

the crossing

Welcome to the latest 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.



Mersey Gateway decision imminent?

Detailed questions asked by the Department for Transport have raised the prospect that a Government decision on the Mersey Gateway could now be just weeks away.

Since Halton Borough Council handed its new Mersey Gateway submission to the Department for Transport at the end of last year, there has been regular dialogue between the local authority and the department.

Ministers and civil servants were particularly keen to receive more information on the impact of the crossing on the River Mersey and how the £335m project will be delivered.

Halton Borough Council, which is behind the private/public sector partnership that is seeking to build the bridge, was asked to respond to these questions by the end of January, leaving the authority hopeful of receiving a positive decision in early spring.

Councillor Tony McDermott, Leader of Halton Borough Council and Chair of the Mersey Crossing Group, said: "We hope the fact that the Department for Transport asked us to respond to the new questions so promptly suggests that a decision on the Mersey Gateway is imminent.

"We are confident that we have been able to supply all the answers to satisfy the Government and that the final decision will be a positive one.

"However, we are not resting on our laurels and continue to lobby hard for the crossing, both in Westminster and locally.

Halton Borough Council spent the whole of last year carrying out the extra studies requested by the Government when it

declared the crossing bid as 'super work in progress' back in December 2003.

Once the Government has made a final decision on funding for the new crossing, a fast-track target timetable will be implemented that could see The Mersey Gateway open to the public by 2012, or sooner.



Councillor Tony McDermott

Mersey Gateway reaches the summit

Senior Government ministers, civil servants and other influential people were reminded about the vital need for a new crossing when plans for the Mersey Gateway were exhibited at the Delivering Sustainable Communities Summit in Manchester.

The three-day summit was the largest event of its kind ever held in the UK, bringing together the key people who are delivering sustainable communities.

The Mersey Gateway stand, which included a video of the proposed crossing along with other promotional literature, was part of the British Urban Regeneration Association's exhibition.

Councillor Tony McDermott said: "To maintain the profile of the Mersey Gateway campaign, it was important that we took part in this very important summit.

"The Mersey Gateway will go a long way to delivering sustainable communities as it will not only spark regeneration in Widnes and Runcorn but contribute to the wider regeneration of the region."

Teaching pack rolled out

A teaching pack that uses the Mersey Gateway to teach children about maths, technology, science and engineering has now been rolled out to schools across Merseyside.

Over the last 18 months, over 800 pupils from 21 primary and secondary schools in the Borough of Halton, have had the chance not only to learn about the prospective new Mersey Gateway, but to put their understanding of technology into action by building their own models of the bridge.

The Mersey Gateway Challenge makes use of teaching materials based on both

the mersey gateway
A NEW MERSEY CROSSING

A bridge to prosperity

The campaign for the Mersey Gateway brings together a unique collaboration of public and private sector organisations from across the whole of the North West - building a bridge to prosperity for the region.

THE MERSEY GATEWAY

"I am convinced as to how vital this crossing will be for sustained economic development in Liverpool/Merseyside; but most of all concerned that if it isn't built, and quickly, Liverpool and Merseyside will become a victim of its own success as so many other initiatives bear fruit."

Digby Jones
Director-General, CBI

the existing Silver Jubilee Bridge and the proposed new crossing.

These teaching materials, which come in the form of a CD, were designed by practising primary, secondary, special school and advisory teachers from Runcorn and Widnes, in partnership with engineers from Halton Borough Council and Gifford, the consultant engineers engaged on the Mersey Gateway.

The whole project, coordinated by the Halton Education Business Partnership, was so successful, it has now been rolled out to neighbouring local authorities with the support of the Construction Industry Training Board. The authorities are

Liverpool, Sefton, Knowsley, St Helens and Wirral.

Andy Page, Manager of the Halton Education Business Partnership, said the Mersey Gateway is very important to today's young people.

"By using the crossing to look at everything from the science that goes into bridge building to the technology that will be used in its construction, teachers are not only enhancing the relevance of learning in the classroom, but introducing children to life outside the classroom, and the response from both the young people and their parents has been fantastic," he said.



Artist impressions of the new Littlewoods headquarters

Littlewoods back Mersey Gateway campaign

Retailing giant Littlewoods is the latest high-profile business to throw its weight behind the bid to build the Mersey Gateway.

The company is preparing to relocate the head office of its Home Shopping division to the Estuary Business Park in Speke, and with 1,200 staff involved in the move, it recognises the vital importance of having good transport links.

The proposed £335m Mersey Gateway bid would not only alleviate the horrendous congestion currently experienced by commuters in this area, but also ensure that the remarkable economic growth of the South Liverpool area is not stifled.

Littlewoods Home Shopping, which is the second largest home shopping retailer in the UK, is investing in excess of £31m in

its new Headquarters complex, which includes the refurbishment and conversion of a former aircraft hangar to provide 130,000 sq ft of offices, to be known as Skyways House.

Littlewoods is also constructing two additional new buildings on the site. The first, to be known as Skyways 2, will provide 83,000 sq ft of additional offices with ancillary storage facilities whilst the second, to be known as Skyways 3, provides 11,000 sq ft of support facilities.

Alistair McGeorge, Chief Executive of Littlewoods Home Shopping, said: "The Skyways House development will create a first-class facility for our business and our people, but it is very important that our employees and key suppliers can easily access our new offices.

"Speke provides us with good access to the M62, Liverpool City Centre and

Liverpool John Lennon Airport, but we believe it is vital that the Mersey Gateway is approved and built as it will make a vital contribution to the continued regeneration of the region.

"We are delighted to support the Mersey Gateway campaign and look forward to a positive decision from the Government in the next couple of months."

Councillor Tony McDermott said: "It is fantastic to receive support from a company with such a high-profile household name as Littlewoods.

"In our representations to the Government, we have demonstrated just how important a new river crossing is to the local and regional company and with companies such as Littlewoods and Jaguar supporting our campaign, we believe we have made a very strong case indeed."

MPs back House of Commons motion

Twenty MPs have so far given their support to a House of Commons Early Day Motion calling on the Government to agree the funding arrangements and construction timetable for the Mersey Gateway.

The motion, tabled by Knowsley North and Sefton East MP George Howarth, asks the House to note that the existing Silver Jubilee Bridge is in excess of its current capacity and that this situation is going to continue to worsen.

It goes on to add that the recently published Northern Way document

recognises that the current congestion is a barrier to economic growth in the Liverpool/Merseyside region, and that a new crossing over the River Mersey is needed to support this growth and regeneration.

It is not just North West MPs who have signed the motion. Sunderland North MP

Bill Etherington, Grimsby MP Austin Mitchell and Northern Ireland MP Iris Robinson are among those from outside the region who have given their backing.

The motion calls on the Government to urgently agree the funding arrangements and construction timetable for the Mersey Gateway.

Up, up and away with the Mersey Gateway

Supporters of the Mersey Gateway are being offered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get an exclusive perspective of the proposed site for the new crossing.

Thanks to the generosity of VLM Airlines and the owners of Liverpool John Lennon Airport, Peel Holdings, the Mersey Crossing Group has arranged an aerial tour of the crossing site and its locality.

On Saturday 19th March, VLM Airlines will be operating a specially commissioned Mersey Gateway service that will offer around 50 invited guests a bird's eye view of the proposed Mersey Gateway location, along with other key strategic sites, including the Mersey Waterfront.

The guest list includes Mersey Gateway supporters from the public and private sector, MPs and members of the media. Four lucky members of the public will also be invited to take the tour as a result of competitions run by the local media.



Check-in will begin with a champagne breakfast at Liverpool John Lennon Airport at 9am, followed by the 30-minute flight. After landing, key members of the Mersey Crossing Group will be on hand to answer any questions.

Councillor Tony McDermott said: "We are very grateful to the generosity of key supporters of our campaign, VLM Airlines

and Peel Holdings, who, like many others in the region, believe securing the Mersey Gateway is essential if they are to achieve the full potential for their business.

Johan Vanneste, Managing Director of VLM, said: "We are delighted to support the Mersey Gateway campaign by offering one of our aircraft, flight crew and check-in staff for the flyover."

What our supporters say

"VLM recognises the importance of the new crossing to the region and the future growth of Liverpool John Lennon Airport."

Johan Vanneste

VLM Airlines

"We are delighted to support the Mersey Gateway campaign and look forward to a positive decision from the Government in the next couple of months."

Alistair McGeorge

Littlewoods Home Shopping

Want to Know More?

If you would like more information about The Mersey Gateway, please visit www.merseygateway.co.uk, email 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 or call **0151 471 7413**.

