


Mersey Gateway Pre-Planning Application Public Consultation

Part III, Interpretive Report on the Public Consultation Process



Halton Borough Council
The Mersey Gateway Team
Environment Directorate
Rutland House
Runcorn
WA7 2GW

mersey.gateway@halton.gov.uk
www.merseygateway.co.uk

MERSEY GATEWAY PRE-PLANNING APPLICATION PUBLIC CONSULTATION

PART III, INTERPRETIVE RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Impact upon the Scheme Development	3
2.1	Outline of consultation issues	3
2.2	Support for the scheme	4
2.3	Tolling	4
2.4	Use of Silver Jubilee Bridge after the opening of MG	5
2.5	Traffic impact upon the Central Expressway	6
2.6	Impact upon commercial units	6
2.7	Possible new M56 Junction (J11A)	7
2.8	Other traffic impacts	7
2.9	Ecological impacts	8
2.10	Design issues	8
3.0	Feedback of information to the Public	10
Appendix 1 Consultation Feedback Leaflet		

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.0.1 The Mersey Gateway project held a 14 week pre-planning application public consultation running from 18th June to 21st September 2007.

1.0.2 This report is the third part of a report that covers the detail of the Mersey Gateway Pre-Planning Application Public Consultation exercise. This report (Part III) specifically covers the outcomes of the consultation process and explains how the views expressed will influence the project as it moves towards the submission of a planning application. The other two parts of the consultation report are:

- Part I, Consultation Process;
- Part II, Factual Results of Consultation.

2.0 IMPACT UPON THE SCHEME DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Outline of Consultation Issues

2.1.1 The key issues emerging from the consultation process are as follows, (for further details refer to Part II, Factual Results of Consultation):

- Support for the scheme
- Tolling
- Use of Silver Jubilee Bridge after the opening of the Mersey Gateway;
- Traffic impact upon the Central Expressway
- Impact upon commercial units
- Impact of a possible new M56 Junction (J11A).

The issues stated above are not listed in order of importance nor in the number of consultation responses that they generated.

2.1.2 Other specific issues were raised, some of which may have only been by a small minority of respondents but nonetheless are of relevance to scheme development, these include:

- Traffic impacts:
 - a) M56 J11
 - b) M56 J12
 - c) Weston Expressway
 - d) Widnes Town Centre
 - e) Ditton Junction
 - f) Widnes Loops
- Ecological impacts
- Design issues:

- a) De-linking of the Silver Jubilee Bridge
- b) Choice of route
- c) Location of toll plazas
- d) Impact on the golf course and nearby housing
- e) Layout of Astmoor Junction
- f) Impact on Public Rights of Way

Each of these issues is described in sections 2.2 to 2.10 with the response or action that the project team will take to address where necessary given in italics.

2.2 Support for the Scheme

2.2.1 The principle of a new crossing of the Mersey in Halton has been generally well accepted, with many respondents seeing a need for the scheme. A total of 243 respondents expressed unreserved support for the scheme whilst 93 stated general support but with concern about specific issues.

2.2.2 Expressions of support for the scheme were particularly evident from institutions, private sector organisations and local authorities that were consulted as they have a stakeholder interest in the project. Only one wider stakeholder response expressed concern over the case for Mersey Gateway. The response demonstrates the continued support that Mersey Gateway receives across the Liverpool City Region and north Cheshire.

2.2.3 *Continue to promote the scheme in an active and positive manner in accordance with the Mersey Gateway Communication Strategy and Stakeholder Management Plan and take on board any suggestions for improving communications.*

2.2.4 *Also continue to actively liaise with Stakeholders, this is of particular importance when such Stakeholders have a regulatory role.*

2.3 Tolling

2.3.1 Whilst the principle of a new crossing of the Mersey was well received, the matter of charging tolls was the most common issue raised by the public. It was also the first of the two closed questions in the questionnaire that offered a range of options to choose from which were as follows, (respondents being able to choose a maximum of two options):

- Same rate for all users;
- Discounts for regular users;
- Discounts for local people;
- Discounts for Silver Jubilee Bridge users;
- Discounts for off peak users;

- Other (please add).

2.3.2 The preference in comments received was for “Discounts for local people” with “Discounts for regular users” being the next preferred choice. By far the least favoured option was “Same rate for all users”. Many respondents gave an additional response (“Other” in the questionnaire) that there should not be any toll due to concerns relating to affordability and potential division of the Borough.

2.3.3 *Develop the tolling strategy alongside the procurement of the project to determine how to maximise the opportunity for local discounts to be delivered. The work will include looking at international experience with similar tolling schemes and will explore the case for deploying a range of potential tolling technology (including open road tolling where charging is automatic and not controlled by toll barriers). The information to be produced to support the planning application will provide the results of the investigation but the precise nature of discounts will be determined later through a procurement competition with private sector bidders.*

2.3.4 *Also consider public transport, walking and cycling improvements to provide alternatives for some local journeys. Silver Jubilee Bridge is expected to carry only 20 per cent of the current traffic and the project includes proposals to modify the existing carriageway across the bridge to provide facilities for cycling and walking. In addition the project will now include a public transport strategy to improve connections to Runcorn Station and to investigate more attractive bus services across Silver Jubilee Bridge. The Council has also launched a regeneration study that will look at the opportunities presented by the Mersey Gateway Project (see 2.4 below).*

2.4 Use of the Silver Jubilee Bridge after the opening of the Mersey Gateway

2.4.1 The second of the two closed questions in the questionnaire related to how the Silver Jubilee Bridge would be used after the opening of the Mersey Gateway. The options given in the question were as follows with a maximum choice of two options:

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

2.4.2 The most popular choice was “Retain as it is”, with 60% of respondents giving this view. It is a surprising response and it is possible that this partly reflects a desire for the SJB not to be tolled. However the results also show a substantive interest in using SJB for improving sustainable transport choices. Around 25% of respondents chose “Introduce cycle lanes”, 25%

chose “Improve pedestrian facilities” and 19% chose “Introduce bus priority lanes”.

- 2.4.3 *There is clear support for the proposals to improve public transport and to introduce attractive facilities for cycling and walking across SJB but the expressed doubt over the de-linking of SJB requires further investigation. The northern approach roads to SJB (in south Widnes) will be severed by the new Mersey Crossing Route and some alteration and reinstatement to these SJB connecting roads is unavoidable. The reinstatement of the approach roads will be undertaken to allow improved access for local development, most of which suffers from severance due to the current high standard of approach roads crossing West Bank. Hence, to the north of the river the reinstatement of approach roads that cater for local access instead of through traffic will form part of the Mersey Gateway scheme to be presented for formal planning approval next spring. To the south of the river the de-linking of approach roads in Runcorn Old Town are an optional consideration. Considerable opportunity exists however to integrate the regeneration of Runcorn Old Town with the modification of the approach roads to SJB. In view of the ambiguity of the response it is proposed that the de-linking of the SJB on the Runcorn side will not be included in the Mersey Gateway planning application, but will form part of the currently evolving Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy. This will ensure that the de-linking is consistent with the regeneration proposals in Runcorn. The Regeneration Strategy will be available for consultation in early 2008 and complete in summer 2008. Once determined the de-linking will form part of the Mersey Gateway scheme to be taken forward to construction.*

2.5 Traffic Impact on the Central Expressway

- 2.5.1 The Mersey Gateway will involve the re-routing of traffic on existing roads, in particular the Runcorn Expressways. The consultation plans indicated a 160% increase in traffic along the Central Expressway, and views were expressed by local residents about increased traffic noise, air pollution and depreciation in property values.

- 2.5.2 *The scheme will now be extended to investigate the traffic and environmental impacts along the Central Expressway. Early work suggests that the existing junctions will require improvement works to cater for the increase in traffic and that new environmental barriers will be effective in reducing noise. The scheme taken forward to the planning application stage will include these additional works.*

2.6 Impact on Commercial Units

- 2.6.1 Whilst no residential property will be directly affected by the proposals (i.e. property needing to be acquired to allow the construction of the scheme), commercial units would be directly affected in South Widnes and at Astmoor

in Runcorn. This gave rise to issues being raised about relocations, advanced purchase, CPO and possible job losses.

2.6.2 *The Council aims to minimise the disruption and loss of jobs to local businesses. To achieve this all businesses and land owners affected by the scheme will be invited to discuss how to mitigate these effects. Options to consider will include the timescale to acquire and potentially relocate businesses, expansion plans and blight. The aim is to make progress with negotiations with landowners prior to proceeding to purchase property using compulsory powers.*

2.7 Possible New M56 Junction (J11A)

2.7.1 Proposals for a new motorway junction on the M56 between existing junctions 11 and 12 on the M56 were first made public in Halton's Local Transport Plan produced in 2000. Whilst a new M56 junction is not currently part of the Mersey Gateway scheme, there is some potential for its inclusion at some later date. Discussions are underway with the Highways Agency and the Department for Transport. No draft designs are available at this stage and hence the consultation leaflet did not detail any proposals but described an "area of potential M56 motorway improvements". Given the uncertainty we expected the comments received querying the nature of the improvements, and possible traffic impact that a new junction could induce. In particular Preston Brook Parish Council were interested in the possible traffic relief that a new junction on the M56 could bring to the A56 through the village. Conversely Sutton Parish Council in Vale Royal, Cheshire, were concerned that a new junction on the M56 could induce more traffic on the A56 through Sutton Weaver and lead to adverse environmental impact.

2.7.2 *Discussions with the Highways Agency and the Department for Transport will continue with the aim of reaching agreement in relation to the desirability and deliverability of this new junction. A decision on the principle to include J11A in the scheme will be made by the end of 2007. Further consultation will be required if we decide to include this in the scheme.*

2.8 Other Traffic Impacts

2.8.1 Comments were made concerning a possible increase in traffic at M56 J11.

2.8.2 *Improvements to M56 J11 are not part of the scheme, extra capacity will be made available at M56 J12.*

2.8.3 M56 J12 currently has capacity problems during peak hours and the scheme details improvements that will provide extra capacity. There were some comments in relation to current and future traffic levels and the proposed junction alterations.

- 2.8.4 *On the opening of the MG traffic levels are expected to initially fall at J12 but will increase above pre-opening levels during the design period. This has been taken account of in the design but needs to be confirmed by the traffic model.*
- 2.8.5 Generally favourable comments were received in relation to the decrease in traffic on the Weston Expressway.
- 2.8.6 *Comments have been noted.*
- 2.8.7 The traffic flow drawing indicating traffic flow changes in Widnes Centre to be generally neutral with the exception of a 50% increase on Moore Lane. This generated some concerns about increased traffic flows and associated noise levels.
- 2.8.8 *It is unlikely that there will be any significant increases in traffic in Widnes Town Centre due to traffic diversions onto other routes. The figure shown may have been shown in error but will be investigated and a revision made if necessary.*
- 2.8.9 Ditton Interchange is being altered from a roundabout junction to a signal controlled junction. Comments were received in relation to increased traffic levels generated by the Ditton Strategic Rail Freight Park and how traffic from Widnes would access the tolling facilities.
- 2.8.10 *The junction has been designed to accommodate this.*
- 2.8.11 Widnes Loops attracted some comment in particular the proportions of traffic that headed east on the Widnes side of the crossing and the junction priorities. The toll plaza onto the MG affected an electricity sub station.
- 2.8.12 *Investigate the possibility of amending the layout to avoid the sub station.*

2.9 Ecological Impacts

- 2.9.1 There have been a few comments in relation to ecological impact, in particular where the scheme crosses Wigg Island.
- 2.9.2 *Possible mitigation or compensatory measures to be considered in the scheme.*

2.10 Design Issues

- 2.10.1 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 from Weston Point Expressway to the SJB as this could help enable the reopening of the flight of locks from the Bridgewater Canal to the Manchester Ship Canal.

- 2.10.2 *The Runcorn de-linking strategy needs to be determined in line with the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy (see para 2.4).*
- 2.10.3 Some concern was expressed by the Acting Mersey Conservator in regard to the impact of bridge piers on the river hydrology.
- 2.10.4 *The detailed hydrodynamics studies carried out to date shows that the impact on river flow will not be significant.*
- 2.10.5 A few comments were received in relation to choice of route with some respondents stating that the route should be downstream of the existing crossing and to a lesser extent that it should be further towards Warrington where the river is narrower.
- 2.10.6 *Studies into the choice of route were carried out up to 2003 when the preferred route was chosen by the Council with the support of the Mersey Crossing Group. The choice of route was based on the best overall option taking into account all significant potential benefits and impacts.*
- 2.10.7 Location of the toll plazas generated a degree of comment, in particular why they were sited on the Widnes side of the river.
- 2.10.8 *The toll plazas were situated on the Widnes side as this was the optimum location that minimises environmental impact.*
- 2.10.9 There were some adverse comments about the impact on the golf course, in particular the reason for its current closure. There was also some comment about the possible impact upon housing to the north of the golf course.
- 2.10.10 *The golf course was closed as a precautionary measure after the discovery of contaminants close to the surface some years in advance of the reference design indicating the main toll plaza taking land from the golf course. Replacement additional land has been identified that could accommodate a reconfigured 18 hole course.*
- 2.10.11 *The impact upon the housing alongside the closed golf course should be neutral as the scheme does not encroach closer than at present, the environmental assessment should demonstrate this.*
- 2.10.12 Some clarification was needed as to the layout of Astmoor Junction. Also some comments were received concerning the impact upon properties where alterations were being made.
- 2.10.13 *Include as part of Central Expressway mitigation measures in the EIA.*
- 2.10.14 There were some queries in regards to the impact of the Widnes Loops Junction on the public right of way that currently crosses this area.

2.10.15 *Determine status of public right of way and accommodate.*

3.0 Feedback of Information to the Public

3.1 This report will be made available to the public and any enquiries should be directed to the Mersey Gateway team.

3.2 A leaflet summarising the consultation process and the outcomes has been produced and is attached as an Appendix. The leaflet will be distributed to all households and businesses in Halton along with Stakeholders following its approval by the Mersey Gateway Executive Board on the 15th November.