



The Mersey Gateway Project



Consultation feedback

Over the summer we asked for your views on our plans for the Mersey Gateway project. This leaflet includes details of what you said and what we are planning to do in response.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people who responded formally to the consultation and to the hundreds of you who attended our exhibitions. We are very grateful for each and every one of your contributions.

Your views will help us to shape the Mersey Gateway planning application, which is due to be submitted in early 2008.

I know that many of you are keen to hear the finer details about our proposals and, while work is progressing to plan, I have to make it clear that this is an extremely large and complex project and details like exact toll levels cannot be confirmed for some time. What I can assure you is that we have listened to your views and concerns and our commitment is to prioritise discounts on tolls for local people.

Finally, I hope that you will continue to support us in our efforts to deliver the Mersey Gateway and the many benefits it will bring to Halton.

Cllr Tony McDermott MBE
Leader, Halton Borough Council

Why we consulted

This summer's consultation programme was designed to give residents, businesses and organisations from across Halton, and the wider north west region, an opportunity to give their views on the Mersey Gateway project.

Specifically, it intended to:

- inform and help shape the planning and other applications, which will be submitted in early 2008
- inform you of our plans and proposed timetable of activity
- inform people at the earliest appropriate opportunity of proposals that could affect them directly
- seek your views and opinions on our proposals, particularly on those aspects of the project which are still flexible.

What you told us

We received over 3,500 responses to the consultation. Contributions came from throughout Halton and across the north west and included local people, businesses, local and regional authorities and special interest groups.

We asked two specific questions as part of the consultation. The questions and the responses we received are shown to the right.

Preferred approach to tolling discounts

We asked: *Both bridges will be tolled. We are currently investigating options for discounts for different people crossing the bridges. Which approach would you prefer to see adopted? Please tick a maximum of two options.*

Same rate for all users

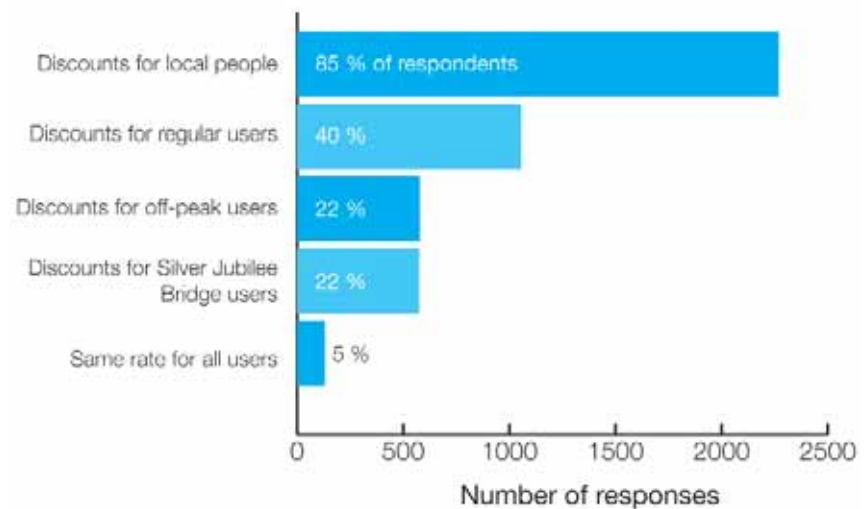
Discounts for local people

Discounts for off-peak users

Discounts for regular users

Discounts for Silver Jubilee Bridge users

Other (please add)



We wanted to know your views on which groups should have priority when it comes to discounts. The most popular option was for discounts for local people, an option the project team and Halton Borough Council will now prioritise. It is too early to rule out other options such as discounts for regular users, but we will ensure that priority for discounts is given to local residents.

A number of 'other' options were suggested by respondents. A summary of these is given below.

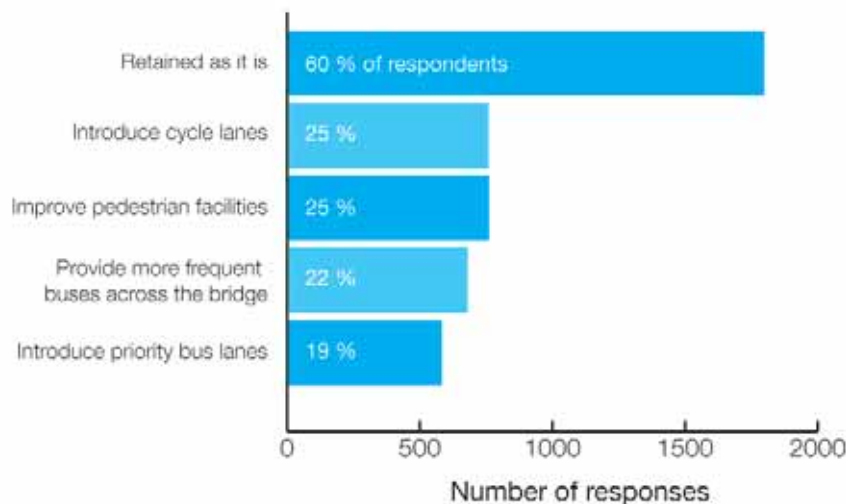
Summary of 'other' responses	Number of responses
No toll	733
Discounts for disabled or elderly users	124
Discounts for specific types of vehicle, e.g. taxi	38
Limited charging plans, e.g. car sharing	23
Discounts for Halton businesses	15
Restrictions for HGVs on Silver Jubilee Bridge	11

A significant number of people expressed a preference for 'no tolls'. This was not given as a choice in the questionnaire because it is not an option for the project. The government will not fund the whole project and tolling is the only way we can deliver the Mersey Gateway. A free to use Silver Jubilee Bridge alongside the Mersey Gateway would not address the congestion issues or enable the project as a whole to be achieved.

Redevelopment of the Silver Jubilee Bridge for the maximum benefit of local people

We asked: *The Silver Jubilee Bridge will be redeveloped as a bridge for local users as part of the project. How would you like to see the Silver Jubilee Bridge changed for the maximum benefit of local people? Please tick a maximum of two options.*

Retained as it is Introduce priority bus lanes
Introduce cycle lanes Provide more frequent buses across the bridge
Improve pedestrian facilities



The most popular response was to leave the Silver Jubilee Bridge as it is. We believe this partly reflects a desire for it not to be tolled, which is not an option available in our funding agreement with the government.

The comments received demonstrate a range of support for modifying the Silver Jubilee Bridge when it would be carrying about 20% of the current traffic flow. The new Mersey Gateway bridge will enable these modifications to be taken forward as part of the overall project.

The redesign of the approach roads on the Runcorn side of the Silver Jubilee Bridge will be planned alongside other improvements in the town. This work will take into account the comments we received in the Mersey Gateway consultation. Halton Borough Council will be inviting your views on these plans early in 2008.

In Widnes, the roads linking the town to the existing bridge will be remodelled to open up areas for new development and better link roads to both bridges. The council is also looking at wider improvements the Mersey Gateway can deliver for South Widnes.

Other comments

We also asked you for any other comments you would like to be taken into account before the planning application is submitted early in 2008.

The most frequent area for further comment was that of tolling, which was highlighted by 41% of all respondents. This reflects the fact that this was the number one issue for many people across the borough.

Others used this section to reinforce their support for the scheme and comment on issues like its design and construction, concerns over traffic congestion and environmental impacts. Almost one third of respondents made no further comments.





What happens next?

The project team is now busy working on areas highlighted in the consultation programme to ensure that the views and concerns of local people and stakeholders are reflected as far as possible in the final Mersey Gateway planning application.

This will be submitted in early 2008. This is the next stage in the process that will lead to construction starting in 2011 and the new bridge opening to traffic in 2014.

There are four key areas relating to the consultation where the project team is working to finalise its proposals. These are:

Tolling

Your issue:

While the scheme benefits from widespread support, many people are concerned about paying tolls and in particular paying tolls to cross the Silver Jubilee Bridge. As well as whether it would be affordable, there were also concerns expressed that a tolled crossing would divide the borough.

Our action:

We understand this view, but tolling both bridges is the only way we can deliver the new crossing, relieve the Silver Jubilee Bridge and bring about much needed environmental benefits to the borough.

The project team is now committed to the principle of prioritising discounts for local people.

The funding agreement with government includes a significant sum to subsidise toll revenue, which will help to keep toll charges down. The current proposal assumes that tolls will be equivalent to the Mersey Tunnel charges. It is not practical to confirm what the exact toll levels will be until 2010 or 2011 as this is when we will be negotiating with potential private sector contractors and funders.



Central Expressway

Your issue:

A number of you were concerned about the increase in traffic that the Mersey Gateway will mean for the Central Expressway in Runcorn. Local residents in particular were concerned about increased traffic noise, air pollution and any effect on property values.

Our action:

We have already asked our engineering consultants, Gifford, to look at how measures like noise barriers and landscaping could be used to reduce the effects of increased traffic. They expect to complete this work by early 2008.

Possible new M56 junction (11A)

Your issue:

The consultation leaflet described an 'area of potential M56 motorway improvements', but did not detail what these could be. Local residents, motorists and parish councils in Halton and Cheshire were interested in how this new junction could impact on local traffic flows.

Our action:

While a new M56 junction near Preston Brook is not currently part of the Mersey Gateway scheme, it could be included in the future. We have reflected the views of local groups in our discussion with the Highways Agency and a decision on whether to include Junction 11A in the Mersey Gateway scheme will be made by the end of 2007. If it is included, we will ensure that everyone who expressed an interest in this area is given the opportunity to make their views known during future discussions.

Impact on businesses and jobs

Your issue:

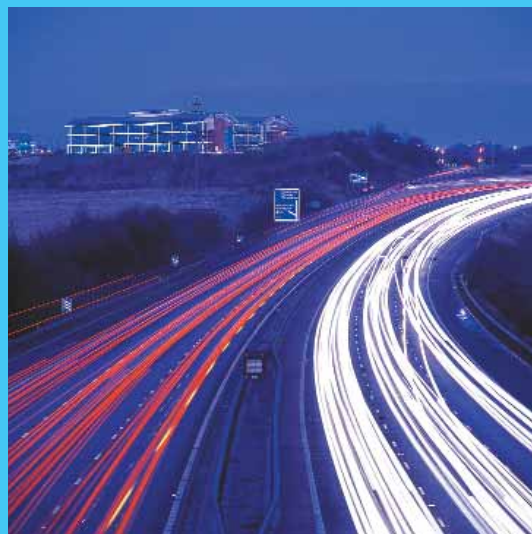
Although there are no occupied homes directly affected by the proposals, the route does affect a number of business premises in South Widnes and at Astmoor in Runcorn. Those businesses affected have raised concerns about relocation, advanced purchase of their land, Compulsory Purchase Orders and possible job losses.

Our action:

We believe the Mersey Gateway will enable the creation of hundreds of new jobs and be crucial to the long term success of businesses in Halton and the wider region.

However, we are in regular contact with all businesses on the route, and will be working closely with them to mitigate effects and, where appropriate, to purchase properties and arrange relocations at a time that minimises disruption.

More details of advance purchase arrangements will be available by early 2008.



What is the Mersey Gateway?

The Mersey Gateway is a £390 million project that would provide a new bridge over the River Mersey between the towns of Runcorn and Widnes. The project includes making changes to the existing Silver Jubilee Bridge to improve facilities for public transport, walking and cycling.

The Mersey Gateway would transform the borough of Halton, improve the lives of local people and create new opportunities for business and investment in Halton, Cheshire, the Liverpool city-region, the north west and beyond.

The new Mersey Gateway Bridge would:

- cross the river around 1.5 kilometres to the east of the Silver Jubilee Bridge
- be a tolled crossing
- have three lanes across the Mersey in each direction
- link the Central Expressway in Runcorn with the Widnes Eastern Relief Road and Speke Road.

The need for a new bridge

The key benefits will be:

- the direct creation of new, permanent jobs
- new opportunities for local and regional businesses
- fewer traffic jams, making journeys faster and more reliable
- opportunities for better public transport links across the river
- increased economic performance across the region
- creation of additional new commercial floorspace
- a catalyst for the development of new homes, shops, offices and leisure facilities
- better links between Halton, the north west and the rest of the country
- a new landmark attraction raising the profile of Halton across the country and around the world



The route

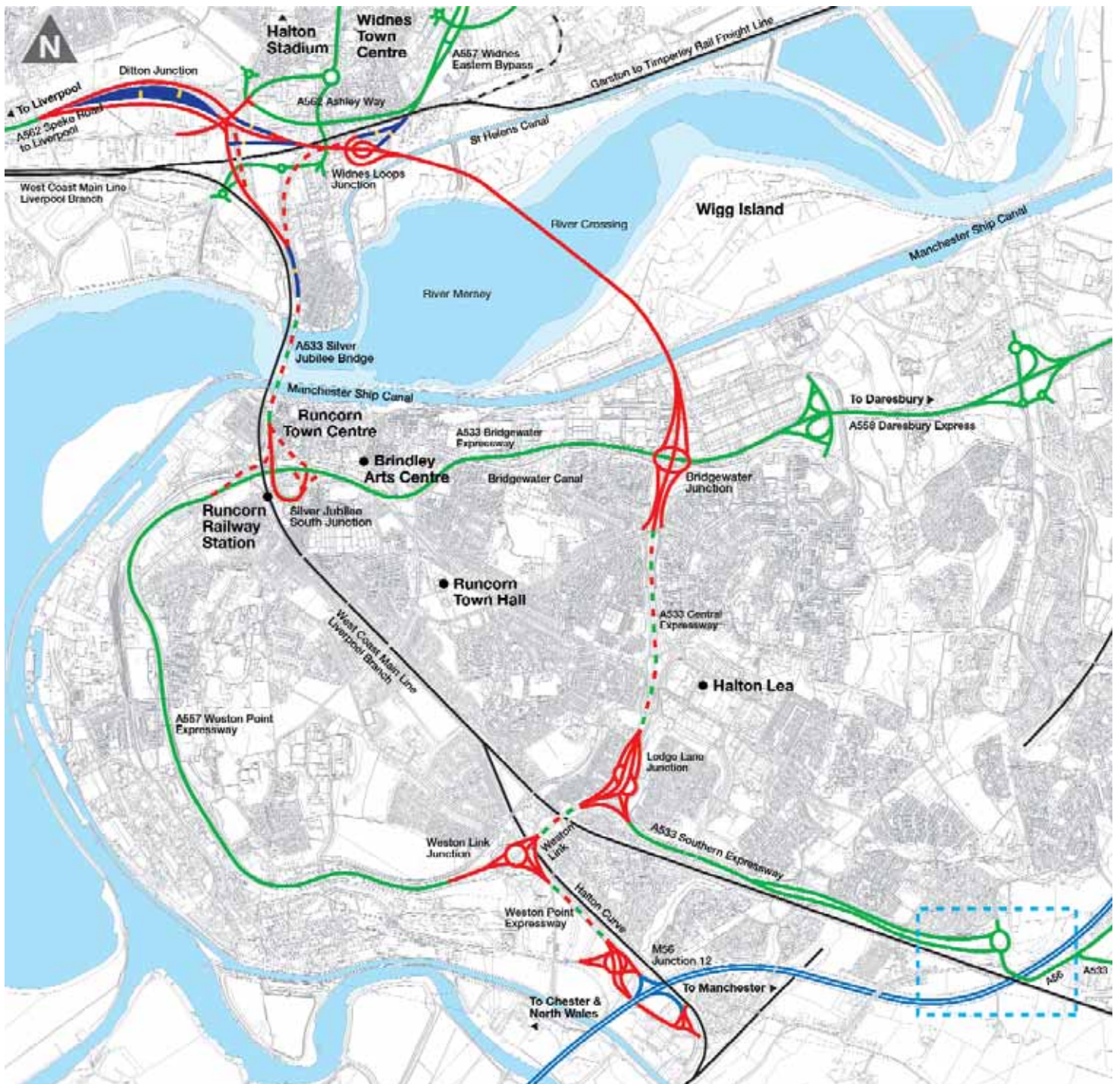
It will run from the Central Expressway in Runcorn to the Widnes Eastern Relief Road and Speke Road, crossing the river and canals around 1.5km east of the Silver Jubilee Bridge.

As well as building the new bridge, the project also involves making extensive changes and improvements to the road network in Widnes and Runcorn to channel traffic over the new crossing and away from the Silver Jubilee Bridge.

The route has been carefully chosen to ensure that it offers the best overall solution, taking into account the potential benefits and environmental effects of the scheme.

Key

- New roads
- - - Improved roads
- Existing major roads
- M56 motorway
- Railway lines
- - - Disused railway lines
- Tolling plaza
- Tolling booths
- - - Silver Jubilee Bridge delinking
- - - Area of possible new M56 junction



How we consulted

The Mersey Gateway project held a 14-week consultation running from 18th June – 21st September 2007.

During this time we asked residents, businesses and organisations across the region for their view on the project in a wide range of different ways. This included:

- delivering leaflets and questionnaires to every household and business in Halton
- 15 exhibitions running for a total of almost 100 hours at locations across the borough
- information in local and regional newspapers and on television and radio
- a new website – www.merseygateway.co.uk and e-newsletter to keep people updated
- articles in Halton Borough Council's publication *Inside Halton*
- a 24-hour call centre answering phone queries about the project
- briefing events for local and regional businesses and groups
- letters to directly affected businesses and other stakeholders
- leaflets and questionnaires sent to local and regional MPs, MEPs, council leaders and chief executives.

All contributions were recorded and independently analysed.

The results and key findings were then looked at in even greater detail so we could ensure the issues raised are reflected in the planning application.

To find out more:

Copies of the full consultation reports and other details about the project are available online at www.merseygateway.co.uk.

Alternatively, if you would like to find out more about the project, please contact us by phone – call Halton Borough Council 24 hours a day on 0151 907 8300.

Or, to sign up for our regular e-newsletter, please email mersey.gateway@halton.gov.uk and write 'enews' in the subject box.

If you need this information in a different format such as large print, audio tape, Braille or another language, please call 0151 907 8300.

About us

The Mersey Gateway Project team is a dedicated unit set up within Halton Borough Council.

The project is supported by the Mersey Crossing Group, which is made up of representatives from regional government, other local authorities and businesses from across the region.

