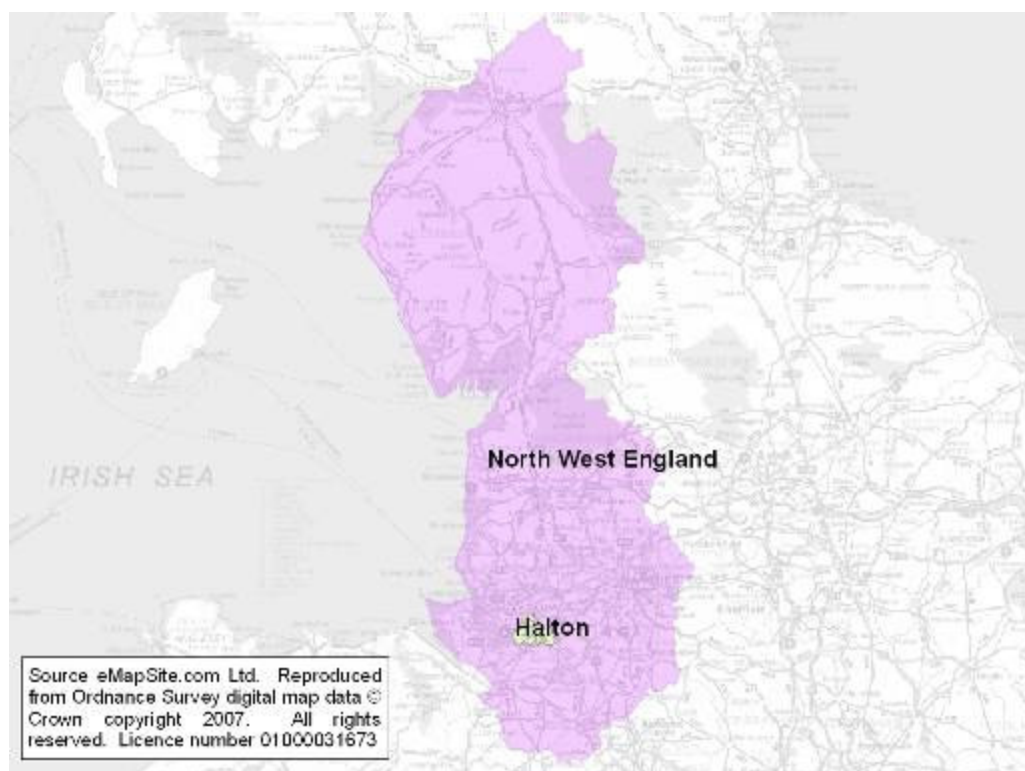
1.2.1 The Borough of Halton (“Halton Borough”) is located in the North West of England<sup>1</sup> (Figures 1.1 and 1.2), at a strategic crossing point of the Mersey Estuary (the “Estuary”).

**Figure 1.1 - Location of Halton in the UK**



<sup>1</sup> The North West of England is comprised of five sub regions including Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Lancashire.

**Figure 1.2 - Location of Halton in the North West**



- 1.2.2 The Borough comprises two principal towns of Runcorn and Widnes either side of the River, together with the four parishes of Daresbury, Hale, Moore and Preston Brook. At one point, known as the 'Runcorn Gap', the Estuary narrows significantly and provides a long-used crossing point. This is now spanned by the main rail connection between Liverpool and the West Coast Main Line (via the Aethelfleda railway bridge) and the A557 road link between the M62 and the M56, via the Silver Jubilee Bridge (SJB). The M62 and M56 motorways pass to the north and south of the Borough respectively with connections via the A562/A5300 and A557 to the M62, and via the A557 and the A558 to the M56. To the west of Widnes the A562, Speke Road, links Widnes and the SJB crossing point to south Liverpool. This provides a connection to nationally significant ports and Liverpool John Lennon Airport. The M62 to the north of the Borough links the Liverpool City Region<sup>2</sup> to Manchester and thereafter crosses the Pennines to the Yorkshire conurbations. To the south, the M56 links North Wales and Cheshire<sup>3</sup> to Manchester. Halton is therefore located at the convergence of a number of strategic transport links in the North West of England, a number of which rely upon the River crossings at this point. Chief among these converging routes is the A557 crossing the SJB.

<sup>2</sup> The Liverpool City Region comprises the Core City of Liverpool and local authority districts of St Helens, Wirral, Knowsley, Sefton, and Halton plus the adjacent areas of Warrington, Chester, Ellesmere Port and Neston (West Cheshire), North Wales and West Lancashire.

<sup>3</sup> Cheshire is split into 6 administrative regions: Crewe and Nantwich, Chester, Congleton, Macclesfield, Vale Royal and Ellesmere Port and Neston.

- 1.2.3 The SJB was opened in 1961 with two lanes of traffic and an opening year flow of less than 10,000 vehicles per day (vpd). When it was widened to four sub-standard lanes in 1977, the design capacity (measured using current maximum throughput standards) was increased to approximately 65,000 vpd. At present it regularly carries in excess of 80,000 vpd on weekdays and a figure of 91,000 vpd was recorded in 2007. These traffic flows, combined with the four sub-standard lanes and absence of any hard shoulder on the bridge, have inevitably led to regular service breakdowns on the SJB. These include:
- a. Routine Congestion during peak travel periods;
  - b. Delays to local connecting roads due to queuing;
  - c. Safety hazards;
  - d. Poor regional road resilience to accidents and other incidents;
  - e. Difficulties in maintenance; and
  - f. Unreliable journey times.
- 1.2.4 These service failings have an adverse effect on travel within the Borough, undermine the City Region's connectivity with the rest of the United Kingdom's (UK) road transport links, and the local community surrounding the SJB suffers a degraded environment and quality of life. The breakdown in transport connectivity and access is widely accepted as a threat to the economic prosperity of the sub-region. This is manifest in the Project being identified as a key 'Transformational Project' in the North West Regional Economic Strategy (RES) by the Northwest Regional Development Agency.

### **1.3 The Mersey Gateway Project**

- 1.3.1 The aim of the Project is to deliver a new crossing of the River in Halton that links into the existing principal road network. It aims to provide effective road connections to the Liverpool City area from north Cheshire in the south, thereby providing effective connectivity for the sub-region and removing congestion from the Borough. The new road capacity provides an opportunity to re-balance the transportation infrastructure within Halton towards delivering local sustainable transport and economic goals. The proposed alignment of the Project is shown on Figure 1.3 (Appendix 1.1).
- 1.3.2 The Project's scope covers the following:
- a. The delivery of a new road crossing of the River in Halton, known as the Mersey Gateway Bridge (referred to as the "New Bridge" throughout this ES);
  - b. Incorporation of the New Bridge in the existing highway network. These works are known as the Remote Highway Works;
  - c. Modification and de-linking of the SJB (excluding the asset management of the SJB works);
  - d. Integration of the revised networks with public transport, cycle and pedestrian links across Halton;
  - e. Integration with the surrounding environment through landscaping;
  - f. Implementation of tolling and development of associated infrastructure; and
  - g. Letting a Concession Contract for the construction, operation and maintenance of the Project.
- 1.3.3 The Council has established a number of strategic objectives for the Project, which are:
- a. To relieve the congested SJB, thereby removing a constraint on local and regional development and better provide for local transport needs;
  - b. To apply toll and road user charges to both the New Bridge and the SJB consistent with the level required to satisfy viability constraints;

- c. To improve accessibility in order to maximise local development and regional economic growth opportunities;
- d. To improve local air quality and enhance the general urban environment;
- e. To improve public transport links across the River;
- f. To encourage the increased use of cycling and walking; and
- g. To restore effective network resilience for transport across the River Mersey.

1.3.4 In considering the viability of the Project it was determined that funding of the works would require the imposition of tolls / charges for the use of both the New Bridge and the SJB. The Council is promoting an approach to tolling that is intended to allow successful delivery of the Project within funding limits agreed with central government. The principal considerations in seeking tolling powers are listed below.

- a. To operate a toll concession scheme, within the limits of affordability, so as to mitigate the impact of tolls on local users who are currently able to use the SJB free of charge, many of whom cross the river frequently and some of whom fall within social inclusion target groups;
- b. To manage demand to ensure the delivery of transport and environment benefits, by maintaining free flow traffic conditions on the New Bridge and SJB and delivering priority for public transport on the SJB; and
- c. To transfer demand risk to the Concessionaire for the duration of the Concession Contract, by allowing the operator to manage that demand through the toll charged, within the constraints of the legal powers and the regulations agreed in the Concession Contract, consistent with the objective of protecting local users.

## **1.4 Environmental Impact Assessment**

1.4.1 In accordance with European and UK law certain projects must be the subject of a particular process of assessment by reason of their size, nature and the likelihood that they will have significant effects upon the environment. This assessment process is known as environmental impact assessment (“EIA”). Some projects are subject to an automatic requirement for EIA, principally those of very large size or with all-but-inevitable adverse effects on the environment. Others, of a lesser size, are tested against a number of criteria to identify whether EIA is required. This is considered in greater detail in relation to the Project at Chapter 3 below.

1.4.2 Aside from its size the Project is located close to a number of sensitive features, including residential and employment areas, areas of ecological importance, areas of cultural heritage interest, areas of contaminated land and important landscape feature areas. As a result EIA has assumed to be required for the Project in line with the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 (the “EIA Regulations”). This requirement is also discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

## **1.5 Purpose of this Environmental Statement (the “ES”)**

1.5.1 This ES documents the overall findings of the EIA for the Project. It is a legal requirement for applications relating to EIA projects to be accompanied by an ES.

1.5.2 The ES consists of three parts:

- a. The ES - a comprehensive document drawing together all the relevant information about the project;
- b. A Non-Technical Summary (NTS) - a brief report summarising the principal sections of the ES in non-technical language, which should be readily understandable by a wide

audience, easily distributed and accessible in a range of different media types and formats; and

- c. Appendices to the ES.

1.5.3 In addition to the main body of the ES and its appendices, certain other information accompanies this ES. This includes:

- a. A Construction Methods Report: This is appended to Chapter 2 of this ES and establishes the manner in which the Project will be constructed and therefore forms the basis of construction assessments provided within Chapters 7 to 20 of this ES; and
- b. A Flood Risk Assessment: This is appended to Chapter 8 of this ES and provides an assessment of the Project's effect on and vulnerability to flood risk.

1.5.4 This ES is structured as follows:

- a. *Introduction and Project Information*: Chapters 1 to 4 provide the background to the Project, set out the details of the Project and the requirements for an EIA in relation to the Project's nature and location.
- b. *Alternatives*: Chapter 5 outlines the main alternatives studied and an indication of the main reasons for choices, taking into account environmental effects.
- c. *Technical Assessments*: Chapters 7 to 20 summarise the findings of a series of detailed environmental impact assessments undertaken as part of the EIA. A list of the detailed assessments of environmental effects considered are as follows:
  - i. Planning Policy;
  - ii. Hydrodynamics and Estuarine Processes;
  - iii. Surface Water Quality;
  - iv. Land Use;
  - v. Terrestrial and Avian Ecology / Information for Appropriate Assessment;
  - vi. Aquatic Ecology;
  - vii. Landscape and Visual Amenity;
  - viii. Cultural Heritage;
  - ix. Contamination of Soils, Sediments and Groundwater;
  - x. Waste;
  - xi. Transportation;
  - xii. Air Quality and Climate;
  - xiii. Noise and Vibration;
  - xiv. Navigation; and
  - xv. Socio-Economics.

1.5.5 The structure of each of these chapters is set out as follows:

- i. *Introduction* - Each chapter is led by a short introduction which introduces the topic and explains why it is relevant to the Project.
- ii. *Purpose of the Study* - A short section outlining the reasons why the study described in that chapter was undertaken.
- iii. *Study Area* - A detailed description of the study area considered in the chapter under discussion, with an explanation of the reasons for doing so.
- iv. *Relevant Legislation and Planning Policy* – Outline of relevant legislation and planning policy related to each topic.
- v. *Assessment Methodology* – Outline of methodology applied to the assessment.
- vi. *Baseline and Results of Investigations* – Details on the results of investigations and baseline details specific to each topic.

- vii. *Effects Assessment* – Identification of likely receptors to effects associated with the Project along with an assessment of the magnitude and subsequent significance of effects.
  - viii. *Mitigation, Compensation, Enhancement and Monitoring* – Outline of measures to mitigate, compensate, enhance and monitor those significant effects identified in the impact assessment.
  - ix. *Residual Effects* – Identification of residual effects following implementation of mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures.
- d. *Conclusions*: Chapters 21 to 23 provide a summary of the residual effects of the Project, information on cumulative effects and methods for the implementation of recommended mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures through a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).
- 1.5.6 Figures, diagrams, tables and plates are numbered according to the chapter to which they relate. Where possible, figures are contained within the ES text. However, where this is not possible as a consequence of their size, they are presented within the first appendix to the chapter to which they relate.
- 1.5.7 All appendices to the ES are contained within a separate volume for ease of reference. A glossary of terms used throughout the ES has been provided in Appendix 1.2. For ease of reference items within lists are identified by lower case letters, rather than bullet points. It should be noted that this does not imply any prioritisation of the list's contents.
- 1.5.8 Since the final detailed design and methodology for construction and operation of the Project will be settled in the future, assumed quantities and dimensions should be considered to be realistic approximations, unless stated otherwise in the particular context in which they are quoted. So that decision-makers and the general public may be confident as to the assumptions used, a realistic pessimistic scenario has been adopted.