

the gateway



Welcome to the latest edition of The Gateway

It gives me great pleasure to write that the Mersey Gateway Project is moving into 2012 with renewed momentum and a clear timetable for delivery.

We are already seeing the early impact of the plans with new investment coming to Halton on both sides of the river.

Our discussions with central government have helped us identify £30 million of savings on the project and we are continuing to strive for both high quality

and value for money through our procurement programme.

Fast approaching is our announcement of shortlisted bidders, one of which will become the private sector partner that will work alongside the council on the project.

The delivery phase will present new challenges and opportunities, and we are looking ahead with great anticipation.

Cllr Rob Polhill

Leader, Halton Borough Council

Plans to save £30 million submitted to council

The Mersey Gateway Project team has submitted three planning applications to Halton Borough Council detailing modifications to the £600 million scheme.

The changes will save £30 million, reduce the impact of the scheme on residents, and deliver design improvements and flexibility along the route. Consultation on the plans showed broad support for the proposals.

Steve Nicholson, Mersey Gateway Project Director, said: "We are pleased that the feedback we have received endorses our decision to make these changes to the scheme, and we believe the detailed proposals that are now with the council will save money and improve the plans as we move forward."

The proposed modifications to the road layouts on either side of the river will reduce projected traffic levels on local routes around Halton Brow in Runcorn, and remove the need for large toll plazas in Widnes.



The modified bridge design

The open road tolling system will feature cameras and modern detection technology to record vehicle details and collect tolls.

The applications also cover possible design modifications for the new bridge to increase the design flexibility available to specialist bridge designers and engineers.

If approved they are likely to mean that any future light rail scheme would use the Silver Jubilee Bridge, as the lower deck on the new bridge may not be built.

Halton Borough Council is expected to make a decision on the plans during March 2012. More details can be found online at www.merseygateway.co.uk.



Ground investigation works underway at ThermPhos

Advance works taking shape

The project team continues to make progress in acquiring land and is commencing the final phases of ground investigation and remediation works.

One of the latest sites the project team has acquired is the Catalyst Trade Park in Widnes, where ground investigation works and pilot trials for ground water remediation have started.

The coming year will see this process intensify with more and more visible signs of advanced works taking place at various points along the proposed route as the programme progresses.

Alan Scarisbrick, Consultant Development Surveyor on the project, said: "We are working with around 100 business owners and occupiers in Runcorn and Widnes to acquire land and assist them to relocate prior to conducting advanced

works including ground investigations and demolition.

He added: "At this stage, most of this work will have very little impact on the public, but where we do need to temporarily close footpaths or roads, we will be doing our best to let people know in advance and provide suitable alternatives".

Government to contribute £470 million to Mersey Gateway

The Government has agreed to contribute up to £470 million to the project over its lifetime.

This is made up of £86 million in direct capital grant and up to £14.55 million per year in long term revenue support for 26 ½ years after opening and is an increase of £5 million per year on the previous funding proposal.

The then Secretary of State for Transport, Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP confirmed the agreement in October

2011 saying: "The Mersey Gateway Bridge is an important transport project which will improve journeys and boost economic growth."

The project is included in the 40 highest priority projects in the National Infrastructure Plan announced by the Chancellor in November.

David Parr, Chief Executive of Halton Borough Council, said: "I'd like to thank everybody from across the region who has worked tirelessly to support the Mersey Gateway Project over recent years as it is only with their support that

we have been able to secure this deal, which will be transformational for the regional economy in years to come."

He added: "It is worth remembering that detailed research has shown that Mersey Gateway can be the catalyst that creates over 4,000 jobs, improves journey times and reliability for millions of people in the region and brings massive inward investment and regeneration potential in to the area."

Over 70% of the funding for the project will be provided through toll income.

New Crossings Board will oversee bridge operations

A new public body is being set up to operate the crossings once they have been developed.

The 'Mersey Gateway Crossings Board' will be an independent subsidiary of Halton Borough Council that will have overall responsibility for both the Mersey Gateway Bridge and the redeveloped Silver Jubilee Bridge.

Its key responsibilities will be to:

- manage cash flow
- administer the Council policy for tolling levels and strategy
- monitor the performance of the project company, and
- the administration of payments.

The Board will have an annual turnover of over £50 million, which will be made up of the annual grant from central government and the toll income from people crossing the river.

It will use this money to pay the private sector partner, fund any toll discounts and contribute to sustainable transport improvements in Halton.

The move to keep the overall management of the project within the public sector will mean:

- toll levels are kept down by avoiding a higher cost of finance
- toll risk income will be with the public sector, and
- private sector innovation will be combined with public sector scrutiny and control.



Major procurement announcement due in spring

The shortlist of companies and consortia that could be appointed to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the project over a 30-year period will be announced in spring 2012.

Due to the complexity of the project, and the potential for bidders to propose different technical, financial and legal

solutions, the procurement process is expected to take two years, with a final contract being awarded towards the end of 2013.

Steve Nicholson, Mersey Gateway Project Director, said: "We are very pleased with the levels of interest we have had in the project and the quality of the initial submissions we have received shows that private sector interests are fully engaged with Mersey Gateway. I am confident we will have an excellent shortlist."

Nature Conservation Trust update

A new environmental trust has been created to protect the local environment around the new Mersey Gateway Bridge.

The 'Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust' has been set-up to deliver lasting benefits associated with the new bridge. It is a visionary approach to long term management, allowing the scope for additional innovative benefits to be brought into the Upper Mersey Estuary area.

The initial aim is to create a new 28.5 hectare nature reserve that will:

- restore high quality saltmarsh throughout the nature reserve
- create new saltmarsh scrapes and pools close to the new bridge
- attract internationally important bird species found further downriver to the new site
- increase the local breeding bird population such as skylark and meadow pipit
- introduce rare breeds of 'conservation cattle' to graze alongside the river to help convert the existing vegetation to a wider range of saltmarsh plants, and
- fence the saltmarsh area off to protect it from disturbance by people and dogs.



Trial conservation grazing began in 2011

What happens next?

The new bridge is scheduled to open in 2016, but before that happens, there are a number of important stepping stones along the way.

Spring 2012 – Shortlist of bidders announced

Spring 2013 – Preferred bidder announced

Autumn 2013 – Final appointment confirmed

Autumn 2013 – Construction work starts

Autumn 2016 – Mersey Gateway Bridge scheduled to open

Regional economy set to benefit

The Mersey Gateway Project is likely to generate a number of commercial opportunities for a wide range of businesses across the north west.

Contracts relating to advance works and other opportunities are already being advertised and awarded through The Chest – Halton Borough Council's online procurement portal; and over 300 businesses have signed up as potential suppliers to the project.

Potential suppliers can sign up to find out more by emailing mersey.gateway@halton.gov.uk

Matt Fearnhead, from the Mersey Gateway team, said: "Mersey Gateway will be a 30-year multi-million pound business which will create long term opportunities for suppliers. We are liaising closely with the local Chambers of Commerce and education and training bodies to make sure that local people have the skills needed and that local businesses are aware of the opportunities."

The project is backed by:



Want to know more?

If you would like to find out more about the Mersey Gateway Project, then please contact us:

By phone - call Halton Borough Council 24 hours a day on **0303 333 4300**

By email - email mersey.gateway@halton.gov.uk

Online - log on to www.merseygateway.co.uk You can also follow [@merseygateway](https://twitter.com/merseygateway) on twitter.



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

www.merseygateway.co.uk

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