

Statement of Community Involvement

The Mersey Gateway Project

March 2008

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.	BACKGROUND.....	2
3.	OUTLINE OF CONSULTATION HISTORY.....	6
4.	FIRST CONSULTATION STAGE (SEPTEMBER 2002 – APRIL 2006).....	10
5.	SECOND CONSULTATION STAGE (JUNE 2007 – OCTOBER 2007).....	13
6.	DESIGN DEVELOPMENT.....	32
7.	FORWARD STRATEGY.....	37
8.	CONCLUSION.....	40

APPENDICES

1. New Mersey Crossing – Quantitative Research (November 2004) [being scanned and added to Collaborator by Matt Fearnhead at Halton BC, so will need to be added to electronic file].
2. Mersey Gateway Pre-Planning Application Consultation leaflet (June 2007)
3. Mersey Gateway Brochure (September – October 2007)
4. Mersey Gateway Pre-Planning Application Consultation feedback leaflet (November 2007)
5. Communications Strategy (2007)
6. Stakeholder Management Plan (2007)
7. Mersey Gateway Pre-Planning Application Public Consultation - Part I: The Public Consultation Process (2007)
8. Mersey Gateway Pre-Planning Application Public Consultation – Part II: Factual Report on the Public Consultation (2007)
9. Mersey Gateway Pre-Planning Application Public Consultation – Part III: Interpretive Report on the Public Consultation Process (2007)
10. The Mersey Gateway – Progress Report (June 2007)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document is prepared by GVA Grimley Ltd on behalf of Halton Borough Council (the “Council”) in connection with the Mersey Gateway Project (the “Project”) which comprises a second road crossing of the River Mersey between Runcorn and Widnes, reconfiguration of the existing A533 Silver Jubilee Bridge, and associated highways and ancillary works.
- 1.2 The provision of a second road crossing of the Mersey has been a long held aspiration of the Council and neighbouring local authorities. The traffic bottleneck caused by the Silver Jubilee Bridge is acknowledged as a social and economic constraint both locally and wider across the region. The Halton Unitary Development Plan (the “UDP”) identifies that the case for a new crossing was formally acknowledged in 1999 by the then Minister for Transport, and the Council has subsequently sought to advance the proposals.
- 1.3 This report provides a detailed overview of the consultation exercise that has been undertaken to date by the Council and its retained public relations consultants. It outlines the consultation methods that have been adopted in order to ensure that the highest level of community involvement has been achieved to inform the evolution of the Project. The document goes on to summarise the consultation approach applied to the Project and the findings generated over the period from 2002 to March 2008. Consultation will of course continue post-submission of the planning applications and appropriate orders in accordance with statutory procedure.

2. BACKGROUND

Proposal Details

- 2.1 The Borough of Halton is located in the North West of England at a strategic crossing point of the Mersey Estuary. It comprises the Borough's two principal towns of Runcorn and Widnes either side of the Estuary, 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 thus provides a historic crossing point. This is now used by the main rail connection between Liverpool and the West Coast Main Line (via the Aethelfleda railway bridge) and the A533/A557 road link between the M62/M57 and the M56 (via the Silver Jubilee Bridge (SJB)). The M62 to the north of the Borough links the Liverpool City Region to Manchester and thereafter across the Pennines to the Yorkshire conurbations. To the south, the M56 links North Wales and Cheshire to Manchester. Halton therefore lies at the convergence of a number of strategic transport links in the North West of England.
- 2.2 The aim of the Project is to deliver a new road crossing of the River Mersey in Halton that links into this existing principal road network. It aims to provide improved and effective road connections for the sub-region and to take the opportunity to re-balance the transportation infrastructure within Halton towards delivering local transport and economic goals.
- 2.3 The Project's scope covers the following:
1. The delivery of a new road crossing of the River Mersey in Halton ("New Bridge"), and its incorporation within the existing highway network via the Central Expressway to Junction 12 of the M56;
 2. Modification and de-linking of the SJB from the primary highway network;
 3. Integration with public transport, cycle and pedestrian links across Halton;
 4. Implementation of tolling and development of associated infrastructure within the wider public realm.

These guiding principles have influenced the development of the Project.

Policy Context

- 2.4 The law prescribes a framework that governs community involvement in planning, and sets out statutory requirements for making information available about planning proposals. Guidance on the law is set out with the 2004 Document “Community Involvement in Planning – The Governments Objectives” and is subsequently reiterated within PPS1 and statutory legislation.
- 2.5 Regard has been had to the Cabinet Office Code of Good Practice on Consultation (January 2004), which provides six consultation criteria that any major development should be mindful of. These criteria have been applied by the Council as a general standard for their consultation, as follows:
1. Consult widely throughout the process.
 2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
 3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
 4. Give feedback regarding the responses received.
 5. Monitor effectiveness at consultation.
 6. Ensure your consultation follows best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.
- 2.6 These criteria have fed directly into the methodology being developed and align with the Council’s Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) as set out below.

Halton Borough Council’s Statement of Community Involvement (July 2006)

- 2.7 Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the Council is developing its Local Development Framework (LDF). This suite of documents requires the preparation of a number of guidance documents including a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). This document encourages the best possible involvement of the public when adopting new plans or determining planning applications.
- 2.8 In the case of the SCI, this aims to provide a degree of certainty to key stakeholders and the general public in relation to how they can expect to be involved at each stage of the development process.

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- 2.9 It seeks to front-load consultation for planning applications in an effort to understand as early as possible the issues of concern and level of consensus between interested parties.
- 2.10 The three tiers of consultation recognised by the Government's 'Code of Good Practice' are reflected in the SCI. The first tier addresses development within Schedule 1 - as defined by EIA regulations 1999. It notes that these developments require consultation to be carried out at a Borough wide level, reaching as many people as possible. It advises that all planning applications will require a bespoke consultation strategy, and that the public can expect to be informed by way of newsletters, public notices, media campaigns and via the internet. The Project is not Schedule 1 development, but has been treated as if it was one owing to its extent and scale.

Communications Strategy

- 2.11 The Project's retained public relations consultants, DTW and Politics International, have developed a Communications Strategy (the "Strategy") in tandem with the Project team and the Council's Corporate Marketing and Promotions Manager.
- 2.12 This Strategy is intended as a working document and is accompanied by an action plan, which is intended to guide consultation activities through to the end of 2011. It outlines key communications activities, roles and responsibilities to ensure that the Project communicates well with the stakeholders and can be successfully delivered.
- 2.13 A timeline has been prepared along with an action plan to reflect the key stages in the Project lifetime. This is to ensure that consultation activities are undertaken at the right time and so that flexibility is built into the process in order to manage changing circumstances and provide opportunity for contingencies.
- 2.14 MPs, local councillors, project partners, civil servants, landowners, local, national and specialist media and the Project team itself have been involved during the development of this Strategy.

Objectives

- 2.15 The objectives of the Strategy are to focus on achieving good quality consultation and an understanding of the Project so as to support its delivery and the wider regeneration of Halton Borough. The six objectives are as follows:
- 1) To develop understanding that the Project is about more than just a bridge;

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- 2) To build and maintain support and awareness of the Project amongst key stakeholders;
 - 3) To secure relevant formal approvals for the Project from statutory consultees ahead of the public inquiry;
 - 4) To ensure an open and transparent public inquiry process with minimal objections by identifying potential opponents of the Project and establishing ways to address their concerns;
 - 5) To provide stakeholders with appropriate opportunities to feedback on, and contribute to, the progress of the Project; and
 - 6) To engage and interest potential suppliers and contractors in tendering for the Project to ensure value for money.
- 2.16 The issues predicated to be raised by consultees are outlined within the Strategy and the Stakeholder Management Plan (Appendix 6), which lists all stakeholders are anticipated to have an input at some stage in the process.

Mersey Crossing Group

- 2.17 As part of the consultation process, the Mersey Crossing Group was formed in 1994. As a key stakeholder, this is made up of representatives from regional government, other local authorities and major private businesses from across the region.
- 2.18 The role of the Mersey Crossing Group is to promote the new Mersey Crossing and to guide the development of the Project. During the design development of the Project, the Mersey Crossing Group has organised and hosted a series of consultation events, as well as holding Project meetings attended by nominated elected members and senior officers from each local authority, together with senior representatives of other bodies. This group provides a forum for discussions with and securing approbation for this key group of stakeholders.

3. OUTLINE OF CONSULTATION HISTORY

3.1 The consultation undertaken can be divided into two clear phases:

- Consultation carried out over the period 2002-2006 leading up to the Department for Transport's confirmation of Programme Entry for the Project in March 2006 (advised on and managed by MVA Consultancy); and
- Consultation undertaken subsequent to approval of the Project by the Mersey Gateway Executive Board on 18th June 2007 (advised on and managed by DTW Consultancy).

3.2 A summary breakdown of these two phases is provided below:

1. First Consultation Stage (September 2002 – April 2006)

3.3 In this early period in the development of the Project, consultation was undertaken in three stages as follows:

Stage	Activity
Stage 1: Assessment of the crossing options	General consultation with residents, including telephone interviews and street survey (September and October 2002).
Stage 2: Assessment of crossing options	<p>Six Resident Focus Groups and three Business and Stakeholder Workshops (February 2003).</p> <p>Seven exhibitions in the Council's Runcorn and Widnes offices were held. Leaflets and questionnaires were delivered to 7,000 residents (February and March 2003).</p> <p>This led to the selection of the preferred route in April 2003.</p>
Stage 3: Focus on impacts of the preferred route	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eight focus groups held for representatives of 'hard to reach' groups 2. Consultation with 25 local authorities. 3. Business questionnaire surveys and direct interviews with major businesses

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Stated preference surveys were issued to 2,400 Halton residents (September 2004). 5. Dispatch of leaflets and questionnaires across the Borough (September 2005). 6. The Project website was established in Spring 2002 with a feedback facility. 7. Series of high profile events took place between 2004 and 2006 including the 'House of Commons MP's Dinner, the Delivering Sustainable Communities Summit and the Liverpool and Halton Chamber of Commerce. 8. Teaching packs for schools were developed with Halton EBP.
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2. Second Consultation Stage (June 2007 – October 2007)

- 3.4 Following the Department for Transport's confirmation of Programme Entry for the Project in March 2006, the Council formed a Project team to manage the planning applications and orders process in tandem with a community involvement programme. The preferred crossing option for the New Bridge was approved by the Mersey Gateway Executive Board on 18th June 2007 allowing for consultation to be undertaken between the period of June and September 2007.
- 3.5 DTW and Politics International developed the consultation process through a Communications Strategy (2007), a Stakeholder Management Plan (2007) and an Action Plan (2007) which conformed with both the Cabinet Office Code of Good Practice on Consultation (January 2004) and the Council's own Statement of Community Involvement (June 2006).
- 3.6 The methodology generated the following exercises over a 14 week period between June and September 2007.

Timing	Activity
June 2007	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The preferred option for the Project was launched via a briefing to the press - consultation leaflets and questionnaires were available for the launch. 2. Leaflets and questionnaires were distributed to

	<p>some 56,000 residents and businesses within the Borough.</p> <p>3. A new website and monthly e-newsletter was launched</p>
July 2007	1. A series of articles publicising the consultation were placed in various local and trade press
July 2007	<p>A broad ranging publicity exercise including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) 15 exhibitions held throughout the Borough ii) Editorial in Council publications iii) Information campaign in local media iv) Monthly e-newsletter v) Briefing events for local/regional businesses and groups vi) Mersey Gateway newsletter vii) Postal/phone/text feedback system viii) Letters to general stakeholders, statutory consultees and regional MP's and MEP's.
July 2007	A wide range of stakeholders at a local, regional and national level were contacted by letter that enclosed a consultation leaflet and questionnaire.
July – September 2007	15 manned public exhibitions were held at locations throughout Halton.
September 2007	Unmanned exhibitions were held at the offices of the Liverpool Daily Post, Liverpool John Lennon Airport and Spike Island. Display boards and questionnaires were provided.
August – September 2007	Eight presentations took place to stakeholder groups
Throughout the 14 week period	Newsletters and media coverage was undertaken including the BBC, Liverpool Daily Post, Regeneration and Renewal, Widnes and Runcorn Weekly News, Runcorn and Widnes World.
Ongoing throughout.	The Mersey Gateway website updated with an electronic questionnaire which asked a series of questions in respect of the draft proposals for the Project, views on

	road tolling options, and the proposed physical works to SJB.
Ongoing throughout.	A 24 hour telephone hotline and links to the Project team was established. A 24 hour Mersey Gateway e-mail and texting facility was established.

- 3.7 Consultation responses were recorded, rationalised into topics and issues, analysed and then addressed either through responses or future actions. A full summary of the two phases and the associated findings are set out in section 4 of this Statement.

4. FIRST CONSULTATION STAGE (SEPTEMBER 2002 – APRIL 2006)

- 4.1 This first period in the development of the Project undertook consultation in three stages as follows:

Stage 1 – Crossing options

- 4.2 In September and October 2002 the first consultation on ‘crossing options’ took place in the form of focus group discussions with residents, interviews with businesses, telephone surveys and street surveys with the wider travelling public were conducted.
- 4.3 This approach sought car driver reaction to a new crossing and, in particular, how driver behaviour would be affected by tolling. It concentrated on two main points, firstly trip frequency and details and secondly, tolling preference.
- 4.4 Three quarters of respondents at that time advised that they would consider travelling via alternative routes that, although they would increase journey times, would avoid road tolling.

Stage 2 - Assessment of the route options

- 4.5 The crossing options were then taken to a series of Resident Focus Groups (six in total) during February 2003 and Business and Stakeholder Workshops (three in total). In respect of the workshops, 18 out of the 64 invited attended.
- 4.6 Following this, an exhibition in the Council’s Runcorn and Widnes offices were held between February and March 2003. This ran alongside a leaflet drop and the issue of questionnaires to some 7,000 residents on 24th February.

Stage 3 – Focus on impacts of the preferred route

- 4.7 A series of alternative options to the construction of the New Bridge were considered during the design development process in 2003. This included an assessment of the following options against the identified scheme objectives:
- a. Halton Travel Plan Network;
 - b. Charging for using the Silver Jubilee Bridge or other roads;

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- c. Dynamic Lane Management;
 - d. Selective Access by vehicle tagging;
 - e. Road space re-allocation;
 - f. Park and Ride;
 - g. Rail Service Improvements;
 - h. Fixed crossing to the west of the Aethelfleda Railway Bridge;
 - i. Fixed crossing between the Silver Jubilee Bridge and Aethelfleda Railway Bridge;
 - j. Fixed crossing to the east of the Railway Bridge.
- 4.8 The findings of this assessment identified that a fixed crossing to the east of the Aethelfleda Railway Bridge represents the only option which has the potential to deliver all of the identified scheme objectives.
- 4.9 The Project team subsequently considered seven alternative fixed route crossings. Following a detailed assessment of each option, route 3A was identified in April 2003 as the best option which delivered significant traffic alleviation, enhanced public transport frequency and reliability, the provision of improved walking and cycling on SJB, avoided residential areas, and would cause minimal impact upon existing industrial areas. Further details on the preferred route selection are provided in section 6 of this Statement, and chapter 5 of the ES.
- 4.10 In July 2004, following the selection of the preferred route, a series of presentations were undertaken as follows:
- 1. 'Hard to reach' groups including the elderly, disabled and those on low income were carried out in eight focus groups.
 - 2. Twenty five local authorities either surrounding the crossing or within 30 minutes drive of it were then issued with business questionnaire surveys.
 - 3. Direct interviews with major businesses within the local area took place, including Eddie Stobart, Port of Garston, Liverpool John Lennon Airport, Sutton and Sons, Halton Transport and The O'Connor Group.

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4. A stated preference survey was issued to 2,400 Halton residents in September 2004 in conjunction with the dispatch of leaflets and questionnaires across the Borough via local libraries, the Council offices, shopping centres and later at local events in September of the following year.
- 4.11 Statutory consultees for likely consents for the Project were involved through out the above process. This has principally involved the Environment Agency, English Nature, Countryside Agency, English Heritage, Highways Agency, Acting Mersey Conservator, Mersey Docks & Harbour Company, Manchester Ship Canal Company and CABE.
- 4.12 In addition, other consultation was undertaken via letter and questionnaire with statutory undertakers and utilities, Network Rail, the Emergency Services, the North West Development Agency, Friends of the Earth, Merseytravel, CAWOS (Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society), Fiddlers Ferry Power Station, Mersey Tunnels, Ditton Freight Terminal, Halton Constituency Labour Party, Liverpool John Lennon Airport Transport Forum, North West Freight Advisory Group, INEOS, Halton Primary Care Trust, British Waterways, Natural Environmental Roundtable and Halton Biodiversity Action Group.
- 4.13 It has been acknowledged from the outset that the Project requires Environmental Impact Assessment. The first stage in the EIA exercise is the scoping report, the earliest version of which was published in April 2002. On publication copies of the document were sent to the following companies and organisations inviting them to comment: British Trust for Ornithology, British Waterways, Butterfly Conservation, Cheshire and Wirral Amphibian and Reptile Group, Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society, Cheshire Bat Group, Cheshire County Council, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Council for the Preservation of Rural England, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Fiddler's Ferry Yacht Club, Government Office North West, Halton Chamber of Commerce, Halton Transport, Halton Wildfowlers, Lancashire and Cheshire Entomological Society, Liverpool John Lennon Airport, Mersey Estuary Conservation Group, Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, Merseyside and West Lancashire Bat Group, Merseyside County Museums, Merseytravel, North West Naturalists Union, Railtrack, RSPB, The Mersey Forest, Warrington Local Agenda 21 Waste Group, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, and Wirral and Cheshire Badger Group.
- 4.14 A dedicated website was established in Spring 2002 with a feedback facility; in addition the 'Stuck in a Jam' outdoor advertising campaign was launched in September 2003 with billboard space taken on construction sites, motorway infrastructure and public transport.
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5. SECOND CONSULTATION STAGE (JUNE 2007 – OCTOBER 2007)

The Public Consultation Methodology

- 5.1 A Consultation Action Plan was prepared in March 2007, initiating the work required for the consultation exercise. The request to undertake major consultation was approved by the Mersey Gateway Executive Board on 18th June 2007, and in accord with the Communications Strategy, highlighted above, the public consultation exercise was implemented between June and September of 2007.
- 5.2 On 18th June 2007 a briefing for the press at the Catalyst Museum in Widnes took place and leaflets and questionnaires were distributed to residents and businesses within the Borough. Consultation leaflets and questionnaires were available for the launch.
- 5.3 Furthermore, a number of articles publicising the proposals were printed in the local and regional media – specifically Liverpool Daily Post, Liverpool Echo, Runcorn World, Runcorn & Widnes Weekly News between 19 June 2007 and 5 July 2007. The Project was also covered by the BBC and commercial radio and TV stations in the North West.
- 5.4 These activities ran from 18th June to 21st September 2007 in line with the Consultation Strategy. In addition to the principle activities noted above the following consultation activities were undertaken: 15 exhibitions throughout the Borough, Editorial in Halton Borough Council publications, a new website, information campaign in local media, monthly e-newsletter, briefing events for local/regional businesses and groups, gateway newsletter, postal/phone/text feedback system and letters to general stakeholders, statutory consultees and regional MP's and MEP's.
- 5.5 This initial consultation aimed to:
1. Inform stakeholders of the Project plans and proposed timetable of activity;
 2. Ensure third parties were informed directly at the earliest appropriate opportunity of proposals that could directly impact upon them;
 3. Seek views and opinions of stakeholders on proposals, particularly those aspects of the Project which remain flexible;

4. Use stakeholder comments to assist with mitigating potential objections prior to the formal planning process;
 5. Seek to build and maintain support for the Project amongst its stakeholders; and
 6. Ensure that the project is employing best practice and meeting relevant consultation guidelines at all stages. All consultation conformed to the Council's SCI.
- 5.6 In early July 2007, a wide range of stakeholders at a local, regional and national level were provided with the consultation leaflets and questionnaires (Appendix 2). A total of 747 stakeholders were contacted.
- 5.7 The consultation leaflet advised on the content of the Project and the availability of additional information at public exhibitions, by telephone, on-line, by freepost return of questionnaire, e-mail, text.

Public Exhibitions

- 5.8 A series of public exhibitions were held as follows: (* Manned Exhibitions)

1.	04/07/2007 Halton Stadium* 12:00-20:00	55 attended
2.	05/07/2007 The Brindley* 12:00-20:00	149 attended
3.	06/07/2007 Halton Lea 10:00-16:00	135 attended
4.	07/07/2007 Halton Lea 10:00-14:00	133 attended
5.	09/07/2007 Halton Direct Link, Widnes 09:00-17:00	49 attended
6.	10/07/2007 Halton Direct Link, Widnes 09:00-16:00	29 attended
7.	12/07/2007* Halton Stadium 10:00-20:00	52 attended
8.	13/07/2007 Greenoaks, Widnes 10:00-16:00	312 attended
9.	14/07/2007 Greenoaks, Widnes 10:00-14:00	330 attended
10.	16/07/2007 Direct Link, Runcorn Old Town 09:00-17:00	40 attended
11.	17/07/2007 Direct Link, Runcorn Old Town 09:00-17:00	37 attended
12.	18/07/2007* The Brindley 14:00-20:00	92 attended
13.	21/07/2007* Halton Stadium 10:00-14:00	26 attended
14.	04/09/2007* Daresbury Innovation Centre 12:00-18:00	58 attended
15.	06/09/2007* Moore Primary School 14:30-20:00	19 attended

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- 5.9 Members of the Project team were on hand to answer queries and record details and talk people through the 1:2500 scale plans and supporting information relating to regeneration and the environmental effects. This was provided along with the main display stand and animations of the route corridor with the new crossing in place shown in 3D computer “walk through”. The exhibitions generated over 3,200 written responses and approximately 200 electronic responses. A full summary of the key issues raised is included at Appendix 8 of this Statement.
- 5.10 In addition, unmanned exhibitions were held at the offices of the Liverpool Daily Post during the period 9th July to 13th July 2007, Liverpool John Lennon Airport between 27th July and 31st August 2007 and Spike Island in September 2007. This involved the use of a full set of display boards, pop-up display boards, and a selection of display boards at each venue respectively, along with questionnaires.

Presentations

- 5.11 Presentations took place over the course of July to October 2007 to a number of stakeholders including:
1. Merseytravel Integrated Transport Forum, 13th July 2007;
 2. Urban Renewal Specialist Strategic Partnership, 17th July 2007;
 3. Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, Ports and Transport Forum, 18th July 2007;
 4. Construction for Merseyside, 20th July 2007;
 5. Merseyside Transport, Health and Environment Forum, 25th July 2007;
 6. Stakeholders involved in the Social Impact Assessment, w/b 10th September 2007;
 7. Federation of Small Businesses, 10th October 2007; and
 8. Mersey Crossing Group and Breakfast Briefing, 15th October 2007.

Media Coverage

- 5.12 Media coverage was generated through BBC North West, Granada, BBC Radio Merseyside, Wire FM, Liverpool Echo, Liverpool Post, Runcorn & Widnes World, Runcorn & Widnes Weekly News, Planning Magazine, Surveyor Magazine, Local Transport Today, Architect, Builder, Contractor & Developer Magazine and the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce Magazine.

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- 5.13 Newsletters provided further coverage including The Mersey Gateway e-newsletter, In Touch (HBC internal magazine), Inside Halton (HBC magazine distributed to all households in Halton), The Gateway (Mersey Gateway stakeholder leaflet), Liverpool John Lennon Airport e-newsletter, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce magazine and the NWDA e-newsletter.

Website

- 5.14 The Mersey Gateway website was updated to provide more information and cater for the purposes of consultation through electronic questionnaire.

Telephone Contact

- 5.15 The consultation brochure contained the Council's Call Centre 24 hour telephone number and links to the Project team. Telephone enquiries processed by the Project team were added to the database of responses.

E-mail

- 5.16 The consultation leaflet gave details of the Mersey Gateway e-mail address. A total of 78 e-mails were received with many requiring a response. All e-mails were added to the database of responses.

Text

- 5.17 A texting facility was set-up at the Council's telephone Call Centre, and details were given in the consultation leaflet. Only 2 texts were received despite being advertised in the consultation leaflet.
- 5.18 A full assessment of the activities undertaken including lists of all organisations, venues and dates is provided in Appendix 8.

Factual Report on the Public Consultation

- 5.19 Following the completion of the public consultation exercise, in August 2007 MVA Consultancy was commissioned to conduct an analysis of the data collated during the public consultation process. This involved the preparation of the following three reports:
- i. [Mersey Gateway Pre-Planning Application Public Consultation - Part I: The Public Consultation Process \(2007\)](#);

- ii. Mersey Gateway Pre-Planning Application Public Consultation – Part II: Factual Report on the Public Consultation (2007); and
- iii. Mersey Gateway Pre-Planning Application Public Consultation – Part III: Interpretive Report on the Public Consultation Process (2007)

5.20 These reports identified the key headline concerns raised by consultees and informed the Interpretive Report (November 2007) produced by the Project Team. These reports can be found under Appendices 7-9.

5.21 The responses from the questionnaire formed the main source of data for the analysis. In total, 3,271 questionnaires and 78 ad hoc emails were returned and 208 public consultation sheets were completed at the exhibition(s). In addition 29 telephone enquiries, 2 texts and 30 letters from stakeholders formed the final data source for this analysis.

Analysis Techniques

5.22 All responses were forwarded to MVA and the analysis process comprised various stages. Initially, data was examined at the clustered level; therefore, comments from the questionnaire were separated from those identified at the exhibitions, or stated through e-mail or telephone.

5.23 Key themes were identified from the topics most frequently mentioned by the public or stakeholders. The intensity of these views was subsequently considered, thus ensuring a comprehensive interpretation of the entire data set.

5.24 The questionnaire also comprised two closed questions. The first concerned tolling. The second concerned the redevelopment of the existing SJB.

5.25 Data was grouped together for reporting purposes, resulting in emerging themes highlighting significant differences in opinion expressed across the different forms of communication methods.

5.26 The postal and online questionnaire provided a useful medium through which the general public were able to communicate with the Project team, alongside the public exhibitions. E-mails were less frequently used by the public and telephone enquiries were mainly confined to requests for additional information. In comparison, stakeholders primarily registered their views by postal correspondence.

5.27 The key findings of the stakeholder and public consultation were as follows:

1. Overall perceptions of the Project

5.28 Overall, stakeholders were positive about the Project. Only one of the stakeholders (North West Transport Activists Round Table) strongly opposed. There were no other objections. Over half of the consultees agreed with the implementation of the Project, twelve remained neutral, a further twelve were supportive and five were strongly supportive (mainly local authority and regeneration agencies).

2. Support for the scheme

5.29 Over half of the consultees (17 stakeholders) expressed a supportive attitude towards the Project. They concentrated mainly on the subsequent improvements to road network and associated benefits for business travellers within Halton.

5.30 Stakeholders also made reference to their long-term support for the Project, whilst others referred to their continued support.

5.31 In describing their support, respondents commented on the importance of the Project for both the local area and wider region, most often with regard to the associated regeneration benefits and further inward investment within the area, thus encouraging economic growth and prosperity.

5.32 It was agreed by these stakeholders that the Project would assist “businesses in the area as it will provide the transport reliability needed to further continue business growth.” This was noted both in terms of growth and trade into south Liverpool as well as the M56 corridor and North Wales.

5.33 Particular reference was made to the ways in which the Project would relieve the volume of traffic currently experienced on the SJB.

5.34 One stakeholder identified specific areas of the road network which would receive the greatest benefit from the Project.

5.35 Although questions about the Project were raised, the importance of it was also noted and support was given. Many respondents felt that the construction of a new crossing was long over due and would deliver economic regeneration of the area, together with easing congestion in the Borough.

5.36 Despite showing some concerns about the Project, some respondents were also keen to identify their support. In such cases, concerns focused on the cost of the New Bridge,

environmental impacts, increased social segregation, added road congestion, or the design/construction involved in constructing the Project.

- 5.37 With regard to social segregation, issues were identified in association with the local communities by the new infrastructure or the imposing of a tolling system. It was assumed by the majority of respondents that the Project would encourage segregation between Widnes and Runcorn residents. The segregation of work patterns was also mentioned.

3. Questions about the scheme

- 5.38 Despite illustrating support for the Project, in relation to tolling one stakeholder said *“it will be important to have some form of regular user discount to minimise the financial impact for such employees,”* including employees of Liverpool John Lennon Airport.
- 5.39 In addition, several respondents queried the design of the Project, in terms of the New Bridge itself and changes to existing roads. *“One issue yet to be resolved is access to and from the M56, currently proposed via junction 12.”*
- 5.40 Two of the stakeholders felt it was important to ensure any unexpected discoveries of archaeological features were also considered during the construction phase of the Project.
- 5.41 Environmental concerns were also expressed by consultees in respect of the development of the Project. This included the need for off-site mitigation to enable the functionality of the landscape to be maintained, including existing visual amenity and biodiversity.

4. Opposition to the scheme

- 5.42 As noted above, only one stakeholder expressed negative views towards the Project and this was an activists group. This response focused on the detrimental effects to the environment. However, it should be noted that this opposition was directed at the general impact of road building, rather than the Project itself.

5. Approaches to Tolling

- 5.43 Respondents were asked to consider the type of discounts they would prefer for both the SJB and the New Bridge. Respondents were able to choose a maximum of two options from a list provided by the Project team and were also provided with space to state another option.
- 5.44 Respondents stated that they would prefer discounts for local people (2,268), discount for regular users of the bridges (1,055) and discounts for elderly or disabled travellers (124). Less

preference was shown for discounts for specific types of vehicles e.g. taxis, cyclists (38), limited charging plans for car sharing (23), discounts for Halton businesses (15) and restrictions for Heavy Goods Vehicles (11). The least preferred option was for all users to pay the same rate (130). Respondents were also able to offer their own suggestions, the most popular being not to have a toll (733).

5.45 Table 1 below highlights the opinion of respondents towards the tolling options offered in the survey. It illustrates that a local discount is the most supported option.

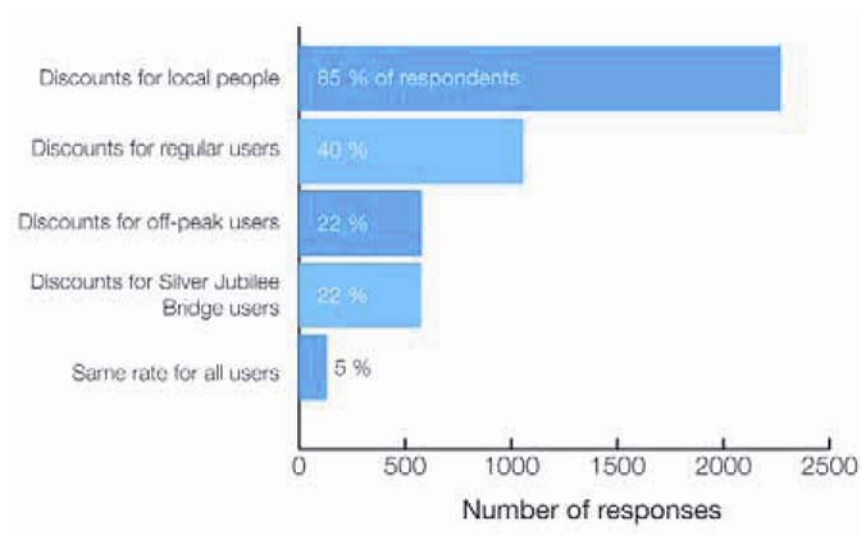


Table 1: Responses concerning toll discounts (%)

5.46 Table 2 below illustrates the support for 'No toll' when given the option of 'other'.

Summary of 'other' responses	Number of responses
No toll	733
Discounts for disabled or elderly users	124
Discounts for specific types of vehicle, e.g. taxi	38
Limited charging plans, e.g. car sharing	23
Discounts for Halton businesses	15
Restrictions for HGVs on Silver Jubilee Bridge	11

Table 2: Other responses to tolling

Redeveloping the Silver Jubilee Bridge

- 5.47 Respondents answering the postal or online questionnaire were specifically asked about their views concerning the redevelopment of the SJB. Respondents were able to choose a maximum of two options from the list provided by the Project team.
- 5.48 Respondents indicated that they would rather retain the SJB in its current state (1,793), introduce cycling lanes (755) and enhance pedestrian facilities (754). The least preferred options were to introduce priority bus lanes (578), and provide a more frequent bus service (675).

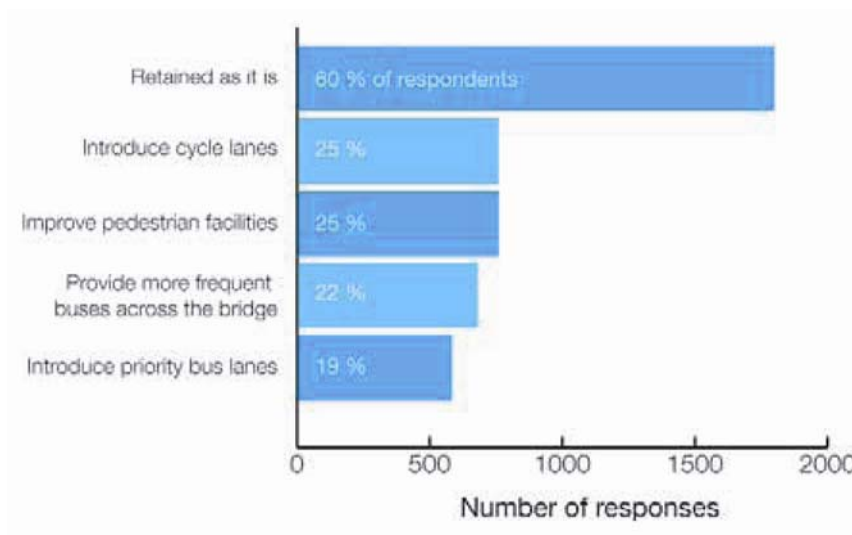


Table 3: Responses concerning options for the SJB (this does not add up to 100% as more than one option was allowed).

Open comments on the Project Proposals

- 5.49 Respondents were asked about their comments on the draft proposals for the Project. The questionnaire included space for the respondents to state their views accordingly.
- 5.50 Whilst the questionnaires and the public exhibitions resulted in good responses, fewer numbers of people utilised electronic techniques or used the telephone.
- 5.51 In addition to the themes which respondents spoke about, the analysis of the data from the public consultation comprised a breakdown of specific geographical areas mentioned in respondents' open comments.

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- 5.52 Respondents discussed the impact of the Project on the M56, particularly Junction 11 in respect of increased vehicular movements at this junction, and the potential to cause increased road congestion. Discussion about the Mersey Tunnels mainly focused on the issue of tolls, whilst a similar percentage of responses highlighted the congestion problems in Daresbury or the damage to wildlife on Wigg Island.
- 5.53 The issues surrounding the tolling of the SJB and New Bridge were discussed most frequently by respondents, regardless of the communication method. Comments which were most commonly raised related to the provision of discounts for local residents or businesses, both for the SJB and the New Bridge.
- 5.54 Many respondents felt that it was unfair to toll residents in addition to other financial costs involved with owning a car or living in Halton.
- 5.55 Several respondents said that the cost of the tolls was particularly pertinent for residents in Halton due to the typically low income in the area. Discounts for the elderly and disabled were also highlighted within the responses.
- 5.56 A small number of respondents referred to other bridges which are not tolled to illustrate their disagreement with the proposed tolling system. A smaller section of the respondent presented doubts about the financial implications of the Project for businesses and shops in Halton.
- 5.57 Some respondents expressed reservations about the funding of the Project, whereby misconceptions arose regarding the funding of the entire Project by local residents.
- 5.58 The design of the tolling system was raised by many respondents as a further concern. This related to the finer details of the Project (which direction of travel will be tolled and how much) as well as the tangible design. This included concerns that the tolling system would greatly increase congestion on the bridges and surrounding area, and have a detrimental impact upon local services including the emergency services.
- 5.59 Issues surrounding the tolling of both bridges were subsequently raised by many respondents and concerns about the impact of the tolls on social segregation within the area were also raised. A small group of respondents showed their support for tolling, and understood the need for this approach to be introduced.
- 5.60 Given that the introduction of toll charging across the New Bridge did not form part of the initial Scoping Report prepared in 2002, a revised EIA Scoping Report for the Project was issued in November 2007. This also reflected the refinement of the Project during the intervening period.
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Design/construction of scheme

- 5.61 Responses to the postal and online questionnaire showed particular concerns about access to the area during the construction phase of the New Bridge and at completion of the Project.
- 5.62 The aesthetic appeal of the New Bridge was also mentioned by respondents as being of particular importance.
- 5.63 The chosen location of the New Bridge and proposed changes to the surrounding road networks were also recognised as important issues, with reservations expressed about the positioning of the Project, the design of adjoining roads and the layout of the New Bridge,
- 5.64 Furthermore, several respondents considered how the location of the Project would impact upon existing residential land-uses, including potential noise, air and visual impacts associated with the Project, particularly the Central Expressway and J11a.
- 5.65 Safety issues were noted by respondents in relation to the construction and use of the Project, especially for pedestrians using the New Bridge.

Traffic concerns/increased congestion

- 5.66 Respondents were generally concerned about the impact on congestion in the area. Some respondents felt that increased traffic would impact on surrounding areas, while others emphasised the continued congestion on the SJB.
- 5.67 In addition, there was uneasiness regarding the implications of the Project for public transport services.

Environmental impact

- 5.68 Respondents using all forms of communication, but most frequently those attending public exhibition, were concerned with environmental issues, in particular noise and air pollution featuring predominantly.
- 5.69 More general issues in respect of the environment were also noted by respondents as opposed to relating to specifics about the Project. These comments mainly highlighted and reflected the environmental policy agenda.

Wildlife concerns

- 5.70 Possible damage to natural habitats and the removal of wildlife were emphasised, and the impact upon natural ecosystems was most commonly mentioned by respondents.

Other

- 5.71 Remaining comments largely addressed wider topical debates, including the economic impact of the Project upon local businesses, the effect on house prices/residential land values, legislation/policy makers, and local employment levels.

Local Businesses

- 5.72 Concern was raised that businesses would move out of the area altogether, and thus there would need to be support and assistance in respect of the relocation of local businesses affected by the Project.

House Prices

- 5.73 Several respondents were concerned that increased noise, traffic and pollution associated with the Project would result in a fall in house prices.

Policy

- 5.74 Some respondents used the questionnaire as an opportunity to voice their opinions in respect of wider governmental policy issues, predominantly focusing upon the economy and health. These comments presented dissatisfaction with the funding strategies of both local and national government.

Job Losses

- 5.75 A small number of respondents expressed strong viewpoints concerning job losses during the construction and operation of the Project.

Construction Force

- 5.76 A larger group of respondents stated their eagerness for the Project to utilise local labour during construction and operation, as opposed to outlining concern at potential job losses. The short-term benefits in local employment were recognised, albeit it was acknowledged that long-term investment in skills and training would be required.

Design and location of the Project

- 5.77 Tolling was the most frequent topic raised by the general public across all forms of communication. Whilst it is clear that local residents expect to have discounted travel across the New Bridge, it was also considered that local residents should receive priority.
- 5.78 Concern was voiced with regards to the design of the New Bridge and the subsequent physical works to the existing highway network. This was mainly in relation to increased congestion.
- 5.79 In addition, stakeholders were keen to stipulate their future involvement in finalising modifications to the surrounding road network.
- 5.80 Consultees also asked to be kept informed about the development of the Project, specifically details in relation to timescales, demolition of industrial property and road closures.

Construction and operation of the Project

- 5.81 The need to employ a local labour force was identified by some members of the general public, whilst stakeholders concentrated purely upon the associated benefits to the surrounding road network through the delivery of the Project.
- 5.82 The public also voiced concerns over congestion during the construction phase of the Project, and the subsequent impacts upon shopping patterns and social visits across the Borough. Stakeholders did not raise any issues in relation to social segregation within the Borough.

Concern at the scheme and poor communication

- 5.83 A small proportion of consultees (circa 1% of respondents) emphasised negative perceptions of the scheme. These concerns generally related to the construction timescales as opposed to identifying any particular aspect of the Project.
- 5.84 In addition, some respondents (less than 1% of respondents) considered that communication between the Project team and residents/businesses within the local area should have provided more detailed information about the proposal.

Overall

- 5.85 The consultation process has identified that the public are primarily concerned with cost issues, including the Project funding and associated road tolling. However, stakeholders did

recognise the wider benefits of the Project to the regional and local transport networks. Furthermore, stakeholders demonstrated a broad understanding of the Project, including the specifics of the design, as well as the intended physical modifications to the existing highway network.

Interpretive Report on the Public Consultation Process

- 5.86 The Interpretive Report (Part III) specifically covers the outcome of the consultation, explaining how the views expressed will influence the Project as it moves towards the submission of a planning application. The full report can be viewed under Appendix 9.
- 5.87 As noted above the key issues emerging from the consultation process are support for the Project, tolling the use of the SJB after the opening of the New Bridge, traffic impact upon the Central Expressway, impact upon commercial units and impact of a possible new M56 Junction (J11A). Other specific issues raised (often by a small minority of respondents) included traffic impact (M56 J12, Weston Point Expressway, Widnes Town Centre, Ditton Junction & Widnes Loops), ecological impacts, design issues (de-linking of the SJB, choice of route, location of toll plazas, impact on the golf course and nearby housing, layout of Astmoor Junction and impact on Public Rights of Way).
- 5.88 Each of these issues is reported in full in the Part II Report in Appendix 8. The Part III Report analyses the data and offers resolutions in order to take the Project forwards to the Applications and Orders stage.

Support for the Scheme

- 5.89 The Project has been generally well accepted, with the need for the Project being acknowledged. 243 respondents expressed their unreserved support for the proposal, whilst a further 93 stated their general support coupled with concern about specific issues.
- 5.90 Institutions, private sector organisations and local authorities have offered the strongest support, with stakeholder interest in the Project demonstrating the continued support that the proposal has across the Liverpool City Region and north Cheshire.
- 5.91 As such, continued liaison with the public and stakeholders is required to promote the proposal further in an active and positive manner in accordance with the Mersey Gateway Communication Strategy and Stakeholder Management Plan (Appendices 5 and 6). This will raise the awareness and profile of the Project, and ensure a continued level of understanding and support.

Opposition to the scheme

Tolling

- 5.92 Road tolling represented the most common concern raised by the public, and comprised the first of two closed questions in the questionnaire. The greatest preference was for a “Discounts for local people” and “Discounts for regular users”. Many respondents gave an additional response under “Other”, stating that there should be no road toll due to affordability and the division effect upon the Borough.
- 5.93 It is appropriate to consider if a local discount scheme is possible at an appropriate time. The scope for any discount in tolling will be dependant upon the viability of the Project. Hence, whilst it would be prudent to maintain an ability later to offer discounts, the point cannot be addressed until the procurement of an operator for the Project has been captured.

Use of the Silver Jubilee Bridge after the opening of the Project

- 5.94 The second of the two closed questions in the questionnaire related to how the SJB would be utilised after-opening of the New Bridge. The most popular choice (60% of responses) was to “retain as it is” (refer to table 3, page 21). It is likely that this reflects a local desire to avoid tolling of the New Bridge. There is also substantial interest in using the SJB for improving sustainable transport choices, with 25% of respondents choosing “introduce cycle lanes”, 25% choosing “improve pedestrian facilities” and 19% choosing “introduce bus priority lanes”.
- 5.95 Concerns over the works to the SJB will require further investigation to be undertaken. This will be necessary to understand the implications of the modifications to the existing carriageway across the SJB to facilitate cycling and walking, alongside more frequent and reliable public transport services. The sustainable transport strategy currently being developed aims to deliver improved non-vehicular connections to Runcorn Railway Station to ensure that the proposed alterations to the SJB form part of a fully integrated local transport network.
- 5.96 The northern approach roads will require physical alterations. The reinstatement of the approach roads is likely to be necessary to enable improved access for local development. To the north of the estuary, the reinstatement of approach roads that cater for local access instead of through traffic will form part of the Project.
- 5.97 The de-linking of the southern approach roads in Runcorn Old Town don't form part of this planning application, but do form part of the wider scheme. Opportunity exists however to

integrate the regeneration of Runcorn Old Town with the modification of the existing approach roads to SJB.

- 5.98 The de-linking of the SJB on the Runcorn side does not form part of the planning application. This will form part of the evolving Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy. This should ensure that the de-linking programme is consistent with the regeneration proposals for Runcorn. The Regeneration Strategy underwent consultation in Spring 2008, and will be adopted in late 2008.

Traffic Impact on the Central Expressway

- 5.99 The re-routing of traffic on existing roads was shown on the public consultation plans as likely to increase by 160% along the Central Expressway. The concerns of local residents were reflected in responses in relation to increased traffic noise, air pollution and depreciation in property values.
- 5.100 Early work carried out suggests that existing junctions will require improvement works to cater for traffic noise, and that new barriers will be used to reduce noise pollution. The planning application will comprise these additional works. With regard to air pollution, it has been identified through the EIA that the Project will not exceed Air Quality Standards within the route corridor.

Impact on Commercial Units

- 5.101 Whilst no residential properties will be required to be acquired for the Project, certain commercial units will need to be relocated within Southern Widnes and at Astmoor in Runcorn. This gives rise to issues regarding relocations, advanced purchase, potential compulsory acquisition and possible job losses.
- 5.102 To minimise the disruption and loss of jobs all businesses and landowners affected by the proposal have been invited to discuss how best to mitigate these effects. Options will include the timescale to acquire and the need to relocate businesses. It is proposed to enter into negotiations with landowners prior to applying compulsory powers in order to acquire properties. In addition, a Business Relocations Officer has been appointed to liaise directly with affected landowners.

Possible New M56 Junction (J11A)

- 5.103 Whilst a new motorway junction on the M56 between junctions 11 and 12 was first proposed in Halton's Local Transport Plan (2000), a new M56 junction does not form part of the Project.

Discussions with the Highways Agency and the Department for Transport sought to determine the desirability and deliverability of this new junction at a later stage. The delivery of a new J11A does not currently form part of the Project, but discussions with the Highways Agency are ongoing.

Other Traffic Impacts

- 5.104 Comments were made concerning a possible increase in traffic at M56 J11 and the current level of capacity at M56 J12. Whilst improvements to M56 J11 do not form part of the proposal, extra capacity will be provided at M56 J12.
- 5.105 In general, favourable comments were received in relation to the decrease in traffic on the Weston Point Expressway.
- 5.106 The traffic flow drawing identified traffic flow changes in Widnes Centre to be generally neutral, with the exception of a possible increase on Moore Lane. This generated some concerns about increased traffic flows and associated noise levels. However, it is not expected that there will be a significant increase in road traffic in Widnes Town Centre due to traffic diversions onto other routes.
- 5.107 Ditton Interchange will be modified to comprise a signal controlled junction. Consultation comments raised concerns in relation to increased traffic levels generated by the Ditton Strategic Rail Freight Park, and how road traffic from Widnes would access the road tolling facilities. The junction has therefore been designed to accommodate these vehicular movements.

Ecological Impacts

- 5.108 A few comments were received in relation to the ecological impacts of the Project upon Wigg Island. As such, possible mitigation or compensatory measures have been considered as part of the Project.

Design Issues

- 5.109 The road layout in Runcorn Old Town generated a degree of comment in the event of de-linking taking place. Favourable comments were received relating to the removal of the slip road from Weston Point Expressway to the SJB, whereby this would contribute to the potential reopening of locks from the Bridgewater Canal to the Manchester Ship Canal. As such, the Runcorn de-linking strategy should be considered further in line with the emerging Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy, and Sustainable Transport Strategy.

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- 5.110 Some concerns were expressed by the Acting Mersey Conservator in regard to the impact of bridge piers upon river hydrology. However, the detailed hydrodynamics studies carried out as part of the EIA demonstrates that the Project will not have a significant impact upon the Mersey Estuary in excess of the naturally occurring rate of change.
- 5.111 A few comments were received in relation to choice of route with some respondents recommending that the proposed route alignment should be located downstream of the SJB, and to a lesser extent, that it should be sited further towards Warrington where the river crossing is narrower. Studies in relation to the route alignment were undertaken up to 2003 at which point a preferred route was selected by the Council with the support of the Mersey Crossing Group. The preferred route was based upon the best overall option having regard to all potential significant benefits and environmental impacts, and achieving all of the identified scheme objectives.
- 5.112 The location of the toll plazas generated a significant degree of comment, in particular why they were situated on the Widnes side of the estuary. Their siting on the Widnes side represents the optimum location whereby minimising environmental impact.
- 5.113 There were some adverse comments about the potential impacts of the Project on St. Michaels golf course, in particular the reason for its current closure. The golf course was closed, however, as a precautionary measure after the discovery of contaminants close to the surface some years in advance of the evolution of the Reference Design for the Project.
- 5.114 Comments were also made about the possible environmental impacts of the Project upon existing residential development situated to the north of the golf course, including air and noise pollution, and potential visual intrusion. The impact upon the housing alongside the closed golf course will be neutral as the scheme does not encroach any further than at present, as demonstrated within the EIA.
- 5.115 Some clarification was required as to the layout of Astmoor Junction. Some comments were also received concerning the impact of the Project upon properties where alterations were being made. These matters are included as part of Central Expressway mitigation measures in the EIA.

Feedback

- 5.116 The results were compiled into a second leaflet which was then distributed across the borough to all residents and businesses in November 2007 (Appendix 4). This leaflet was also

issued to over 800 stakeholders from across the country including MPs, MEPs, local authorities and special interest groups.

- 5.117 This feedback not only included the factual results of the consultation, but also indicated how this had impact upon the Project. It also outlined the approach of the Project team to investigate and mitigate areas of concern.
- 5.118 Copies of all the consultation material was also published on the Mersey Gateway website, comprising part of a wider information campaign through local and regional media and via the Council's own publications.

6. DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

- 6.1 An important element of any consultation exercise is to demonstrate how consultee responses have been considered and, if relevant, these have informed the development proposals.
- 6.2 As previously outlined at para. 3.1 of this Statement, the Project has been subject to two distinct phases of consultation, as follows:
- a. First Consultation Stage (September 2002 – April 2006); and
 - b. Second Consultation Stage (June 2007 – October 2007)
- 6.3 Each stage of consultation has included Business and Stakeholder workshops, public exhibitions, interviews with major employers, telephone surveys, street surveys, and questionnaires. This campaign has generated a large number of consultee responses from the general public, stakeholders, and local businesses. The extent to which these comments have informed key elements of the design development are therefore considered below:

1. Design of the New Bridge

- 6.4 During the consultation process, consultees expressed the importance of the aesthetic appeal of the New Bridge, highlighting the need for an appropriate use of materials, colour and lighting, and adopting a modern, stylistic design. Consultees also outlined the need for the New Bridge to accommodate sufficient and safe vehicular movements through the designed lane layout and configuration. The extent to which the Project has had regard for these comments during the design development is set out below:
- i. The Project has been designed having full regard to its local context and its inter-relationship with neighbouring uses. Whilst the Project works have to successfully achieve their function as a major link, which means that the scale of the Project is inevitably large, the design development has sought to incorporate human scale elements wherever possible in terms of landscaping and public realm;
 - ii. The lightness of cabling and structural form, and choice of appropriate materials ensure that the New Bridge has the capacity to be considered as a modern iconic structure of architectural merit in its own right, set alongside the SJB and Aethelfleda Railway Bridge;

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- iii. The Project works as a whole have sought to incorporate visual interest and to create visual interest through the quality of the design and choice of materials;
 - iv. The Project has been designed to be compatible with both its local context and surrounding land-uses as it passes through Widnes and Runcorn;
 - v. The Project will represent and deliver a modern road facility designed to accord with current standards and with ample capacity to accommodate current and estimated future traffic levels;
 - vi. Landscape proposals, including tree and shrub planting, have been considered to minimise the visual impacts of the Project upon existing built development, canals and rivers, areas of designated and proposed greenspace, and Green Belt land at Wigg Island to the north of Astmoor Industrial Estate; and
 - vii. Careful consideration has been given to the position of carriageway lighting in respect of the estuary setting, and in particular, the effects on wildlife.
- 6.5 As far as possible therefore, the design of the New Bridge and the wider works have had regard to the broad comments raised.

2. Preferred Route

- 6.6 Given the proposed scale of the New Bridge, concerns were expressed, in particular by local residents, as to the possible visual impact of the Bridge upon existing residential areas within Runcorn and Widnes; and the Grade II listed Silver Jubilee Bridge and Grade II* listed Aethelfleda Railway Bridge crossing the estuary at the Runcorn Gap. These concerns, which echo some of the key principles underlying the appraisal of alternatives, have been addressed by the preferred route as follows:
- i. It is situated from existing, densely populated residential areas;
 - ii. It is aligned to minimise the impacts of development upon existing commercial properties within Runcorn and Widnes;
 - iii. It is aligned away from allocated future residential sites as identified on the Halton UDP Proposals Map so to minimise any potential impact upon future development within Runcorn and Widnes;

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- iv. It is configured to maximise links with the existing local highway network, including the Central Expressway, providing direct access to the M56 J12 and the wider region, and to Liverpool via the A562 Speke Road; this will serve to benefit both residents and businesses alike, and will provide efficient multi-modal access where required; and
 - v. It is situated upstream from the existing listed structures to minimise the visual impact of the New Bridge upon these important structures, and enable the New Bridge to itself be regarded as an 'iconic' structure within the setting of the Mersey Estuary. The Project as a whole has sought to respect the existing nature and character of the existing built fabric, and add positively to this.
- 6.7 Where possible therefore, the preferred route has sought to minimise the visual intrusion of the New Bridge upon the existing character and appearance of the estuary setting, and existing surrounding land-uses.

3. Environmental Impacts

- 6.8 During the consultation process, comments were raised in respect of the impacts of the Project upon existing biodiversity and wildlife habitats, and possible impacts of noise and air pollution arising from the movement of vehicles across the New Bridge and approach roads. The Project team has had regard for these concerns through the design development as follows:
- i. Road noise barriers will be constructed within the route corridor to reduce associated road traffic noise generation; overall, the preferred route alignment will reduce the number of people bothered by noise pollution than at present; and
 - ii. The New Bridge is situated upstream to minimise any environmental impacts upon the Middle Mersey Estuary, designated as a European Site, SPA, SSSI and Ramsar Site, in recognition of its conservation value (in particular its birdlife); the EIA has identified that the Project will not affect the integrity and biodiversity of the Middle Mersey Estuary.
- 6.9 In addition to the above, the Project team has undertaken pre-application consultation with the CABE Review Panel, and this remains ongoing. To date, CABE has been directly consulted at the following stages of design development:
- i. Initial Early Design Review (21st March 2007); and
 - ii. Interim Design Review (5th December 2007).

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- 6.10 CABE has recognised the Project as a “*unique possibility to regenerate the area on both sides of the river.*” Following consultation with the Panel in March and December 2007, the key issues raised by CABE comprise:
- i. The design of the New Bridge should be of the highest quality, reflecting its natural setting and its visual prominence;
 - ii. The New Bridge should represent a symbolic landmark, enhancing perceptions of the local area;
 - iii. The use of space below the Bridge deck by pedestrians and cyclists should be investigated;
 - iv. Views of the existing landscape from the Bridge should be a consideration within the design;
 - v. Consideration should be given to the spatial planning and access strategies;
 - vi. The relationship between the New Bridge, ramps and roads and existing residential development and proposed new development zones requires careful consideration; and
 - vii. The design development should have regard to the impacts of the infrastructure works around the proposed Bridge landings.
- 6.11 The feedback from the CABE Review Panel has sought to inform the design development of the Project by virtue of the following:
- i. The New Bridge has been designed to represent a symbolic landmark within the estuary setting through its design, and choice of materials;
 - ii. The design of the New Bridge is of a high quality in order to produce an elegant and distinctive structure set alongside the SJB and Aethelfleda Railway Bridge; and
 - iii. The design development has had regard for the inter-relationship between the main Bridge structure and the northern and southern abutments of the estuary through the use of appropriate landscaping where possible.
- 6.12 The Project team will continue to consult CABE as the Project evolves to address any outstanding issues, and secure their ongoing views in respect of the Project.

- 6.13 The Project team has recognised throughout the design development process the importance of involving stakeholders, community groups, local businesses and residents in delivering a successful Project which as far as possible achieves the needs of all parties. The Project team will continue to consult these groups as and when required.

7. FORWARD STRATEGY

- 7.1 The consultation exercise, while based on national and locally adopted guidance, was tailored so as to deliver a bespoke process suitable for the Project and the needs and concerns of the Borough, its residents and the wider Liverpool City Region. As such this process has ensured that as many people at as many different levels of the socio-economic strata and business community have had access and opportunity to freely and conveniently offer their views on the Project. Now that this process has taken place, the Council has a clear understanding of what the key issues are and can now apply this to the statutory consultation exercise that will take place with the submission of the planning application and orders.
- 7.2 Two planning applications and listed building consent applications are to be submitted to the Council on 31 March 2008. The Local Planning Authority will advertise receipt of the planning application, and the documentation will subsequently be subject to a statutory period of consultation. A combination of direct invitations, adverts, publicity materials and editorial information in the local and regional media will invite stakeholders and the local community to access the information, plans and documentation submitted with the application at various venues across the borough and around the region.
- 7.3 The application for an Order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 will be submitted in May 2008 and will share much of the information submitted with the aforementioned planning applications.
- 7.4 Due to the size and strategic importance of the Project, a range of consultation activities are currently programmed to give residents and stakeholders further opportunity to comment. These include:
- Leaflets delivered to households and businesses within Halton.
 - A series of exhibitions are planned in Halton for June 2008 to give people an opportunity to ask questions and give their thoughts on the planning application and Transport and Works Act Order. A special preview exhibition will also be held for Halton councillors, Mersey Gateway executive board members, the Mersey Crossing Group, and Advisory Panel members. The exhibition dates are listed below:

DATE	TIME	LOCATION
09/06/08	12:00-20:00	Stobart Stadium, Widnes
10/06/08	10:00-17:30	Stobart Stadium, Widnes
11/06/08	12:00-20:00	The Brindley, Runcorn
12/06/08	10:30-16:30	The Brindley, Runcorn

- A series of exhibitions for stakeholders at venues around the North West;
- Regular editorial in council publications – Inside Halton/Halton Today/In Touch;
- Media coverage - a pro-active programme of media relations will take place to ensure that local, regional, national and trade media are fully briefed about the application and accompanying orders, including:
 - a) *advance briefings to key journalists;*
 - b) *feature interviews with key players around the date of submission;*
 - c) *production of a media pack including images for issue at submission of planning application;*
 - d) *24-hour press hotline to deal with media queries;*
- A dedicated and regularly maintained website – **www.merseygateway.co.uk**;
- Ongoing information campaign in local media;
- Monthly e-newsletters to all those who have signed up to receive regular MG updates;
- Briefing events for local/regional businesses and groups;
- Formal letters to all statutory consultees;
- Leaflets sent to local and regional MPs, MEPs, council leaders and chief executives;
- Gateway newsletter to keep local businesses informed of progress;
- Mersey Gateway tours;
- Briefing programme of presentations to and meetings with key stakeholder groups will also take place to ensure that they are aware of the significance of the submission and are encouraged to contribute. This may include tours of the area and will target the following audience groups:

- a) *Merseyside and North West MPs, peers and other political stakeholders (including DfT, DEFRA, DCLG);*
- b) *Council leaders and Chief executives;*
- c) *MPs and peers with specific interests in transport or construction issues;*
- d) *Local opposition leaders in Halton;*
- e) *Business leaders within the region ;*
- f) *Other local interest groups within and around Halton;*
- g) *Attendance at party political conferences; and*

- This will also include a special Westminster briefing for MPs.

7.5 Continued communication and ongoing dialogue with stakeholders will take place whilst the Project awaits determination, and latterly during the construction phase (subject to receiving planning approval). Similarly, the Project Team will continue to provide up-to-date information on the progress and implications of the development throughout its onward delivery, providing a forum to voice concerns and to address any problems.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The programme of stakeholder and public consultation undertaken as part of the Project has conformed with the legislative framework set out within 'Community Involvement in Planning – *The Government's Objectives*' guidance, and that expressed within PPS1 and statutory legislation. The Project team has also had regard to the Cabinet Office '*Code of Good Practice on Consultation*' issued in January 2004, and Halton Borough Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (July 2006).
- 8.2 The Project team has undertaken a comprehensive and balanced consultation exercise in accordance with the statutory guidelines which have sought to inform the design development. This has comprised the following:
- i. Consultation was undertaken whilst the Project proposals remained at a formative stage;
 - ii. All stakeholders and community groups, and the general public, were provided with information which was accurate and sufficient to enable them to make a meaningful response when requested;
 - iii. All consultees were afforded adequate time within which to respond to the proposals at each stage of the consultation process;
 - iv. The general public, stakeholders and local businesses have been kept informed of progress throughout the design development through local press releases, leaflets and the Mersey Gateway website; and
 - v. The consultee responses have been considered by the Project team, and have informed certain elements of the design development through to submission.
- 8.3 The Project team has kept consultees informed as to the results of the consultation and how this has impacted on the Project to ensure that consultees understand that their contribution to the Project is valued. The Project team will continue to consult and liaise closely with local businesses, stakeholders, community groups and local residents post-submission to keep them well informed of the Project and its supplementary elements (including road tolling) as they continue to evolve.