

Local communities in Runcorn and Widnes are to get a chance to have their say on potential money saving improvements to the Mersey Gateway Project.

The chance comes following the announcement earlier this week by the Transport Secretary that the Government is to invest up to £470million in the project over its lifetime. This investment confirms that the project will go ahead.

Proposed modifications to the road layouts that are being considered on either side of the river would reduce projected traffic levels on local routes around Halton Brow in Runcorn, and remove the need for large toll plazas in Widnes. These are at the heart of modified proposals to deliver the Mersey Gateway Project.

An Open Road Tolling (ORT) system would mean using cameras and modern technology to record vehicle recognition details for the collection of tolls for crossing both the new bridge and the Silver Jubilee Bridge.

Although this would mean that drivers would still be charged for crossing the river, the toll plazas that would have been built in Widnes would not be developed, and that traffic would be more free-flowing.

On the Runcorn side of the river the proposed modifications have largely been developed as a result of listening to concerns from local residents and councillors. The project team has adjusted the plans for the slip roads at either side of Halton Brow to reduce projected peak time traffic levels alongside Warrington Road by up to 60% and to improve access to facilities at Halton Lea.

The consultation also covers possible alternative designs for the new bridge. The route of the new crossing is not changed but the Council would like to increase the design flexibility available to specialist contractors who will be responsible for confirming the design of the new bridge within the scope of planning permissions obtained. Some design freedom is important to improve the construction process and maximise value for money.

The alternative designs under consideration would not accommodate a future light rail scheme and if these were adopted the Council would use the Silver Jubilee Bridge rather than the new bridge for future public transport services including any light rail future proposals.

Delivering the changes identified would require new planning applications. but before any planning applications are submitted, the project team is keen to hear the views of local people. The Council may decide to build a scheme based on the current approved scheme.

Steve Nicholson, Mersey Gateway Project Director, said: "Our discussions with Government,

local residents, councillors and others have identified ways that could improve value for money across the project and better meet the concerns of residents.”

He added: “Although the changes identified are relatively small, our estimates show that this amended approach could reduce the cost of the scheme by at least £30 million, but it is important that we get the views of local communities before we submit any new planning applications. ”

As part of the consultation, the project team is holding two exhibitions in October to give local communities a chance to give their views on possible modifications to the project. There will be one exhibition in Runcorn and one in Widnes.

Anyone who would like to find out more about the proposed modifications or give their views is welcome to come along to one of the exhibitions and speak to a member of the Mersey Gateway team.

The exhibitions are taking place at:

- Runcorn Town Hall, Chambers

Tuesday 18 October 2011 12.00pm to 7.00pm

- Stobart Stadium, Widnes, Box 8

Wednesday 19 October 2011 12.00pm to 7.00pm

Anyone interested in contributing to the consultation can also view the consultation materials and submit their views online at www.merseygateway.co.uk or contact the project team on 0151 495 4091 to ask any detailed questions.