

National Infrastructure Commission
Response the call for evidence on London
Gravesham Borough Council Response

Introduction

Gravesham Borough is located in Kent south of the river Thames, east of the Dartford Crossing and has a population of 105,300. The main Gravesend/Northfleet urban area has a population of 84,400. The rest of the Borough is covered by Green Belt, though within that there are significant areas of Ramsar/Special Protection Area (North Kent Marshes) and parts of the North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

On the west side of the Borough north of the A2 is the Ebbsfleet Valley, shared with Dartford Borough Council, and now covered by the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation. The two Boroughs' remain the plan making authorities. Considerable development has been proposed and consented in the Ebbsfleet area, and is now starting to happen on the ground. The EDC is charged with accelerating and developing the vision for the 'Garden City'.

The Borough is crossed west-east by the A2 trunk road (4 lanes plus hard shoulders) connecting London and the M25 with North Kent and Dover. The M20, just to the south of the Borough, is the main route to the Channel Tunnel and ferry's. Both connect to the M25 which provides links round London and to the rest of the country.

There are three railway lines across the Borough, all running roughly east - west. The North Kent Line links London Charing Cross & Cannon Street with Medway Towns via Dartford & Gravesend. HS1 links London St Pancras with the Channel Tunnel with an international and domestic station in the Ebbsfleet. Domestic Services operate over HS1 from East Kent via Ashford and via Gravesend. Finally there is the Chatham line running through the rural area linking London Victoria with the Medway Towns and East Kent (east of Medway this is confusingly also referred to as the North Kent line). Travel times currently to central London are in the order of 60 minutes from Gravesend by the traditional routes and 24 minutes on HS1.

27% of the working population are employed in Greater London and commute by coach, rail & drive, and only 33% work within the Borough. 18% of journeys to work are by public transport and 65% are by car.

The Borough therefore qualifies as part of the 'London commuter hinterland' and there is a tension between a role (at one extreme) of being a pure commuter settlement and providing more employment in the Borough to produce more sustainable travel patterns.

The north of the Borough is part of Thames Gateway with significant redevelopment opportunities on former industrial land. Land values, compared with London, are relatively low so there are viability issues.

Question 1 Economic and Social challenges

Gravesham has an adopted Local Plan Core Strategy to 2028¹. Work for Kent County Council extrapolates this to 2031². The Council has commissioned technical work for the Local Plan including a SHENA (Strategic Housing and Economic Needs Assessment) which will update the objectively assessed housing need, employment and retail requirements and

¹ Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy <http://www.gravesham.gov.uk/services/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-policy/gravesham-local-plan-core-strategy>

² KCC Infrastructure plan <http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/environment-waste-and-planning-policies/growth-and-infrastructure-framework-gif>

look further into the future. This includes analysis of development land values and site viability. This study will be subject to consultation in the spring, but is likely to show, in line with the national household projections, higher levels of housing need. As a rule of thumb the latest national household projections suggest something in the order of a 25% increase in annual housing completions for Kent as a whole over and above levels set out in the South East Plan (as an arbitrary benchmark). This represents a major transport challenge for an already stretched transport infrastructure across the South East.

The Borough has a finite supply of brownfield sites, and once these are developed it will be necessary to hold discussions within the sub-region about the scale and location of development. This will include the role of the Metropolitan Green Belt and its boundaries. As noted above there are nature conservation and landscape constraints in the rural area. The Borough is the least self-contained in employment terms in Kent and there is an objective to increase local employment for sustainability reasons.

A major component of new development is in the Ebbsfleet area around the International and Domestic Station, shared with Dartford Borough. The overall strategy stems from the mid 1990's and the arrival of HS1, and required a significant modal shift. Planning permissions exist for the most of the overall area. The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC)³ is now taking this area forward and has commissioned a masterplan. It has £310 m to assist with infrastructure delivery over the next 5 years.

London Resort Company Holdings (LRCH) is proposing a leisure resort on Swanscombe Peninsula mainly in Dartford Borough, which is aimed at attracting 15m visitor a year and directly employing some 13,000.⁴ LRCH are continuing to develop their proposals and assess the impacts, but they are of major significance in creating demand for travel by both workers (13,000 jobs directly) and visitors (up to 96,000 per day at peak). It is currently intended to progress the development via an application under the NSIP process.

The EDC masterplan will deal with both a 'with and without' London Paramount world. Various sites have recently been granted Enterprise Zone status in the Ebbsfleet and at Northfleet Embankment. The new development needs to be grafted and integrated with the existing communities, complicated physically by the changes in levels brought about by the chalk quarrying of the past.

It has been known since the original work on Kent Thameside in the mid 1990's that given the local road infrastructure (and reasonable enhancements thereto) that a major shift to public transport was required to cope with travel demand along with additional local jobs. The HS1 station at Ebbsfleet was a key part of the strategy along with the Fastrack system. The later along with local bus routes, walking and cycling networks is the foundation on which rail sits.

The intention was to create a substantial amount of local employment to attract employees, especially from further east, and increase local self-containment. In Gravesham the housing market already includes a component of movement out of London and on further east, so commuting will remain a significant element.

A2 is highly congested and proposals are being developed junction enhancements to support development at Bean and Ebbsfleet. Proposals exist for additional crossing capacity either at the existing Dartford Crossing or east of Gravesend. A fresh consultation is about to occur on this contentious issue. The Borough Council opposes routes east of Gravesend on environmental grounds.

Both residents and businesses see transport as a key issue, as witnessed by reposes to recent consultations by EDC and LRCH. There is scepticism over the ability of the transport

³ Ebbsfleet Development Corporation <http://www.ebbsfleetdc.org.uk/masterplanning/>

⁴ LRCH <http://www.londonparamount.info/have-your-say/project-documents/>

system to handle new development and concern over the reliability of the system, especially by business.

Thus there are major transport issues locally, never mind the outworking of some of the considerations outlined for example in the London Infrastructure Plan 2050⁵.

It is important that a focus on major infrastructure projects does not exclude considerations of ease of use – covering such matters as information, paying tolls and fares. Progress is being made, slowly, on integrated ticketing for public transport but a similar approach is needed elsewhere. For example will it be possible to have one account to handle all Thames tolled river crossings?

The bus networks should not be overlooked – as there is a fundamental disjunction between method of organising bus services inside and outside London. In the former it is essentially specified by TfL whereas outside it is based on competition – which had de facto produced local monopolies. TfL services reach as far as Bluewater.

There is therefore a major challenge from growth to handle the demand for movement across the South East.

Q2 Strategic Options

The answer to this question has been addressed by mode to illustrate the complexity of the issues. The fundamental point is that this is a regional issue (meaning the wider Southeast), especially in relation to the rail network, not just a London one. There is finite rail capacity which is trying to meet the growing needs of passengers, both inside and outside London. The same is true of the strategic highway network which at peak times, and in some locations all day, highly congested. There is a big question, especially outside London, where on the Commissions timescale substantial new development is going to occur.

There is a tension between what might be called a London view of the world – seeing the inner South East as a source of housing for jobs in London – and a view seeking more local jobs and meeting local housing needs. In the local context this is exemplified by the counter weight that London Paramount would offer in terms of jobs.

The Commission is not in a position to determine future development patterns: it can only work on existing commitments and some future options. Major development outside London logically requires routes that support it which will suggest which corridors should benefit from, for example, Crossrail 2 or Crossrail 1 extensions but also possibly links that do not focus on London.

In arriving at changes to the network there is a danger in trying to fit a scheme to services, rather than specifying what services are needed (as a consequence of the future demand or existing congestion) and then providing the infrastructure that serves that. Many of the quick wins have been already made and future will require more Crossrail like schemes (e.g. Crossrail 3 from South East London) on the basis that terminal platform capacity is hard to expand.

Q2 Strategic Options: Road network

The A2 past Gravesend was widened in 2008 to 4 lanes, and moved slightly south. At peak times it is running at over capacity and a number of the junctions have started to show stress. The A2 is an important part of the local road network as well as its strategic role, for example past the Ebbsfleet only it and A226 (single carriageway road on a chalk spine) provide east – west links.

⁵ London 2050 <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/business-and-economy/better-infrastructure/london-infrastructure-plan-2050>

The current Dartford Crossing is severely congested and the Government has accepted the need for additional crossing capacity. A consultation is imminent on the options that have been recently refined either at the existing crossing (corridor A) or east of Gravesend (corridor C). Gravesham opposes corridor C because of the environmental impact. The debate about route choice will take place elsewhere but the need for additional crossing capacity (along with proposals inside London) is obvious. Once a route corridor is selected delivery of this scheme should occur within the current timeframe of 2025.

Highways England is committed to enhancing the A2 junctions at Bean and Ebbsfleet junctions to deal with existing problems (Bluewater) and development. London Paramount is working on a junction enhancement at Ebbsfleet to serve both their proposal and the already consented development. Various developments are committed to contributing to such schemes. This however ignores the cumulative implications on other junctions of development across the Gravesend/Northfleet urban area. Tollgate junction (A227) is already stressed. Lower Thames Crossing will make a difference depending on the option chosen, and it is not currently clear what the net effects will be.

The role of Fastrack has already been mentioned but both it and local bus services need to offer frequent, fast and reliable services. Depending on local circumstances this may involve dedicated routes, bus lanes on existing roads and measure likes priority at traffic signals.

On the highway network there is a tension between long distance strategic flows (cross channel traffic for example) and local commute. Highways England is charged with improving the strategic network and Transport Authorities (Kent CC in this case but Medway is also relevant) the local. Private developers are expected to fund improvements for their developments, for example London Paramount as noted above is looking to build a new access road and improve the Ebbsfleet junction.

Local Planning Authorities are trying to meet their housing and employment needs in a context where there is no overview of what the region, including London, needs to meet or the national transport infrastructure needed to support it. There must come a point when the transport infrastructure cannot handle additional development where the relationship between homes and jobs is critical.

Q2 Rail network

Rail network has already been described above. 12 car schemes and power supply enhancements have or are being implemented – the current short term need is for Southeastern or successor(s) to have sufficient rolling stock to run more 12 car trains. There is a particular need for additional high speed rolling stock as peak hour trains are regularly full and standing from/to Gravesend.

Safeguarding exists for Crossrail 1 to be extended out to Gravesend (passenger services) and to Hoo junction for stabling sidings. A study is currently underway looking at the case for extension and what infrastructure would be needed. This is related to the levels of development in Kent Thameside and proposals currently being explored along the riverside in the London Borough of Bexley.

A further complication is the “with and without” London Paramount cases. The later would certainly significantly enhance the need for services east and west from Swanscombe/ Northfleet to get labour to/from the development. The Borough Council would support the extension of Crossrail to help meet the need for additional capacity on the North Kent line, given the constraints further into London. There is an obvious logic in diverting as many passengers as possible (for whom it is an appropriate route choice) onto HS1 from Ebbsfleet, Gravesend and Medway. Crossrail could then do the same at Abbey Wood leaving the rest of the traffic on the traditional lines where expanded services provision should be possible. What is required needs to be explored further.

Transport for London and others have expressed a desire (with or without taking over the franchising role and making it a concession) for regular interval services on the various routes from Dartford into London. The precise nature of these proposals is unclear both in terms of service pattern, termini, infrastructure and rolling stock implications etc. The point of all this is to illustrate that the issue is not a simple one of infrastructure and requires the balancing of a number of factors. On rail issues at least there overall balance needs to be looked at in the context of transport for the south east – not just London.

Q2 River

Currently Gravesend is linked to Tilbury by a regular ferry service, subsidised by Kent County Council and Thurrock Council. The Borough Council has invested in a pontoon off the historic Town Pier to increase the potential usage. London Paramount has discussed services from central London to serve their development (and use of the river in the construction phase) and also provide access for labour from Thurrock. The potential of the Thames should not be overlooked as a transport corridor for both passengers and freight, where for example London Paramount has identified considerable scope in the construction phase.

Q3 Crossrail 2

No direct comment on this scheme other to note the on-going tension between an all stations inner suburban service and aspirations for it to serve destinations further away which implies a different sort of rolling stock and a lack of segregation, as illustrated by Thameslink.

Q4 Funding

Any schemes for new infrastructure will require funding and the Commission will no doubt be presented with a list of projects with a combined large price tag. Traditionally major strategic schemes, whatever the mode, have been funded by Government, whether directly or indirectly. The private sector has played a role (e.g. Dartford Crossing) where tolls can be collected and a funding model constructed. The Local Government funding model is in a period of austerity and it cannot be assumed to produce any greater financial input than hitherto.

Developers are often seen as a source of funding. Major schemes certainly require major transport investment – but this is likely to be for local transport requirements and not able to meet major strategic needs on a significant scale. The Crossrail/Lower Thames Crossing type schemes with costs in the billions will still require significant subsidy. Land values in the Gravesham urban area are only able to support local transport and social facilities to make the area function. The GLA CIL approach to Crossrail funding would for that reason be unlikely to produce significant income on current land market values.

Q5 Lessons for London

This question is interpreted as applying to London and its 'commuter hinterland'. The key points are:

- Transport is a South East issue not just a London one
- There needs to be a strategic regional view
- There are major issues with capacity across a number of modes

- Need to define the 'services' needed (what that means varies by mode) to meet the demand and then define projects that produce the required outputs
- Whatever happens the resulting plan will be a compromise between a host of factors
- There needs to be cognisance of how the system operates as whole (so ticketing, paying tolls etc. is part of the whole from the user perspective)
- Obvious anomalies (e.g. TfL rail concession model versus franchising, differences in the operation of bus networks) in legal framework across boundaries that hinder integration
- Gravesham is particularly interested in:
 - Lower Thames Crossing
 - A2 junctions
 - Full use of existing rail infrastructure
 - Extension of Crossrail 1
 - Development of interchange, bus, walking, and ticketing initiatives to make the overall system work
- Development in lower value areas won't pay for the big ticket items because of scale of costs involved

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