

Press release: 55 years on, Dartford crossing looks to the future

The original tunnel opened to traffic on 18 November 1963 and has since been used to make 1.5 billion journeys, with around 155,000 vehicles currently using it each day.

Although it has been added to over the years, with a second tunnel opening in May 1980 and the Queen Elizabeth II bridge opening in October 1991, the Dartford Crossing is still the only road crossing of the River Thames east of London.

Highways England is currently seeking views on proposals for a new Lower Thames Crossing – which will provide an additional route over the Thames from 2027.

David Manning, Development Director for the Lower Thames Crossing, said:

At 55 years old, Dartford Crossing remains a vital piece of national infrastructure having provided decades of service to the country. However, being the only way to get across the Thames east of London, it carries more traffic than it was ever designed for – leading to regular delays.

This anniversary co-insides with our public consultation for the Lower Thames Crossing, a new route across the Thames connecting Kent, Essex and Thurrock. We want everyone to get involved and help us shape our plans and maximise the benefits, a transformational project of this size can deliver.

The existing Dartford Crossing is designed to carry up to 135,000 vehicles a day, although it regularly carries more than 180,000, with that number increasing every year. Keeping it running is a 24/7 operation, and involves major maintenance and a regular inspection programme. In recent years the two Dartford Tunnels have been fully refurbished with new lighting, ventilation and fire suppression systems that significantly improve safety standards. Virtually all the work has been carried out overnight or at weekends, while keeping the Crossing open to traffic.

The multi-billion pound Lower Thames Crossing would nearly double road capacity across the river Thames and almost halve northbound journey times at Dartford Crossing.

The 14.5-mile route connecting Gravesham in Kent and Thurrock in Essex is expected to reduce traffic at Dartford by 22% with 14 million fewer vehicles using it every year. It will almost halve the morning peak average journey times between M25 junctions 1b and 31 from nine minutes to just five.

A consultation on the latest proposals – which aim to maximise the project's huge benefits – is currently underway. It ends on Thursday 20 December 2018. Find out more about the public consultation and give your feedback at the [Lower Thames Crossing website] (www.lowerthamescrossing.co.uk/haveyoursay).

Additionally, 60 events are being held between 10 October and 20 December across Kent, Thurrock and Essex for residents, businesses and communities to ask questions and provide their views.