RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSPORT AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE THAMES GATEWAY

FOR THE ODPM

FINAL REPORT

JULY 2003

Strategic Overview and Summary

Shaping the Thames Gateway: Development and Transport Intertwined

A Sub-Regional Structure

The aspirations for major change in the Thames Gateway make it essential that there is a change of focus: from "the same but more so", to a new shape and set of relationships.

We can envisage the eventual urban structure of this two-and-a-half million population sub-region as being characterised, from east to west, by:

- two major outer conurbations the size of Leicester (Southend / Rochford, Medway);
- a "linear city" in North Kent Thames-side from Gravesend to Ebbsfleet to Dartford and inward;
- a "new town" at Barking / Dagenham / Rainham;
- and the existing places revived and expanded on the south side along the North Kent Line (and eventually Crossrail) spine.

There will be interactions both upstream and downstream, with major job additions not just in London but also concentrated in "city centres" (including Ebbsfleet as well as Southend and Medway) plus some expanding outer areas like Shellhaven and Thurrock. The spinal structure will help achieve a relatively high public transport mode share, with potential for more contra-commuting, thus increasing the efficient use of public investment.

(1) South of the River

From North Kent Thames-side inward to Docklands, there is a string of opportunities, many of them of major significance, with Central London at one end, and the rest of Kent and direct access to continental Europe at the other. The Channel Tunnel Rail Link can be seen as a major point on the spine, with Crossrail filling in the "vertebrae" of intermediate locations, and high quality Transit giving efficient local circulation to get the most out of the potential, in the most sustainable way.

(2) North of the River

Across the Thames there are also huge opportunities, but more mixed and less clearly located along a single major spine and, east of Stratford, less equivalent of the wider connections beyond, to outer areas and to Europe. There will be more of a stress on local hinterlands, and less potential to shift modal choice away from car towards public transport.

(3) Two major outer conurbations

In the outer parts of the Gateway, Medway and Southend will continue to have strong business and commuting relationships with London: but they are growing into medium-sized cities – to become attractive differentiated places in their own right, with a countervailing pull for some commuting in these outer areas, and a social and economic dynamic of their own.

Cross River Relationships

Thames Gateway is a powerful concept, but it is not all one uniform thing. Upstream, the inner Gateway is becoming more like Central and West London, in that the Thames is perceived almost as an incidental open space with little or no effect on residential choice or job moves (so "Docklands" is now an area of housing search, as much as "Southwark" or "Tower Hamlets"). Downstream, on the other hand, where River turns into Estuary, there is no significant north-south relationship between the main places - Southend, Sheerness, Chatham, Basildon - and never will be: all possible economic and social needs are met in their own hinterlands or in London. Even at the Dartford crossing, (with a tunnel for forty years, and a bridge for ten), the relationship between South Essex and North Kent is not particularly strong.

In between, there is an interesting area of choice – to actively seek to extend the "inner" logic. The case for a Crossing between Beckton and Thamesmead is not simply that it releases potential of specific sites which are otherwise critically constrained: though it will help attract commercial interest to Thamesmead and Belvedere, and make job opportunities (especially in the Royals) more accessible so widening choice for South East Londoners. It is also about deciding that, together with DLR Woolwich and Crossrail, this part of the Gateway is going to become increasingly economically and socially interlinked; and that this takes both road and rail links for it to be complete and convincing.

A Location of Choice

This ambitious growth and restructuring is critically dependent on changing the location decisions of a large number of individuals. We have got to make people want to live there. Most home moves are very local, and so to get the scale of change we are talking about, we will have to persuade a lot of people to "transmigrate", rather than just move the average 10 kilometres. The Thames Gateway has got to be more attractive – both absolutely and relative to other competing areas. That means partly making it more convenient, with strategic "spinal" and high quality local public transport. And partly making it

good to be in – distinctive riverside communities, making places with life, character and activity, protecting and improving green space where this is of value.

As well as a place to live, Thames Gateway must also become a location of choice to work. There need to be many thousands more jobs, and that means making the area attractive and convenient for indigenous and incoming businesses. But there are never going to be enough to make the places within it "self-sufficient" – this is a big busy sub-region with a hugely powerful World City economy at one end of it. Central London / Docklands will remain dominant employment locations for many; Ebbsfleet / North Kent Thames-side will be a new focus, a sort of eastern East Croydon astride the strategic rail lines; Medway and Southend can grow independent job potential, and so they need transport investment for road connections and fast London links for business attractiveness as well as commuting. Job growth will be very substantial, too, in the rest of area, but it will not "keep up" with housing growth there, except in parts of South Essex, notably Shellhaven where job growth will dominate.

The Transport Dimension

Transport investment is clearly fundamental to all this. The Thames Gateway needs help to become a "competitive location", for residential choice as well as commercial investment, since it has identifiable (non-transport) disadvantages at present. It needs high quality regional AND local transport if we are not to waste the potential, especially on the major opportunity sites.

So the Gateway can become a sustainable sub-region, as envisioned in the DPM's Communities Plan. It will not however be a collection of self-contained towns; there will be a lot of travel, and a lot more travel than now. But with the right associated development, there will be a lot less travel than would be associated with developing in other competing locations, where the transport / development logic is not so interwoven. In particular, there is the opportunity to structure much of the development in the Thames Gateway in a way that reduces the overall proportion of travel that is undertaken by car, thereby minimising the environmental "footprint" of this scale of growth.

The Trajectory

This vision of an evolving sub-region does not happen all at once and everywhere. CTRL will be operational in 2007, and so North Kent opportunities are an early priority and they demand focus on the quality, function and effectiveness of local Transit. At the western end, local Transit and DLR system expansion can help to maintain momentum and to secure commitment to very ambitious plans for Barking, Dagenham, Woolwich, and Thamesmead. Crossrail and the Thames Gateway bridge come along later to release another layer of potential, as well as new sites on the south side "spine". Opportunities in the remainder of the Gateway area are generally less dependent on major transport decisions, but still need coherent local and strategic programmes to fit with the release of both short and long term potential in each locality.

The Key Relationships

This report argues:

(a) That the combination of available land and new (CTRL) and possible (Crossrail) strategic transport schemes does indeed have the potential - if handled right - to bring about a step change in development potential; but

(b) That if aspirations in terms of homes and jobs and sustainable communities are to be met, close attention must be paid to the planning of transport at the local level, combined with a commitment to integrated planning and funding. Although such an approach is unprecedented in the UK, it would not be unique in European terms, as shown in the benchmarking case studies in the report. Experience to date suggests that rail-based local transport helps to trigger high density, low car dependence development. This argument is not easy to validate with hard evidence from the UK, where rail-based public transport has rarely been planned in relation to new development. We therefore rely instead on benchmarking evidence from various projects around the world. For both rail-based local transport and the strategic transport links, it is in our view a chimera to suppose that incontrovertible evidence of cause leading to effect can be found and measured.

Strategic Focus

Our recommended approach has three main themes.

First, the ability to "win" large-scale high-quality development varies across the Thames Gateway, with some opportunities being dependent on early transport investment decisions, and others either being less urgent or "self starting". It is therefore advisable to **focus** efforts and resources on transport investment decisions (for the time being) in areas:

- Where there are maximum returns to scale (in terms of development aspirations) associated with transport investment and other factors;
- Where early wins can be achieved in terms of development potential being released by transport investment, and of maximising returns on transport investment; and
- Where there is a danger that without transport intervention potentially valuable sites could be squandered with low intensity or unsustainable development.

Second, **strategic** transport projects, which link the Thames Gateway area to London, Europe and other parts of South East England can open up longer distance travel. This can play a part in attracting householders and businesses on the scale required. Our recommended approach is to build upon strategic transport improvements as and when they come on stream, requiring a phased implementation. CTRL is committed and under construction and so should drive one of our "focus" areas. Beyond that, however, such major projects can only be delivered in large chunks. In addition they are also dependent on a positive business case within which the benefits to the Thames Gateway will

form only a part – and probably a relatively small part compared to strategic considerations.

Third, securing high density sustainable developments in the Thames Gateway will require a step change in the level of commitment to and resources for the building and procurement of **local** transport systems. Without this there is no reasonable prospect of being able to achieve the quantity or quality of development to which the Thames Gateway project aspires. The local transport systems must provide for connections to the strategic transport hubs, and must integrate core local transport spines with other services. Such systems, however, must be sufficiently robust and credible to attract and support intensive development. There will need to be close control over the timing and delivery of both development and transport. The report discusses the issue of whether bus-based transit will be sufficient, or whether rail-based transit will be necessary to achieve the desired outcomes. It points out that there is limited evidence-based support for either case made. It is also acknowledged that it has been hard (in the UK) to make a business case for rail-based local transport. It is argued that much will depend on conditions within which local public transport operates, in particular the relationship between parking supply and management, development formats, and the restriction or otherwise of car-based development in locations not served by the new transport system.

Further work will be required to develop integrated transport strategies for each area that reflect the principles suggested in this report, including improved access to major transport hubs and the specification of attractive high capacity local transit systems compatible with the density aspirations of the Communities Plan.

Chapters 2 – 8: The Main Points in Summary

Chapter 2 "The scope of the Thames Gateway in 2003" reviews each of the principal areas, the aspirations for them, and the existing and proposed transport schemes to serve them. It compares the estimate of potential in the ODPM "Zonal Action Plans" (ZAP), and concludes that there is probably even more development potential than that ambitious scheme – our assessment suggests that more capacity can be identified in North Kent Thames-side and Barking / Havering Riverside, and substantially more in Greenwich & Bexley Riverside, though the Medway figures are in our view an over-estimate.

Chapter 3 "Transport Analysis" summarises the transport capacity issues and the travel characteristics (current and expected) in the different parts of the sub-region. It concludes that for growth to be successful there will need to be a shift of mode away from car to public transport but new road capacity will still be needed. It is the modal shift which is critical, because if its scale is insufficient, then even with new roadspace it will be highway capacity that will force a limit on development potential. Table 3.1 sets out, for each of the main sites, the expected travel characteristics and constraints at 2016. It suggests that for Barking / Havering, development potential is directly dependent on the capacity of the Light Rail / Transit package; for North Kent Thames-side the

road to rail/public transport shift is critical; in Greenwich / Bexley Riverside, Crossrail can unlock the constraints restraining the upper scale of potential; for Medway, rail improvements may possibly release extra potential because road improvements will be swallowed by general traffic growth; and for South Essex, the c2c system may need more additional capacity than is currently proposed.

Chapter 4 “Potential Scale of Development” examines the scale of housing and employment growth suggested for Thames Gateway from the perspective of a “reality check” against past trends, the regional setting and the supply/demand balance, and it sketches out alternative growth scenarios” based on varying assumptions about, for example, how much of the South East’s forecast growth the Gateway might expect to “claim” over the next fifteen years. It suggests that the ZAP 2016 figures (325,800 jobs, 158,500 homes) are well outside the envelope of even the most ambitious of the scenarios analysed, and that a planning basis might be ranges around 150,000 and 120,000 respectively.

Since the planning capacity exceeds the economic potential to 2016 by this wide margin (both in the Gateway and the wider South East), it follows that development can be expected to be at a slower pace (i.e. it will happen, but not by 2016); and that there is a need to choose between the sub-regions of the South East, and within the Thames Gateway sub-region, which areas should receive priority.

Hence the emphasis in our approach on the importance of focus: on places where there is a synergy between development opportunities, demand from private investment, and transport’s role in releasing capacity in a concentrated and accelerated way.

The chapter also discusses the relationship between the likely scale of economic growth and the scale of, and reasons for, moves in the housing market. It argues that “local” demand will only create some 20-25,000 units of new housing demand; the rest will have to be driven by the regional economy, and will be in response to job opportunities (in the Gateway, Docklands and in central London) and the transport links to them. There is thus a powerful economic, and pace-of-development, logic to early commitment of transport investment.

Chapter 5 ”Transport and Development Interaction” reviews in turn the strategic and local transport investment issues, in relation to the development potential that could be attracted and / or unlocked. It explores the contribution that CTRL International, CTRL Domestic services and Crossrail can bring to Ebbsfleet, and links this both to the need for careful planning to maximise the potential of the station hinterland itself, and the vital importance of getting the supporting local transport systems right. Crossrail is also assessed in terms of its important contribution west of Ebbsfleet, in the Greenwich & Bexley Riverside corridor, where its single biggest “additionality” is identified. On the third major strategic scheme, Thames Gateway Bridge, the chapter concludes that whilst its structural and transport role is very important, its direct

contribution to development potential on the major sites considered in the study may not be substantial.

The analysis of the local transport choices, which we see as critically important to getting the most out of the major sites, is structured as a comparison of two scenarios – "Bus-based transit" and "Tram/LRT based transit". Using benchmarking against experience elsewhere, it is argued that whilst the capacity provided by bus-based transit will be adequate for most of the areas (though not Barking/Havering, where Light Rail is already being proposed), there is limited experience of such systems having any impact on development and modal choices. This makes it a high-risk strategy compared with the more credible and committed rail-based (tram/LRT) systems, in a development environment as unhelpful as that of the Thames Gateway.

Table 5.3 summarises, area by area, the conclusions on the relationship between development and the existing, committed and proposed transport investments. Transport is a significant constraint on development but in some areas proposed transport schemes would release the full potential of sites. There are significant potential gains from these major transport schemes, provided they are supported by local strategies and improvements. In all the areas, the development proposals and transport schemes will have to be fully integrated in order to maximise potential development and the momentum for regeneration.

Chapter 6 " Strategic Focus in the Thames Gateway" looks in turn at Barking & Havering Riverside, Greenwich & Bexley Riverside, North Kent Thames-side and Southend / Rochford, and suggests what elements of transport investment planning and choice need to be addressed, and how they relate to the development track. It also briefly reviews the issue of the peripheral sites (some Green Belt, some Metropolitan Open Land) which have been suggested for development in either the ZAP or our own (Chapter 2) analysis, and sets out a suggested basis for the development case in such locations.

Chapter 7 "Phasing of Transport and Development" summarises the steps that might be taken towards realisation of the full potential identified for the Thames Gateway. For each major location, an approximate "best case" trajectory is described; and then the transport decisions needed and their timing are set out in the table at paragraph 7.2. We also include some remarks on the institutional mechanisms which we believe would support coordination of the development and transport Improvements.

Chapter 8 "Conclusions" compares a "zero case", "current aspirations" and "higher aspirations" in an attempt to relate the package of actions, which we believe is necessary, to the very ambitious targets set by the ODPM's Sustainable Communities Plan and the ZAPs.