

## KMEP consultation response – Lower Thames Crossing

### About You

#### Name of organisation

This response is submitted by the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP).

KMEP is a federated arm of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). It is tasked with determining local economic priorities to drive forward growth and job creation within Kent and Medway. KMEP is chaired by the private sector, with a total of 32 members drawn from the business, local government, further and higher education sectors.

This consultation response reflects the views of all KMEP Members with the exception of Gravesham Borough Council.

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#### 4 Are you responding on your own behalf or on behalf of an organisation or group?

- Providing my own response
- Providing a response on behalf of an organisation or group

### Crossing location

Our proposal is a crossing at Location C, east of Gravesend and Tilbury.

#### On balance, do you agree or disagree with our proposal for the location of a crossing, at Location C?

- Strongly agree**
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

#### Please provide the reasons for your response

The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) strongly agrees with the proposal of Highways England to construct a new bored tunnel crossing the Thames to the east of Gravesend and Tilbury.

At their board meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> February, KMEP voted overwhelmingly in support of a crossing at Location C, recognising the free flow of traffic from Kent to Essex stimulates economic and business growth and unlocks access to housing and job opportunities.

Before commenting on the preferred location for a crossing, KMEP members wish to make the following comments:

**1) A new Lower Thames Crossing is required to prevent stagnation in business growth in the South East economy.**

Economic growth in the South East is constrained by under-investment in strategic transport infrastructure connecting the Thames Gateway towns. The first Dartford tunnel opened in 1963 and the QEII bridge in 1991. During the last 25 years, daily average traffic has increased substantially – from 80,000 vehicles in 1991 to 141,000 vehicles in 2014. This is significantly above the design capacity of 135,000 vehicles per day.

Even without any traffic incidents, this volume of traffic results in congestion and 50mph speed limits, which adversely affect productivity and constrain business opportunities.

The findings of a recent business survey (included in Highways England’s business case) demonstrate this. 73% of respondents say traffic congestion at Dartford affects their business. 60% thought their business would grow and almost 50% said that they could employ more people if the problem of congestion were addressed.

The constraint on business growth, caused by the lack of a new Lower Thames Crossing, is particularly felt by freight carriers transporting hazardous goods. Due to the design of the existing Dartford tunnel, these HGVs must be escorted through the tunnel for safety reasons, adding a delay to their journey. On 300+ occasions a year when the crossing is partially or fully closed due to incidents, the only alternative route for these HGVs is to travel clockwise around the M25, as they are not permitted to use the Blackwall Tunnel.

The lack of investment in a new crossing severely impacts the Gross Value Added (GVA) per head for the South East region. Affluence is not evenly distributed across the South East of England, with a clear East-West divide, as the most recent GVA per head figures for 2014 show:

<b>Gross Value Added (GVA) per head in 2014 relative to the UK average (shown as a %)</b>			
<b>To the west of the M25</b>		<b>To the east of the M25</b>	
Berkshire - £28,961	<b>118%</b>	Essex Thames Gateway - £19,585	<b>80%</b>
Buckinghamshire - £28,307	<b>115%</b>	Kent Thames Gateway - £20,006	<b>81%</b>
East Surrey - £30,429	<b>124%</b>	Medway - £17,038	<b>69%</b>
Oxfordshire - £30,485	<b>124%</b>	Thurrock - £18,056	<b>73%</b>
UK average - £24,616			
South East average - £27,012			
<b>Northern Powerhouse cities: -</b>			
Leeds - £26,341			
Liverpool - £22,092			
Manchester - £30,963			
Newcastle - £20,693			

[Source: <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05795>]

Interestingly, the GVA per head in the Thames Gateway is significantly below, not only the South East and UK average, but also the GVA of the Northern Powerhouse cities.

To quote the Rt. Hon. Patrick McLoughlin MP, Secretary of State for Transport *“Rebalancing the national economy is a core part of Government’s economic strategy”*.

We respectfully urge the Government to redress the imbalance that is evident in the South East, through investing swiftly in a new Lower Thames Crossing that will transform connectivity between the north and south, and remove the fetters that restrict job creation, productivity and business growth.

**2) A new Lower Thames Crossing is required to unlock faster and more reliable access to the European trade markets.**

A new crossing would not only spread economic growth within the South East, but would enlarge the European trade corridor which runs from Calais, via the Port of Dover, through Kent, and then on to the Midlands and the North of England.

This European trading route is set to expand: The Port of Dover has witnessed a 25% increase in freight traffic through the Port of Dover in the past three years, with now over 2.4 million HGV movements per year [Source: <http://www.doverport.co.uk>].

Highways England indicates that HGVs currently represent 25% of journeys, and this is predicted to rise to 34% by 2041.

If Britain is to compete successfully in the European markets (particularly in the export and import of perishables or time-sensitive goods), its transport network must have sufficient capacity and resilience to provide for efficient and reliable journeys. The congestion and delays at the existing crossing risk putting British businesses at a disadvantage compared to their European competitors.

**3) Consultation, decision-making, investment & construction must be compressed into the shortest timeframe reasonably practicable.**

There is a pressing need for further investment in a River Thames crossing (as evidenced above) in order to grow the economy and spread prosperity throughout the region. KMEP urges Highways England and the Government to act with pace. A quick decision on the route is essential to avoid blight which is already taking place.

Indecision can be harmful to the local economies, with companies postponing decisions to move to employment sites earmarked for growth and expansion. As the Kent & Medway Growth & Infrastructure Framework shows on page 37, there is a significant cluster of key employment sites with over 1,000 sq.m of commercial floorspace located in the Thames Gateway region ([http://www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0012/50124/Growth-and-Infrastructure-Framework-GIF.pdf](http://www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0012/50124/Growth-and-Infrastructure-Framework-GIF.pdf)). The decision of businesses to invest in these sites is inextricably linked to their ability to transport goods, services and employees to these locations.

The scale of the potential investment in the Thames Gateway and the resulting rewards are substantial and of national importance to the Government. Ebbsfleet is designated to become the first Garden City in 100 years and London Resort Company Holdings (LRCH) are bringing together a planning application for London Paramount, set to be a world-class entertainment resort on the Swanscombe Peninsula, employing 8,500 full-time employees and supporting 15,700 indirect jobs through the supply chain and growth from spending in the local area. Visitor numbers are forecast to reach 15million per year once the resort is fully operational. [Source: <http://www.londonparamount.info/>]

According to the timeline of LRCH, the anticipated grand opening of London Paramount is spring-summer 2021, with construction commencing in winter 2017. While alternative modes of travel (such as High Speed 1) will transport some of the new employees, residents, visitors and goods to the area, it is inevitable that these developments will

place even greater capacity demands on the existing highway network and Dartford Crossing, which is already beyond its design capacity. Without a prompt decision on the location of a new crossing and expeditious construction, there is a danger of extensive gridlock in the region.

For the residents living in the affected areas, a swift decision is preferable to minimise uncertainty around the two potential routes.

**4) Private finance options should be considered to accelerate construction of the project.**

The consultation document states that using private sector funding would lead to a 2 year delay in opening the crossing, but it is unclear why this is the case. KMEP would welcome this assumption being tested further, as there is considerable appetite to be involved in this project from infrastructure investors, international banks, construction parties, fund managers, and pension investors across the globe - were the Government to approve this approach. [Source: KCC's commissioned research available from Joe Ratcliffe].

**Turning now to the location:**

**5) KMEP overwhelmingly supports Highway England's preference for a bored tunnel at Location C, because it adds resilience to the network and produces greater economic and strategic transport benefits than Location A.**

At the meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> February, each KMEP member was asked if they'd agree to support a new bored tunnel being constructed at location C.

Everyone present, with the exception of the Leader of Gravesham Borough Council, voted in favour. The detailed reasoning shown below thus reflects the majority view of KMEP.

Gravesham District Council and the thirteen other Councils represented on KMEP are submitting their own individual responses to this consultation, and these should be read separately.

***The reasons why KMEP is unsupportive of Location A, over Location C, are as follows:***

- ***Construction at location A would impede traffic flow for 6 years with 40mph speed restrictions being imposed.*** The speed limit on the existing crossing is set at 50mph, but in the evening peak 1 in 5 journeys average less than 20mph according to Highways England. With a traffic management system imposed to channel traffic safely through the construction zone, it would seem reasonable to question if the traffic during the construction period would reach speeds nearing 40mph.
- ***Location A funnels traffic into the existing congested bottleneck and does not increase the resilience of the network to incidents.*** The approach to a new crossing at Location A would concentrate additional traffic in the existing M25 corridor from Junction 2 to 29. For safety reasons, the existing 50mph limit on the crossing would remain, limiting any improvement in journey times for businesses and trade.

As Highways England acknowledges, the existing crossing is one of the least reliable sections of the UK's Strategic Road Network. Over the course of a year, the crossing is partially or fully closed 300+ times, and it typically takes 3-5 hours following an incident for the roads to clear. While a new crossing at location A would add capacity, the advantage could be negated if there were an incident on the approach.

A new crossing at Location A could attract more traffic, and if there were an incident at Junction 1A or 1B of the M25, it could potentially worsen the congestion on local roads, particularly the B255 St Clements Way and A206 Crossways Boulevard – vital link roads connecting businesses in Dartford town centre with the rest of the Borough.

- **Location A does not link new business communities to the Highway Network or provide new connectivity to local roads.** Constructing the crossing at Location A would be a missed opportunity to spread prosperity deeper into Kent and Medway by linking up new business communities to markets north of the river.
- **A new crossing at Location A would exacerbate the noise and air quality issues at Dartford.** The Kent and Medway Air Quality Monitoring Network take daily air pollution readings, recorded on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (very high). At its peak in the week commencing 7 March 2016, Dartford recorded the highest possible score for air pollution of 10 (very high) with PM10 particulate matter reaching 125 µg/m<sup>3</sup> [Source: <http://www.kentair.org.uk/index>].

The reasons why KMEP overwhelmingly supports Location C, over Location A, are as follows:

- **The economic benefits of a new crossing at Location C significantly outweigh those at Location A.** KMEP is aware of three high-level assessments of economic benefit:

Study by	Date of report	Conclusion on economic benefit
KPMG	2010	Location C would unlock six times the number of jobs (6000) than Location A (1000)
URS	2012	9,100 local jobs and 32,300 regional jobs could be unlocked by crossing at Location C - relative to 7,600 local jobs and 23,000 regional jobs unlocked by Location A.
Highways England	2016	“Improved access to jobs and services, and more opportunities for new businesses are estimated to generate double the wider economic benefits at Location C compared with Location A.”

While the figures differ between assessments, the consistent message is Location C provides a greater economic benefit. Highways England indicates a crossing at Location C could increase GDP by over £7 billion and create 5000 new jobs.

- **Location C improves connectivity to the Channel Ports.** A crossing at Location C provides a quicker, more direct and reliable journey for HGVs coming from the Midlands and the North to the Channel Ports. Highways England’s analysis has shown generally that a crossing at Location C would increase HGV traffic over and above the Location A route, which is indicative of the increased potential for economic growth at Location C.
- **Location C – if coupled with additional improvements to the M2/A2 - would enable Kent County Council’s policy objective of bifurcation to be implemented,** splitting traffic to and from the Eastern and Western Docks in Dover between the M20/A20 and M2/A2 corridors.
- **Reduced journey times and greater capacity are offered by Location C.** The new bored tunnel at Location C would have a speed limit of 70mph, improving journey times from Kent to the M25 by up to 12 minutes. Crossing capacity across the river

would increase by 70% in the opening year at Location C (relative to 60% at Location A).

- **Location C offers congestion relief on the A13 and on the A2 between the M25 and M2.** According to Highway England's modelling, a crossing at Location C would draw 13-14% of the existing traffic away from Dartford. Removing the congestion around Dartford could unlock significant growth and regeneration, improve access to jobs and services, and increase business opportunity.

It would be helpful to see the detailed modelling revealing the final destinations for this 13-14% of traffic using the new crossing. In all likelihood a proportion of this traffic will be headed further into Kent and Medway, particularly to the Port of Dover, rather than returning to the M25. If this were the case, it would draw traffic away from the A2 (from Junc 2 of the M25 at Dartford to Junc 1 of the M2 at Shorne), freeing up this stretch of road for local businesses and residents heading into the capital for commerce. This is implied by the Highways England business case that states there would be "improved flow on the A2 and A13".

- **Location C can be constructed without impacting the already congested Dartford corridor.**
- **Location C provides an alternative route in the event of an incident at the existing Dartford crossing.** The existing Dartford Crossing has "one of the highest incident rates on the major road network" according to Highways England. Having an alternative route could elevate the 3-5 hour delays currently experienced.
- **A new bored tunnel at Location C would provide a high-quality, safer transport solution.**
- **Location C has the potential to open up the eastern sector of East Anglia.**

#### Additional measures

The proposal for a new Lower Thames Crossing should not be viewed in isolation, and KMEDP wish to make the following requests for additional measures and design elements that should be incorporated into the investment: -

- Firstly, to future-proof the design, there should be **3 lanes crossing in each direction**, rather than the 2 lanes proposed in the consultation. As the Chancellor announced in his budget speech this month, "*Britain can choose short-term fixes or we can lead the world with long-term solutions to long-term problems*".

The consultation document shows within 7 years of opening the QEII Bridge reached its design capacity. Since then, there has been 18 years of periodic congestion and lobbying of the Government for further infrastructure investment. Although a larger 3-lane bored tunnel will inevitably be more expensive, over the long-term it will be more cost-effective.

Furthermore, 3-lane capacity will be required if and when London Paramount and Ebbsfleet Garden City are built. Appendix 5.2 to Highways England's Traffic and Economics Appraisal states the impact of London Paramount Entertainment Resort has not been factored into the consultation's traffic modelling. Indeed, Highways England's Appraisal says "based on the qualitative assessment, the inclusion of Paramount within V2 [modelling] might indicate that a dual 3-lane crossing is needed at Option A or Option C".

- The new crossing must be accompanied by a **package of funded improvements to the wider Kent motorway and road network**. In particular, KMEP urge Highways England and the Government to consider and invest in the highway network from the new Lower Thames Crossing to the Channel Ports.

Were the new Lower Thames Crossing to be situated at Location C, commercial traffic heading to the Channel Ports would be faced with two options.

Firstly, commercial traffic could choose to travel from the **M2** on either the **A229** (Bluebell Hill) or the **A249** (Detling Hill) and join the **M20**, north of Maidstone, before continuing onto the Channel Ports. [KMEP recognises that the A229 link is the shortest route between the M2 and M20, and is likely to experience higher traffic volumes.]

KMEP requests that a pragmatic and affordable proposal is created and funded to **upgrade the A229 and A249, accompanied by improvements to junctions 3 and 5 on the M2, and junctions 5 to 7 on the M20** to allow free flow between the two motorways without impeding local traffic.

The proposal to upgrade the link between the M2 and the M20 must be developed concurrently to the proposal for a new Lower Thames Crossing, to ensure the new crossing relieves congestion and does not simply displace it to the next weakest point in the network. The A229 is the shortest link between the M20 and M2 and already suffers from significant congestion at peak times.

KMEP would welcome seeing the modelling and analysis which discounted the Option C Variant.

Secondly, commercial traffic could choose to travel along the **M2, down the A2**, to the Port of Dover. For this option to relieve congestion and not displace it elsewhere on the Strategic Road Network, the following investment is essential:

- Upgrading **M2 Junction 7 at Brenley Corner** to improve flows between the A2 and M2. Junction 7 marks the end of the M2. Traffic wishing to continue on the A2 towards Dover must exist on the slip road, navigate a roundabout which connects with the local traffic network serving the businesses and residents of Faversham. It is a location that is well-known for its congestion, particularly at peak times.
- Dualling sections of the single carriageway on the **A2 north of Dover along Jubilee Way to Whitfield and near Lydden**. Near Dover, parts of the A2 revert back to single carriageway. Highways England's modelling says 7 million vehicles would use a new crossing at Gravesend. If a sizeable proportion of these were to continue to Dover on the M2/A2 without any upgrade or investment, this will cause significant congestion in Dover district.
- In addition to dualling sections of the A2, KMEP requested that Highways England considers upgrading the **A260** route from Lydden on the A2 to Hawkinge, which can therefore act as the most easterly rung in the ladder between the M20/A20 and M2/A2.
- Finally, the M2 is still only two-lanes for much of its length; consideration should be given to expanding this motorway.

- The additional infrastructure listed above is an essential part of creating a strategic road network capable of transporting goods and trade to Europe from Britain. The cost of this investment should not prevent its construction - The Government could use a proportion of the ongoing revenue stream generated from the tolls on the new crossing to fund these highway improvements in Kent.

**A final thought:**

As David Cameron said in 2012 *"I just want to explain why infrastructure matters so much and what has gone wrong with the way that we provide it in Britain. The truth is we are falling behind; we are falling behind our competitors and we are falling behind the great world-beating, pioneering tradition set by those who came before us. There is now an urgent need to repair the decades-long degradation of our national infrastructure and to build for the future with as much confidence and ambition as the Victorians once did"*.

**Route options north of the river in Essex**

**6 There are three route options north of the river in Essex – Routes 2, 3 and 4. Where do you think the route should be located north of the river?**

- Route 2
- Route 3
- Route 4
- Another route
- None of these
- Don't know

Please provide the reasons for your response

KMEP supports the preference of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership for route 3, north of the river Thames, in Essex.

The Highways England analysis indicates route 3 is the most viable route and will meet transport objectives and unlock housing and job opportunities.

KMEP asks Highways England and the Government considering an additional direct link to the Port of Tilbury (including its three expansion sites). The benefits of this additional junction are that it would:

- Enable further growth at the port, supporting local, national and international trade;
- Provide further congestion relief to the Dartford Crossings and approach roads and improve the reliance of the local strategic road network;
- Provide environmental benefits to Tilbury residents and those along the A1089 corridor; and
- Improve connections to north Kent to provide better access to significant and growing employment opportunities.

In addition, KMEP supports SELEP's case for additional highway improvements north of the river, including:

- Improving M25 junction 28 to ease important anti-clockwise movements;
- Improving the A12/A130 junction at Howe Green and A127/A130 at Fairglen which is already a bottleneck and would see increased traffic flow as a result of the new crossing; and
- Improving the A12/A130 junction which is currently a major bottleneck on the A12 and is also forecast to see increased traffic flow as a result of the new crossing.

**7 Thinking about the three route options north of the river, on balance do you agree or disagree with our proposal for each of these?**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Route 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Route 3	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Route 4	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

**Route options south of the river in Kent and Medway**

**8 There are two route options south of the river in Kent – the Western Southern Link and the Eastern Southern Link. Where do you think the route should be located south of the river?**

- Western Southern Link
- Eastern Southern Link
- Another route
- None of these
- Don't know

Please provide the reasons for your response

KMEP firmly supports the decision to build a new crossing at Location C. With regard to how it links to the existing highway network, it has sought the advice of local government partners.

There is a difference in opinion between its constituent councils but, on balance, the majority of its councils (including the two local highway authorities) prefer the Western Southern Link.

**The reasons why KMEP prefers the Western Southern Link (WSL) are as follows:**

- The WSL generates the most support from KMEP's constituent councils.



**10 Having evaluated the options, our proposed scheme is a new bored tunnel road crossing at Location C, following Route 3 north of the river and the Eastern Southern Link south of the river. On balance, do you agree or disagree with our proposed scheme?**

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree**
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

Please provide the reasons for your response

As the answers to questions 1-9 indicate:

- The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) **strongly supports** the proposal of Highways England to construct a new bored tunnel crossing the Thames to the east of Gravesend and Tilbury (Location C).
- KMEP supports the preference of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership for **route 3**, north of the river.
- While partners within KMEP differ in their views, overall the inclination of KMEP is to prefer the **Western Southern Link**.

Please refer to the previous answers for the detailed explanation of why KMEP has formed these views.

**11 We would welcome any comments you may have on our proposals for junctions.**

As the previous answers have indicated, KMEP request the new crossing is accompanied by a **package of funded junction and road improvements across the wider Kent network**.

In summary, these improvements to the South of the Thames include:

- **Upgrading the A229 and A249, and improving junctions 3 and 5 on the M2 and junctions 5 to 7 on the M20** to allow free flow between the M2 and M20 without impeding local traffic.
- Upgrading **M2 Junction 7 at Brenley Corner** to improve flows between the A2 and M2.
- Dualling sections of the single carriageway on the **A2 north of Dover along Jubilee Way to Whitfield and near Lydden**.
- Upgrading the **A260** route from Lydden on the A2 to Hawkinge, thereby acting as the most easterly rung in the ladder between the M20/A20 and M2/A2.
- **Upgrading the M2 to a 3-lane motorway**.

To the north of the river, KMEP also supports:

- a new junction east of Tilbury with a direct link to the Port of Tilbury. This will allow a significant improvement in the connectivity into and out of the port as well as to surrounding areas to future proof significant expansion plans.
- Improving M25 junction 28 to ease important anti-clockwise movements;

- Improving the A12/A130 junction at Howe Green and A127/A130 at Fairglen which is already a bottleneck and would see increased traffic flow as a result of the new crossing; and
- Improving the A12/A130 junction which is currently a major bottleneck on the A12 and is also forecast to see increased traffic flow as a result of the new crossing.

All these proposal must be developed concurrently to the proposal for a new Lower Thames Crossing, to ensure the new crossing relieves congestion and does not simply displace it to the next weakest point in the network.

Additionally, KMEP urge Highways England to discuss with Gravesham Borough, Kent County and Medway Councils the proposal to **connect the new crossing with the A226**. Without clear modelling, KMEP cannot determine if linking to the A226 will unlock economic growth or not. New access routes in theory should create opportunities for local businesses, however this positive effect could be completely negated by an increase in congestion on the local road network (that is already close to capacity).

## 12 We would welcome any other comments you may have on our proposals

Please refer to our previous answers.

Also, KMEP would urge Highways England and the Government to mitigate to the greatest extent possible any adverse environmental and/or social impact that results from the construction of a new bored tunnel.

For example, KMEP would ask Highways England to consider construction of a longer tunnel to reduce impact on settlements, the ecology of the area, and the landscape. This may help deliver a new Lower Thames Crossing in a shorter timeframe, as there could be fewer formal objections and appeals received from environmental organisations and residential lobbying groups.

## Do you have any feedback on this consultation – events, information provided, advertising, etc.?

We welcome and thank Highways England for their engagement with the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (KMEP's umbrella organisation), and for their consideration of our views.

There are some areas for future consideration that KMEP wish to draw to Highways England's attention: -

- **To engage a greater number of businesses in the dialogue, KMEP would have preferred a more user-friendly format for the consultation questionnaire.** The approach used of separating the questions online onto multiple pages, without a progress bar, could have resulted in businesses abandoning their submission part way through due to time constraints.
- The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State has been quoted as saying a new crossing at Location A (in Dartford) has not been ruled out by the Department for Transport [Source: [http://www.newsshopper.co.uk/news/14277036.Government\\_confirms\\_Lower\\_Thames\\_Crossing\\_at\\_Gravesend\\_far\\_from\\_reality/](http://www.newsshopper.co.uk/news/14277036.Government_confirms_Lower_Thames_Crossing_at_Gravesend_far_from_reality/)]

If, as reported, the Government is considering option A, KMEP requests that caution is applied to the interpretation of the consultation results, given the questions have been

framed in such a manner as to suggest option A has already been discounted.

- The **lack of detailed GIS route maps** showing how the southern link would connect with the existing highways has caused concern.
- **Detailed modelling information** providing traffic volumes on key local links & explaining why the C Variant has been discounted is desired. KMEP retains its firm belief that investment in the highway network is necessary to improve the connectivity between the M2 and M20.
- The Dartford Crossing is nationally important strategic infrastructure with over 50 million vehicles using it every year. The impact of any change to the Crossing's operation will not be constrained solely to businesses located in Dartford and Gravesham, but to businesses across the breadth of Kent and Medway. We strongly agree that the consultation's information events in Kent & Medway should be concentrated on the districts of Dartford and Gravesham, however **we request additional information events are held across Kent & Medway in any future consultation**, with Sevenoaks and Dover being particularly earmarked for consideration (given Sevenoaks' boundary lies within 6 miles of the existing crossing and Dover acts as a transport hub for European trade).
- Finally, the **timeliness of information distribution** has been raised by KMEP members. The consultation was launched without prior stakeholder notification.