

# the crossing

Welcome to a special edition of The Crossing, the newsletter designed to keep you up-to-date on the progress to secure a new crossing for the River Mersey between Runcorn and Widnes.



## Final crossing submissions go to the Government

Approval to build a new Mersey crossing could now be only a few months away after extra studies requested by the Government revealed that impacts on the River Mersey and the wider road network would not be significant.

And although it remains the desire of Halton Borough Council to have an untolled crossing, a range of different tolling options has also been submitted at the Government's request.

These new submissions have gone to the Department for Transport for consideration, simultaneous with the announcement that the new crossing is to be known as The Mersey Gateway.



This is to reflect the strategic importance of the new crossing, not only to the towns of Widnes and Runcorn, but also to the wider Merseyside sub-region and North Wales.

The extra studies requested by the Government involved a more detailed examination on the effects the crossing would have on the River Mersey, a widening of the traffic modelling to look at any impacts and benefits it may have on the region's transport network and what tolling options were available.

The studies have revealed that if only three of the bridge towers were to be in the water, then the impact of the structure on the River Mersey would not be significant.

And despite widening the road studies to look at such roads as the M60, M62, M6 and M56, the conclusion has been

reached that the existing network would not suffer as a result of the new crossing.

Councillor Tony McDermott, Leader of Halton Borough Council and Chair of the Mersey Crossing Group, said: "We have looked at everything the Government asked of us, and it is our opinion that there is now no reason why we cannot be given the go-ahead to build the crossing.

"The Mersey Gateway has overwhelming support from the local community, regional MPs and public/private sector organisations across the North West."

It is expected that the Government will make a final decision on funding for the new crossing early in 2005, with a fast-track target timetable following that could see The Mersey Gateway open to the public by 2012, or sooner.

# A tolled crossing?

Despite steadfastly maintaining that it prefers a free-to-use crossing, Halton Borough Council has always recognised that it may have to consider tolling the new bridge.

This became even more apparent when the Government requested that tolling was looked at as part of the extra studies. Detailed research on the implications of tolling has been carried out over the last year.

Although in its final submission, Halton Borough Council has once again reiterated its desire for a free-to-use crossing, it recognises the scale of the project and the potential need for imaginative revenue raising policies to be applied.

The Council is therefore recommending a bridge with tolls, but with a substantial discount for local cars and light vehicles, and a frequent user discount for HGVs, both of which should keep the bridge as cheap as possible for local users.

If a free-to-use bridge were chosen, the cost to the Government of this option has been calculated to be in excess of £750m, which would include the building and maintenance of the bridge.

Even though the existing Silver Jubilee Bridge would also have to be tolled, the intention is to make this a 'local' crossing with buses using the bridge for free and the current four-lane carriageway being reduced to two to allow pedestrians and cyclists to use the bridge more safely and effectively.

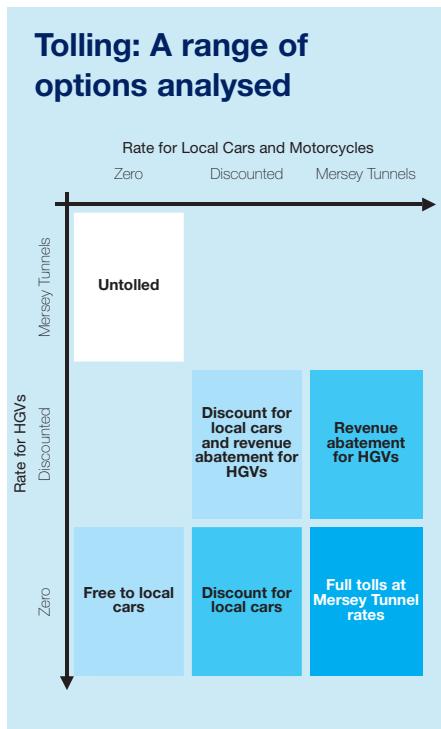
Of the total revenue generated by tolls, it is proposed that Halton would retain 2.5% each year for local transport improvements.

Councillor Tony McDermott said: "In an ideal world, the Government would fund the entire project and we would not have to consider tolling.

"However, we have proposed a strategy that is based on striking the balance between the realistic level of support we can expect from the government with the minimum realistic level of tolling,

particularly for local residents who have no alternative routes available.

"If it comes down to having no new crossing or a new crossing with tolls, I am sure local people and businesses who currently suffer the horrendous daily congestion problems experienced on the Silver Jubilee Bridge will join with us in agreeing that building The Mersey Gateway is the only solution."



## Other tolled crossings

The Government is increasingly promoting the use of tolling to fund new crossing/bridge building projects.

### Existing tolled crossings:

- Humber Bridge
- Liverpool Tunnels
- M25 Dartford Crossing
- Second Severn Crossing
- Forth Road Bridge
- Erskine Bridge
- Skye Bridge
- Tay Bridge
- Tyne Tunnel

### Proposed tolled crossings:

- Thames Gateway
- 3rd Forth Road Bridge

### Other toll roads:

- London Congestion Charging
- Durham City Centre

## Want to Know More?

If you would like more information about The Mersey Gateway, please visit [www.merseygateway.co.uk](http://www.merseygateway.co.uk), email [publicrelations@halton.gov.uk](mailto:publicrelations@halton.gov.uk), or call **0151 471 7413**

If you have any comments about this newsletter, or there are any issues you would like to see covered in future editions, please email [michelle.baker@halton.gov.uk](mailto:michelle.baker@halton.gov.uk) or call **0151 471 7413**

