

Highways England seeks partners to build £1.9 billion Lower Thames Crossing roads

For more than 65 years the Dartford Crossing has stood as the only crossing between Kent and Essex, a critical link carrying vital food, goods and services between the manufacturing centres, ports, and distribution hubs of the South East, Midlands and North of England. It is designed for 135,000 vehicles a day, but it now often sees 180,000 a day use it, leading to long delays which businesses across the country say act as a barrier to trade and jobs.

The Lower Thames Crossing will improve journeys by almost doubling road capacity across the River Thames east of London. The two successful bidders will build a total of 14.3 miles of new roads that will connect the longest road tunnel in the UK to the strategic road network. If given the green light this reliable new route will help to unlock a wealth of long-term economic benefits, as well as play an important role in the country's economic recovery by supporting over 22,000 jobs during construction, including hundreds of opportunities for apprentices, graduates, and local businesses.

The tender process is for two roads contracts:

- The Kent Roads contract, which is a two-stage design and build contract for the part of the route from the A2/M2 corridor to 1km south of the southern tunnel entrance, with strategic utilities and environmental interfaces.
- The Roads North of the Thames contract, is also a two-stage design and build contract delivering the route from 1km north of the northern tunnel entrance to Junction 29 of the M25. New link roads are required to connect the route with the M25, A13 and A1089.

Matt Palmer, Lower Thames Crossing Executive Director, said:

Our roads connect us – we rely on them, and they are a critical part of our economic recovery and low-carbon future. The Lower Thames Crossing is the most ambitious road project this country has seen since the M25 was completed 35 years ago. These contracts show our commitment to this project, which will support 22,000 jobs during its construction and provide a huge economic boost to the UK economy when it opens for traffic.

Our challenge is to build the new crossing in a way that not only supports the next generation of low carbon vehicles, but minimises our footprint, and allows us to enhance the natural environment and leave a positive legacy for our neighbours and users.

The successful bidders and their supply chain will help Highways England achieve their ambition of making the Lower Thames Crossing the most environmentally sustainable road project ever delivered in the UK. They will support delivery of landscaping that will increase the biodiversity value of the area by 15% by planting over 260 hectares of new woodland, converting 400 hectares of arable land into semi-natural habitats, and creating new ponds, waterways, ditches and hedgerows. They will also be responsible for seven new green bridges that connect habitats and species either side of the new road.

The £600 million Kent Roads contract comprises:

- 6km of new road, including a multi-level junction to connect the A2 to the Lower Thames Crossing
- Environmental mitigation is at the heart of our scheme, most visibly with two “Green Bridges” at Thong Lane & Brewers Road, these bridges are combine green spaces with walking, cycling and vehicle access and provide better connectivity for the landscape, ecology and habitats. Brewers Road will also cater for horse riders.
- The road has been design to minimise impact, and has extensive landscaping new and upgraded structures, embankments, cuttings and retaining walls.
- The diversion of utilities including strategic gas mains, electricity cables, water, and telecoms
- Ecological works for species protection and habitat enhancement along the route

The £1.3bn billion Roads North of the Thames contract comprises:

- 16km of new road with over 30 proposed new and/or upgraded structures, embankments, cuttings and retaining walls, under bridges to take the route through the A13 and to join the M25 at Junction 29
- Environmental mitigation is at the heart of the scheme, the roads north of the Thames contract is extensively screened by bunding and landscaped along its length, with 5 “green bridges” these bridges are combine green spaces with walking, cycling and vehicle access and provide better connectivity for the landscape, ecology and habitats.
- Two viaducts at Tilbury over Tilbury Loop Railway and at across Orsett Fenn over the Mardyke flood plain. Both have been design to enhance connectivity under the crossing, supporting local community access.
- The diversion of utilities including gas mains and electric cables and towers.
- Ecological works for species protection and habitat enhancement along the route.

Highways England is building on its track record of successfully delivering major projects by bringing in partners and expertise from across the infrastructure industry. The two roads contracts are the final of three main works contracts to be procured for the scheme, with the £2 billion Tunnels and Approaches contract currently out for tender and the £162.5 million Integration Partner contract awarded to Jacobs earlier in the year.

Highways England plans to resubmit its application for a Development Consent

Order later this year. An application was originally submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in October 2020 but was withdrawn in order to provide more information.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.