

THE MERSEY GATEWAY PROJECT

(MERSEY GATEWAY BRIDGE)

CORPORATE

PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF

David Parr



This proof of evidence relates to the implications of the following applications and proposed orders:

	Application ref:	Appeal ref:
Planning Application for full planning permission for works lying within Runcorn comprising improvements to the Central Expressway, Weston Link, the Weston Point Expressway and Junction 12 of the M56 motorway, dated 31 March 2008	APP/D0650/V/08/1203385/2095113	
Planning Application for full planning permission for works lying within Widnes comprising modifications of the northern approaches to the Silver Jubilee Bridge, dated 31 March 2008	APP/D0650/V/1203384/2095069	
Listed Building Consent Application for modifications to the carriageway of the Silver Jubilee Bridge, dated 31 March 2008	APP/D0650/V/08/1203386/2095114	
The River Mersey (Mersey Gateway Bridge) Order (application under section 6 of the Transport and Works Act 1992 to the Secretary of State for Transport for an order under section 3(1)(b) of that Act)	<u>TWA/08/APP/05</u>	
The A533 (Silver Jubilee Bridge) Road User Charging Scheme Order 2008		
The Halton Borough Council (Mersey Gateway - Queensway) Compulsory Purchase Order 2008		
The Halton Borough Council (Mersey Gateway - Central Expressway) Compulsory Purchase Order 2008		
The Halton Borough Council (A533 Central Expressway) Side Roads Order 2008		
The Halton Borough Council (A533 Queensway) Side Roads Order 2008		

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Personal Details

I am the Chief Executive of Halton Council. I have held this position for approximately 5 years. Prior to this I was the Chief Executive at Macclesfield Council. I have worked in local government for approximately 25 years; throughout this period I have undertaken a variety of roles covering the whole spectrum of the activities and responsibilities of a local authority and its many and varied partnership arrangements. I am a contributor to a number of multi-agency bodies addressing regional, sub-regional and local strategy and policy, and delivering or facilitating public services. I hold the lead local authority Chief Executive advisor role for transport and highways in the Liverpool City Region.

1.2 Qualifications

I hold a Law Degree and a post Graduate Diploma in Planning and Environmental Law.

I am a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of England and Wales. I am not a practising solicitor in my present role but hold a valid Practising Certificate.

1.3 Role in Project

My role in the project is to provide the strategic direction and ensure the project delivers its wider national, regional and sub-regional objectives in addition to meeting the local objectives within Halton.

2. SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

2.1.1 In my evidence I shall provide some context and characteristics about Halton, the Liverpool City Region its Travel to Work Area and its local communities. I shall identify the challenges and opportunities that present themselves in the area and describe the strategic policy framework in place to address these challenges and opportunities. I shall explain how the Council, in partnership with its partners from the public, private and third sector, is driving the economic, social and environmental regeneration of the Borough and how Mersey Gateway is instrumental to the longer term well being of Halton and the sub-region.

2.1.2 I have structured my evidence as follows:

1. In section 3 I describe the characteristics of Halton and explain the challenges currently facing the Borough;
2. In section 4 I explain the Halton Council responsibilities and corporate aims;
3. In section 5 I explain why Halton Council is promoting the Mersey Gateway and set out the objectives that the Council expects the Mersey Gateway to deliver;
4. In section 6 I summarise the key resolutions made by the Council;
5. In section 7 I list the organisations who have submitted letters of support and I append the letters of support for reference (Appendix 1); and
6. In section 8 I provide a short conclusion about the need for the Mersey Gateway.

3. HALTON – THE PLACE

3.1.1 Halton is a largely urban area of 119,500 people. Its two biggest settlements are Widnes (approximately 60,000 population) and Runcorn (also approximately 60,000 population) which face each other across the River Mersey, 10 miles upstream from Liverpool. The population of Halton was in decline for over a decade, but has recently started to increase. Between 1991 and 2002 the estimated Borough population decreased by 6,500 people from 124,800 to 118,300. However, in 2003 there was a small increase in the population and between 2003 and 2006 the estimated population increased by 1,100 people.

3.1.2 Runcorn and Widnes have a common heritage in the chemical industry. Widnes is regarded as the birthplace of the industry, and its development soon spread to Runcorn in the 19th Century. Quick and sometimes environmentally damaging development took place up to the mid 20th Century. More recently, there has been a rapid contraction as the industry became more globalised. This has left a positive legacy in that high value-added, specialist chemical manufacturing and scientific and research-based employers are based in the Borough. This is one of the key strands of a revitalised and vibrant knowledge-based economy in the Borough. However, contraction brought with it a massive rise in worklessness for those with little or no skills, which lingers to this day. Investment in new creative and science-based businesses (at Daresbury, Manor Park and The Heath) and Logistics (at 3MG (Mersey Multi-Modal Gateway)) as well as the development of the Widnes Waterfront are now bringing new employment opportunities to Halton but require new skills and the upskilling of the community. Worklessness, a low enterprise culture and low skill levels remain major challenges for the Borough.

3.1.3 On the back of the still booming industry of the 1950's and 1960's, Runcorn was designated as a New Town. Roads and a unique busway system were constructed together with a new shopping centre (Halton Lea) to serve an influx of residents from Liverpool, many of whom were accommodated in

new social housing. There was less employment provision in the New Town than might have otherwise been expected because of the projected growth in employment in the chemical sector. In the event, employment growth did not materialise and industries have in some cases left the Borough. As a result, the opposite to the projected growth occurred and so the New Town legacy is of a very well landscaped environment concealing residential areas in which the housing is becoming life expired and there are successive generations of unemployed.

3.1.4 The number of jobs in the Borough is largely the same as it was 10 years ago but the proportion employed in manufacturing has fallen and the reliance on a small number of large employers is beginning to reduce. The wealth of the Borough has improved overall during the last 10 years as illustrated by rising numbers of detached houses, rising car ownership, and increases in professional and managerial households in parts of the Borough. However, many of the Borough's residents still experience high levels of deprivation and poverty. Health inequalities also provide the Borough with significant challenges with all age mortality one of the worst in the country for both men and women. The Borough also scores badly on most health statistics. Research in 2004 by The University of Lancaster (CD 219) concluded the Borough's poor health is predominately a result of lifestyle (i.e.- poor diet, smoking, alcohol intake and lack of exercise). Data from the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for 2007 (CD221) confirms that these lifestyle characteristics tend to be more acute in the less affluent communities of the Borough.

3.1.5 While Halton has inherited more than its share of challenges, it has a track record of delivering excellence resulting in real benefits and new opportunities for the people who live and work here. Our population is starting to grow after years of decline; crime is falling; our children are leaving school with better qualifications; employment prospects are broadening and ambitious regeneration projects are changing the physical environment. Social, economic and physical regeneration are creating opportunities for all. Improved accessibility and consistency of journey time

are also critical to the future success of Halton and its sub-region. As the birthplace of the chemical industry, many of Halton's most challenging problems are rooted in the area's industrial past. With manufacturing and chemical sectors declining, considerable energy has been successfully put into broadening the range of employment opportunities available. The latest IMD for 2007 (CD221), not only contains some of the latest data available, but is also one of the most comprehensive sources of deprivation indicators, as some 37 different indicators are used. It shows that overall, Halton is ranked 30th nationally (a ranking of 1 indicates that an area is the most deprived), but this is 3rd highest on Merseyside, behind Knowsley and Liverpool, and 10th highest in the North West. St Helens (47th), Wirral (60th) and Sefton (83rd) are considerably less disadvantaged compared to Halton.

- 3.1.6 The 2007 IMD suggests that levels of deprivation have decreased in the Borough, from a rank of 21st in the 2004 Index. Halton's concentration of deprivation has gone down from 20th position in 2004 to 27th worst in England in 2007. Concentration is a key way of identifying hot spots of deprivation within an area. However, although Halton is travelling in the right direction, there is still considerable room for improvement. Within Halton there are 8 super output areas in the top 975 Super Output Areas in England, i.e. within England's top 3% most deprived, this is up from 6 in 2004. The most deprived neighbourhood is ranked 306th out of 32,482 and is situated in the Windmill Hill area of Runcorn. Some 27 % of Halton's children and young people live in poverty (nationally the figure is under 20%).

3.1.7 A recent audit conducted by Local Futures (CD277) demonstrates that the Borough is performing well in terms of its current economic performance and structure. However, the level of human capital and trends in economic growth may present problems for the future. This is particularly so given the district's poorer performance in terms of some social and environmental indicators, which may create difficulties attracting the best qualified people to the Borough. As previously advised health inequality also remains a major challenge. Halton's performance on education and skills (although again improving), and low levels of home ownership, point to problems of inclusiveness, with some groups of residents not sharing in the current levels of economic prosperity.

3.1.8 This evidence shows that the gap in prosperity between the richest and poorest neighbourhoods is continuing to widen despite the efforts of the Council and its partners to date. The policy implications of this audit are that a broad based approach to regeneration is still needed to deal with the depth and breadth of challenges in Halton. The Mersey Gateway project is the catalyst for driving the Council's social, economic and environmental regeneration programme. Through better connectivity, more consistent journey times and improved accessibility, combined with a much improved physical urban environment, Halton will become a better place to live and work, and to invest.

3.1.9 As explained above, as a result of its past, Halton has inherited a number of physical, environmental and social problems. The Council has been working hard together with its partners to resolve these issues ever since the Borough was formed in 1974. Gaining unitary status in 1998 has helped to co-ordinate more activity over a wider front and has increased the resources the Council and its strategic partners have been able to invest in Halton. Progress has been good and the Halton of the 1980s is unrecognisable however, there still remains much to be done. The Mersey Gateway project is a critical element of the ongoing social, economic and environmental regeneration of Halton and will not only deliver vital infrastructure to maximise the potential of the Borough and its communities but will also ensure Halton and the sub-region can respond positively to the challenges and opportunities that present themselves. The evidence of Mr Russell will show in more detail the economic, employment and educational benefits arising from Mersey Gateway and Dr Twigger-Ross will explain the social benefits that will materialise directly and indirectly from Mersey Gateway.

3.1.10 The site where the Silver Jubilee Bridge is now situated is known as 'The Runcorn Gap' this is also the location of the first crossing of the Mersey by ferry boat in the 12th Century. The river Mersey is one of the defining characteristics of the Borough but also has the potential to divide it without adequate infrastructure. Tolls are not a new proposal for crossing services at this location. A typical charge for the ferry service was tuppence per person. Crossing the river by the Transporter Bridge (opened in 1905) cost 1d for a pedestrian and 8d for a car for a journey that took about two and a half minutes to complete. The Railway Bridge opened in 1868 and was officially named 'Aethelfleda' after King Alfred's daughter and now carries West Coast mainline services connecting Liverpool and Euston and the Midlands.

3.1.11 In 1961 the Widnes-Runcorn road bridge was opened providing a two lane single carriageway that handled around 10,000 vehicles a day (ten times the capacity of the Transporter Bridge). Due to unrelenting traffic growth, in 1975 the carriageway of the bridge was widened and strengthened to its current configuration of four 'narrow' lanes (Figure 3.1). To deliver the new traffic lanes the original pedestrian footways were removed from either side of the carriageway and a new footway constructed as an extension to the east side of the bridge superstructure. In 1977 the bridge was renamed the Silver Jubilee Bridge. The Silver Jubilee Bridge became the responsibility of Halton Council when it was transferred from Cheshire County Council in 1998, when Halton was granted unitary council status. Since that time Silver Jubilee Bridge has received constant investment.

Figure 3.1 – Silver Jubilee Bridge



3.1.12 The local, sub-regional and regional transport system and accessibility across the Mersey, and through the Borough is now dominated by the Silver Jubilee Bridge. Section 5 of Mr Pauling's evidence explains in detail the role of the Silver Jubilee Bridge in the local and regional transport network.

3.1.13 The reliance on a single road link across the river Mersey has significant implications for the day to day life of local residents and in particular for

Civil Contingency planning. The loss of accessibility in the event of Silver Jubilee becoming unavailable for any period compromises how people are able to go about their business. In the event of a long period of unavailability the implications for local residents, businesses and through traffic are severe and would strike at the very heart of the social and economic fabric of Halton and the whole sub-region. This is recognised in that the Emergency Planning incident report form (Appendix 2) for Halton specifically asks the question "Is the Runcorn Bridge open?". This key document is used in the event of an incident to respond to that event, showing how the status of the existing bridge is of great importance. In addition the Borough has two emergency centres, one either side of the river to address the potential severance and the associated social and economic consequences that could arise in the event of Silver Jubilee becoming unavailable as a consequence of a specific event or a civil emergency. Many essential services within the Borough have centres in both Runcorn and Widnes to ensure that they are accessible at all times.

4. HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES AND CORPORATE AIMS

4.1 Corporate Priorities and Key Challenges

4.1.1 The long-term vision for Halton is set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy 'Making it happen in Halton 2006-2011' (CD120) and our own Corporate Plan (CD121). The vision statement is as follows:-

"Halton will be a thriving and vibrant Borough where people can learn and develop their skills, enjoy a good quality of life with good health; a high quality urban environment; the opportunity for all to fulfil their potential; greater wealth and equality; sustained by a thriving business community and with safer, stronger and more attractive neighbourhoods" (page 14 of CD 120 and CD 121).

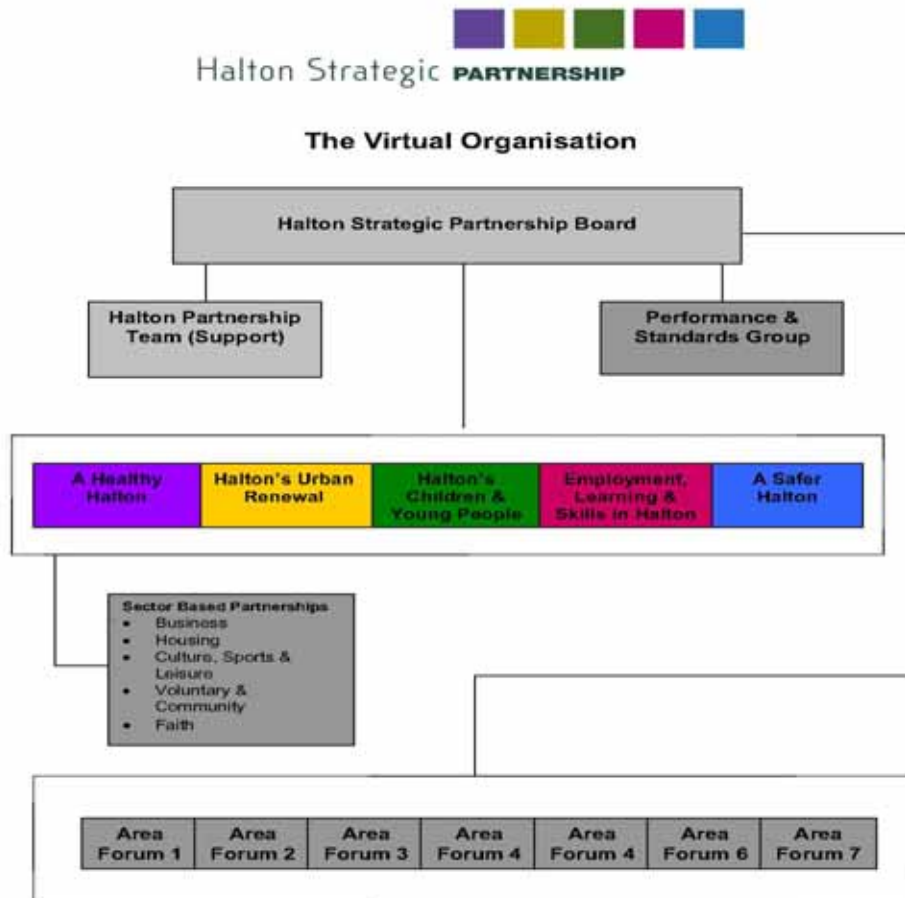
4.1.2 With this shared vision and a clear set of priorities developed through extensive consultation, research and data, we are working with our partners and our communities to make Halton a more modern, vibrant Borough. We want Halton to be a place of opportunity for all, where people are proud to live and see a promising future for themselves and their families. Partnership working; enterprise and innovation; vision; ambition; improved accessibility and hard work are coming together to transform the Borough of Halton and its sub-region

4.1.3 Delivering the Mersey Gateway project is the Council's top priority in this transformational programme, The project is a priority outcome in our emerging Core Strategy and the longer term vision for Halton (as summarised in the 'Long Term Vision – Halton 2025 "Keeping it all Happening" (CD276) and is the catalyst for our future social, economic and environmental regeneration.

4.2 Delivering Our Priorities and Vision

- 4.2.1 Making Halton a better place does, however, present some major challenges. The Local Area Agreement (LAA) (CD 181) is a three-year agreement, based on the local Sustainable Community Strategy and sets out the priorities for the Borough as agreed between Central Government (represented by Government Office North West - GONW) and Halton, represented by its Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – in our case, the Halton Strategic Partnership (HSP). In addition to establishing agreed priorities, stretch targets and financial incentives the LAA also offers to local authorities greater freedoms and provides the opportunity to think innovatively, and develop new solutions to local priorities. Halton’s Local Area Agreement provides a further tool for the HSP to develop its strategic leadership role and to tackle some of the big crosscutting challenges that Halton faces. The Mersey Gateway Project has the unanimous support of the HSP and is recognised locally as a vital part of the future of Halton if it is to overcome its challenges and realise its many opportunities.
- 4.2.2 The HSP is organised through a Strategic Board, supported by five thematic partnerships, a performance management group and a number of specialist subsidiary partnerships. This includes representation at all levels by all stakeholders including significant representation from the voluntary and community sectors (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1



4.2.3 The LAA sets out the steps we need to take to bring about real improvements that will change lives for the better. The priorities have been derived from what local people feel is important, and from facts and figures about conditions in Halton. In particular, we need to achieve real progress on the five strategic themes that are set out clearly in the Sustainable Community Strategy and mirrored in the LAA:

A Healthy Halton

- a. To create a healthier community and work to promote well being - a positive experience of life with good health.

Halton's Urban Renewal

- b. To transform the urban fabric and infrastructure, to develop exciting places and spaces and to create a vibrant and accessible Borough.

Halton's Children and Young People

- c. To ensure that in Halton children and young people are safeguarded, healthy and happy

Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

- d. To create an economically prosperous Borough that encourages investment, entrepreneurship, enterprise and business growth.

A Safer Halton

- e. To ensure pleasant, safe and secure neighbourhood environments where people can enjoy life.

4.2.4 The Mersey Gateway Project forms a central part of the Urban Renewal theme of the Sustainable Community Strategy. In addition, the project presents solutions to cross-cutting challenges that will drive substantial benefits in all of the five strategic priorities. Mersey Gateway should be much more than a bridge, it should be a real catalyst to help deliver each of the five priorities and add value in so many and varied ways to what the Council is seeking to achieve. Not only is the Mersey Gateway bridge expected to be an iconic structure but combined with Silver Jubilee Bridge, the Project should offer improved accessibility, enhanced public transport opportunities and greater consistency of journey time. This should provide the opportunity to access additional employment and learning, leading to rising aspirations and greater prosperity. A true bridge to prosperity.

4.2.5 Negative perceptions about Halton, which can affect investment decisions, still prevail. Improved transport, greater accessibility and environmental

improvements are vital as steps to promote Halton's assets. Halton's Urban Renewal key objectives as defined in the Sustainable Community Strategy are:

A. To create and sustain a 21st Century business environment with the required variety and quality of sites, premises and infrastructure that can support high levels of investment and economic growth and increase Halton's competitiveness.

B. To revitalise the town centres to create dynamic, well-designed high quality commercial areas that can continue to meet the needs of local people, investors, businesses and visitors.

C. To support and sustain thriving neighbourhoods and open spaces that meet people's expectations and add to their enjoyment of life.

D. To ensure Halton designs in and maintains high levels of accessibility to places and spaces so that opportunity and need are matched, and provides excellent connectivity to the wider world through transport and ICT links.

E. To enhance, promote and celebrate the quality of the built and natural environment in Halton including tackling the legacy of contamination and dereliction, to further improve the Borough's image.

4.2.6 These overarching policy aims have been addressed in the setting of the Mersey Gateway objectives which I explain in Section 5 below.

4.3 Sub Regional & Regional Context

4.3.1 Halton lies in a central location in the North West of England, with Merseyside to the west, Manchester to the east, Lancashire and Cumbria to the north and Cheshire to the south. Halton's prominent location in the heart of the North West is reinforced by its excellent connectivity close to the M56, M62 and M6, with direct access to the West Coast Mainline and

within 20 minutes of 2 major airports (Pauling, Figure 4.1). Silver Jubilee Bridge also offers the only non-local crossing of the Mersey between the Mersey Tunnels and Thelwall (M6) (Pauling Figure 6.1). However, the Borough's external connectivity is compromised by its internal challenges, focussed on the Silver Jubilee Bridge.

- 4.3.2 Halton is recognised by its neighbours and its regional partners as an major contributor to the wider economic development of the North West, The regionally significant economic development sites at Daresbury and 3MG (Ditton, Widnes) and the Widnes Waterfront Economic Development Zone are important not only to Halton but the North West economy and have benefited from significant regional funding in recent years.
- 4.3.3 The Liverpool City Region Prospectus (CD272) recognises Mersey Gateway as a priority for the city region and a key contributor to the social and economic regeneration of the city region. The project has the support of all five Liverpool City Region local authorities (Liverpool City, Wirral, St. Helens, Sefton and Knowsley). In addition the adjacent authorities of Warrington and Cheshire West & Chester are also supporting the Mersey Gateway Project.
- 4.3.4 The project also has the support of major employers across Halton and the city region, including Stobarts, Liverpool John Lennon Airport, Jaguar and INEOS ChlorVinyls (one of the major chlor-alkali producers in Europe, who have a manufacturing plant in Runcorn) - to name but 4 - and the Chambers of Commerce for Halton and Liverpool.
- 4.3.5 The Mersey Gateway project is also identified by the Northwest Regional Development Agency (in the Regional Economic Strategy (CD104)) as a transformational action, linked to sustainable growth, that will support the continued regeneration of Halton, the Liverpool City Region and the sub-region.

4.3.6 The project has also received the support of North West local authorities and business partners through the Regional Assembly (now 4NW) who have determined that the project should be included as a scheme in the upper quartile of the Transport Regional Funding Allocation.

4.4 Halton Borough Council and Project Administration

4.4.1 As a result of local Government reorganisation in the 1990's, Halton became a unitary authority responsible for all local Government services and functions within the Borough. The Borough was previously a district of Cheshire. The Council has a leader and cabinet model of governance (the Cabinet is known as the Executive Board), with six scrutiny committees called Policy and Performance Boards (PPB's) aligned to corporate priorities. It has also established seven Area Forums spanning the Borough. A pilot neighbourhood management approach covers the three most deprived areas of the Borough. The Council's net revenue budget for 2008/09 is £101 million, with a capital programme of £36.7 million. The Council employs around 5,000 staff across all services. Band D Council tax for 2009/10 is £1,324 - the third lowest in the North West. In addition, the Council receives significant external capital and revenue funding including Area Based Grant, European Community Funds, Working Neighbourhood Fund, lottery funding and the Children's Fund.

4.4.2 A Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) undertaken by the Audit Commission last year re-confirmed HBC as an Excellent (four star) local authority. The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities.

4.4.3 HBC was also awarded 'Centre of Excellence' status for Local Transport Delivery by the Department for Transport (DfT) in 2005 in the category of 'Better Urban Public Transport and Accessibility'¹ and the Council has been

short-listed for the next round of Beacon Status Awards (2008/2009) under the Banner 'Improving Accessibility'.

- 4.4.4 As a unitary Council Halton is well placed to co-ordinate its activity over a wider front, and therefore increase the resources the Council, and its strategic partners, are able to invest in Halton. The Mersey Gateway Project will be constructed totally within the Borough and consequently Halton has the ability to ensure Mersey Gateway as a major transport infrastructure initiative is successful by bringing forward complimentary interventions in areas such as economic development, planning and land use, education and skills, and health. As the Council is vertically integrated, it can provide the wherewithal to deliver the project outcomes and avoid the complex institutional interfaces that often bedevil the delivery of other major transport schemes in the United Kingdom.
- 4.4.5 The stakeholder interest in the urgent need for Mersey Gateway as outline above extends across the North West. Hence the Mersey Crossing Group (now the Mersey Gateway Group) was established in 1994 with wide representation across Government agencies, local authorities and key private sector interests. This stakeholder group chaired by the Leader of Halton Council, Cllr Tony McDermott MBE has provided the strategic direction for the project during the development of the scheme from feasibility up to defining the current proposals under consideration at this Inquiry.
- 4.4.6 Although Halton has the statutory authority and functions required to deliver a successful Mersey Gateway, as with all local authority investment, it can only do so with the support of Government. The Government's capital investment towards local and regional transport improvement schemes is managed through the Local Transport Plan process. This administrative procedure sets the rules for securing grants from the Department for Transport (DfT) towards major transport improvement schemes such as Mersey Gateway. Since taking responsibility for promoting a new Mersey Crossing Halton has worked closely with officials and

Ministers at the DfT. This joint endeavour in the early years of our project study culminated in Mersey Gateway being granted Programme Entry approval by Transport Ministers in March 2006. This decision established the funding support from Government and moved the project from feasibility into the delivery phase. This move into the delivery phase prompted the Council to establish a dedicated Project Team led by an experienced Project Director Steve Nicholson. The evidence presented by Steve Nicholson gives more detail on the formal arrangements with Government that support the delivery of the project (HBC/2/1P at Section 8).

- 4.4.7 The Programme Entry decision in March 2006 also coincided with the advent of Regional Funding Allocation where the Government's funding support for major projects reflected the region's view of the relative priority given to each scheme. Mersey Gateway is in the top tier/quartile of schemes in the North West programme of transport schemes to be funded over 10 years.
- 4.4.8 Halton are progressing the Mersey Gateway Project against a background of a new emerging City Region agenda. Merseyside's formal boundaries are over 34 years old and no longer meet the challenges faced by a city region in a global market place. The distances travelled to work are vastly greater than they were in 1974 when the Merseyside region was designated, and the destinations to which people will travel has also changed in line with economic restructuring (e.g. loss of traditional industry and replacement with 'footloose' light industry, R&D, offices and service industries). Halton faces many similar challenges to the Merseyside conurbation (now described as the Liverpool City Region) and since 1998 has worked closely with its Merseyside neighbours as part of 'Greater Merseyside'. The Council is now firmly embedded in the Liverpool City Region both politically and administratively. The Merseyside authorities have submitted a City Region Prospectus to Ministers supporting the case for the integration of Halton into the Liverpool City Region (CD272).

- 4.4.9 The Council and its partners recognise that their ambition for Halton can only be achieved through engagement in the wider sub-region and region and so Halton plays a very active role both sub-regionally and regionally. As part of the closer working relationships across the City Region, a draft Multi Area Agreement is under development for the City Region overall, covering areas such as housing, transport, employment and skills. Two sections of this Multi Area Agreement have been published to date; Employment and Skills Platform and Story of Place (CD271). The Local Transport Act 2008 also invites the Liverpool City Region to submit proposals for a new Integrated Transport Authority that would assume the responsibilities of the Passenger Transport Authority and the Passenger Transport Executive (Merseytravel). The long standing partnering approach taken by Halton, as manifest in the Mersey Gateway Group (formerly the Mersey Crossing Group), foreshadows the more formal arrangements now emerging for governance in City Regions.
- 4.4.10 Through its transport links to the most of the UK and the North West region, Halton has the ability to function as a gateway to the City Region. However, its internal transport challenges mean that without the Mersey Gateway, that role would be fulfilled sub-optimally at best. For instance, in the City Region's public transport system, Runcorn Station is already a strategically important transport interchange for people accessing the outlying parts of the region where main line inter-city services run direct to London and the Midlands. Investment in the Station already taking place, combined with the proposed improvements as part of the Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy (CD182) and the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy (CD127) (see paragraph 5.1.4) will reinforce the strategic role of Runcorn Station for the foreseeable future. The Mersey Gateway provides the opportunity to increase accessibility to the City Region. Without Mersey Gateway Halton would still be integrating into the City Region but if it is to achieve the full potential of the City Region Halton needs the Mersey Gateway to improve connectivity and accessibility. The key role of Mersey Gateway is recognised by the Regional Economic

Strategy (CD104), which includes the Project in a list of priority transformational interventions.

4.4.11 The Council's Executive Board has set up a sub-group called the Mersey Gateway Executive Board, chaired by the Council Leader which acts as the Council's decision-making body on the development of the Mersey Gateway Project. Substantive project issues, as determined by the Council Constitution, are decided by the Full Council. Project management arrangements reflect the best practice guidance given by PRINCE2 and under this system I fill the role of Senior Responsible Owner and chair of the Mersey Gateway Project Board. More detail of the project delivery organisation is given by Mr Nicholson in his evidence (HBC/2/1P at Section 12).

4.4.12 The above provides an overview of Halton and its surrounding area, the challenges and corporate priorities set by the Council, together with its track recording in harnessing a partnering approach aimed at more effective and continuous improvement in service performance and the creation of new opportunities for our residents.

4.4.13 I would now like to explain why the Mersey Gateway Project is such a key requirement if we are to succeed in our vision for the Borough.

5. WHY HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL IS PROMOTING MERSEY GATEWAY

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 There is clear evidence that Mersey Gateway has comprehensive policy support at national, regional and local levels. The details of this are given by Messrs Pauling (Transportation Evidence), Brooks (Planning Policy Evidence) and Russell (Economic Evidence) but I would like to draw attention to the following.
- 5.1.2 When Mersey Gateway received Government approval (Programme Entry) in March 2006, it was the culmination of several years of scrutiny by DfT officials. The endorsement by Transport Ministers confirmed that the project has a good fit with national transport policy, the project is deliverable and that it represents value for money. Since then the Government has moved to better align transport investment with the economic and climate change policy agenda. At the end of last year the DfT published 'Delivering a Sustainable Transport Strategy' (DaSTS) (CD177), in a further response to the Eddington Transport Study, which looked at the links between transport and the UK's economic productivity, growth and stability, and the Stern Review of the economics of climate change. The evidence of Mr Pauling (HBC/8/1P) and Mr Russell (HBC/9/1P) explains how Mersey Gateway meets Eddington's recommendations. The Government is now consulting on how to best take forward the DaSTS principles.
- 5.1.3 The Region's policy and economic programmes are now to be incorporated into an Integrated Regional Strategy that will form the basis of advice put to Government on the delivery of DaSTS. The Government has now instructed each region to produce its Regional Integrated Strategy, which for the North West will seek to maximise growth opportunities presented by the three cities of Manchester, Liverpool and Preston. Ensuring efficient connectivity for Liverpool and between Liverpool and Manchester is an aim of the Mersey Gateway Project. The Regional Economic Strategy selects Mersey Gateway

as a Transformational Project in delivering the connectivity required for Halton, Liverpool and the wider city region. The high regional priority given to Mersey Gateway reflects concern over congestion and poor journey time reliability evident on Silver Jubilee Bridge at present which impacts on the nationally important north-south corridor (the M6 motorway) and the east-west corridor comprising M62 and M56 motorways, either side of the Mersey. The Silver Jubilee Bridge provides a north-south route as part of this box system of major roads connecting Liverpool with north Cheshire and national routes to the rest of the UK. The options to cross the Mersey are limited, with only three major road crossing points (the Mersey Tunnels, Silver Jubilee Bridge and M6 at Thelwall) over a road distance of 55 kilometres, which adds to the strategic importance of maintaining effective service on these routes. The traffic assessments and modelling we have undertaken show this motorway system to come under increasing pressure as demand for road travel increases in the near future and congestion on Silver Jubilee Bridge will deteriorate to the bridge being at capacity for most of the average working day.

- 5.1.4 At a local level, policy support for Mersey Gateway is already embedded in the Unitary Development Plan (CD115) and two Local Transport Plans (Halton and Merseyside (CD119 and CD105)). The project has recently been the key influence in the formulation and adoption by the Council of the Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy and the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy (see section 6 for key resolutions). Together with the Mersey Gateway Project these strategies form the wider Mersey Gateway initiative which the Council considers to be necessary to maximise the benefits arising from the opportunities presented by the Mersey Gateway Project. The Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy is now to be delivered through area-specific Supplementary Planning Documents that identify substantive changes in land use for south Widnes and Runcorn which are designed to seize the social, economic and environmental regeneration opportunities arising from the project and help overcome some of the challenges facing Halton and its neighbouring boroughs.

5.2 The Do- Nothing Consequences

5.2.1 Although many of the challenges that Halton faces and which the Mersey Gateway is designed to address are explained above, I would like to provide a personal view of the possible consequences should we fail to deliver this priority project.

5.2.2 I would like to envisage a situation 25 years hence, with the Mersey Gateway Project in place and where;

1. Liverpool John Lennon Airport is rivalling established regional airports like Manchester Airport;
2. 3MG is the premier logistics facility in the north west of England, driving environmental benefits and job and wealth creation;
3. Daresbury Science and Innovation Centre continues to deliver world class science and when linked to the knowledge based industries of South Liverpool has become a centre of excellence for the United Kingdom;
4. The Liverpool City Region moves to its pre-eminence as a seaport and with modern e-port functions, delivering creative digital science and knowledge economy at a world class level;
5. Warrington continues to develop strongly in the north west economy;
6. West Cheshire and Chester becomes a well established new local authority, and is thriving 25 years on.

5.2.3 All this will drive the outcomes we are striving for – reduced unemployment; improved skill; reduced worklessness, (not at 35% in this region, but at 5%); and where people are trained to the appropriate level for their particular skill level or beyond.

5.2.4 The Mersey Gateway project is, as stated above much more than a bridge. It is about the regeneration of communities, creating employment, creating

opportunity, providing the opportunity for skills for training. Accessible transport is essential to allow people to move around; to deliver maximum opportunity for local people. Moreover Mersey Gateway would deliver all these benefits in a sustainable way. This offers a strategic vision of change for Halton and our neighbours. Halton Council do not consider that this is a possibility without Mersey Gateway.

5.2.5 This contrasts with the situation if Mersey Gateway is not delivered. The Mersey Tunnels would continue to function but they will be at capacity during the peak periods and most of the day. There will continue to be only one crossing over the River Mersey in Halton, plagued by increased congestion, delay and uncertainty over arrival times. The local environment will suffer due to vehicle pollution exacerbated by congestion. Journeys to Liverpool John Lennon Airport will be fraught with prospects of delay. The only link to the Liverpool City Region from the south and east of the country (M6/M62) will also be congested with no improvement planned. The Council's efforts to keep Silver Jubilee Bridge functioning will come under increasing pressure as the old bridge struggles to cope with a traffic burden it was never designed to take. We may need to close SJB for a significant period of time. This would be not for days, not for hours, but for weeks, and possibly for months, for essential repairs. During periods of accidents, incidents and maintenance the absence of any alternative will manifest in severe congestion over a wide area impacting in particular on Warrington. Within Halton, cross river travel to and from schools and hospitals will be onerous resulting in land use and services being focused on the separate towns of Runcorn and Widnes, eroding the vision of Halton as a holistic and prosperous authority.

5.2.6 Mersey Gateway offers an opportunity to counter risks of continued deprivation, poverty and inequality associated with sub-optimal performance of key infrastructure in Halton. It also permits changes in Halton's business environment. Without tackling this, business is less likely to relocate or invest in Halton if goods are not able to be moved with certainty over cost and time and where staff had serious problems getting

to and from work with poor public transport alternatives. Business is less likely to come to the Liverpool City Region if connectivity to the rest of the county is unreliable.

5.2.7 Mersey Gateway is about establishing accessibility for Halton and the sub-region in the form of a modern sustainable transport intervention. Delivering the project through tolling is controversial because a new charge for a public service is inherently controversial. But at an estimated cost of £604m and with the increasing call on public finances, where tax revenues are falling, the Government have made it clear tolling is the only way they will support the delivery of Mersey Gateway. They are also supporting the project by providing PFI credits.

5.2.8 The Mersey Gateway shapes the future by forming a reliable route for transport to and from the City Region and provides a reliable connection for Halton residents and business for the foreseeable future. The Silver Jubilee Bridge would become a local bridge, where public transport can move freely, regularly connecting with improved bus services in Runcorn and Widnes. Transport choice will be increasingly important with our expected increase in population, due in part to an increase in terms of the ageing population, who would benefit in particular from free bus travel unfettered by congestion and unreliability. Life style choice would be prompted by more sustainable and healthy travel options where cycling and walking will be a more attractive alternative to short distance car trips.

5.2.9 I meet many people in the region who share the Council's vision and are looking to, and supporting, Halton to deliver such a key transformational project. In the following section I provide a specific description of what the Council believe will be delivered through Mersey Gateway.

5.3 Project Objectives

5.3.1 Since taking the initiative to promote a new road crossing of the Mersey, the Council has developed certain project objectives to ensure that the

desired outcomes are deliverable and as I explain above, are consistent with up-to-date local, regional and national policies and priorities. The objectives now embrace the full range of benefits the Council and its partners expect the project to deliver and issues that it should address and together they underline that Mersey Gateway is aimed at achieving much more than a just a new bridge. The delivery of specific benefits, set against the existing conditions and circumstances are dealt with by Mr Nicholson and our expert witnesses but I would like to set out the specific challenges the project is expected to meet against each of the project objectives.

- 5.3.2 The Council's objectives for the Project are not solely reflected in the new infrastructure to be provided, but run through the wider Mersey Gateway initiative (see paragraph 5.1.4). They are supported by the Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy and the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy, which are key policy initiatives to which the Council is committed alongside the Mersey Gateway Project itself.

Objective 1: To relieve the congested Silver Jubilee Bridge, thereby removing the constraint on local and regional development and better provide for local transport needs;

- 5.3.3 The Silver Jubilee Bridge carries the A557 road between the M62 and the M56. The A557 is a principal road, maintained by the Council as the local highway authority and connects with the M56 and M62. To the west of Widnes the A562 Speke Road links Widnes to south Liverpool. The M62 to the north of the Borough links the majority of Merseyside to Manchester and across the Pennines to the Yorkshire conurbations. To the south, the M56 links North Wales and Cheshire to Manchester. Halton, therefore, lies at the heart of a major transport interchange in the North West of England.
- 5.3.4 As explained above, the Silver Jubilee Bridge was completed in 1961 replacing the previous Transporter Bridge at Runcorn Gap. It is the only internal road link within the Borough between the towns of Runcorn and

Widnes. The bridge is of real importance to Merseyside and North Cheshire, with approximately 40% of traffic crossing the bridge making trips across the region and an additional 40% (approximately) having either an origin or destination outside the Borough. In the event the bridge becomes unavailable the result is serious disruption and major inconvenience within Halton and across the region. As I explain above, this affects day-to-day travel and key strategic thinking, including in relation to civil contingencies.

5.3.5 In his evidence Mr Pauling demonstrates that Silver Jubilee Bridge is operating over or very close to its service capacity for much of the working day and the level of service offered to users will deteriorate as demand for travel and road transport continues to grow. The current use of Silver Jubilee Bridge covers a wide travel zone due to the limited River crossing opportunities. This dispersed pattern of origin and destination of trips could not be catered for by viable public transport facilities. This conclusion, alongside the rejection of travel demand management alternatives was reached relatively early in the options appraisal undertaken to identify viable solutions that could relieve the congested Silver Jubilee Bridge, as part of an integrated transport package. It was therefore acknowledged that Silver Jubilee Bridge could only be relieved by providing additional road capacity crossing the River.

5.3.6 It was therefore necessary to explore the most efficient and effective way to provide a new crossing of the Mersey that would remove traffic from the Silver Jubilee Bridge. The Council commissioned a study of alternative routes (indeed multiple studies have taken place) which is reported in the Major Scheme Appraisal Report as explained by Mr Nicholson. The Council was looking to identify a route for a new crossing that would offer best value in terms of the economic return; it would need to relieve Silver Jubilee Bridge; and the route should fit within the environment constraints with residual impacts that are manageable. It will be demonstrated through the evidence presented at this Inquiry that the proposed scheme has distinct advantages over the alternative routes appraised.

5.3.7 Congestion associated with the Silver Jubilee Bridge is accepted widely as a constraint to economic regeneration and growth both locally, within the Borough, and across the wider City Region and the North West. It also impacts adversely on the day to day lives of the residents of Halton. At a local level Halton suffers the impact of around 12 million vehicles passing through the Borough every year on roads that are not designed to accommodate these very high traffic flows. The week day flow of around 83,000 vehicles is very high for a crossing of this nature. The Council recognises however that the Silver Jubilee Bridge route is vital for connecting the Liverpool City Region with north Cheshire and the national Strategic Road Network. The alternative routes crossing the Mersey are limited, as is explained by Mr Pauling, and congestion is restricting the ability of business to operate, goods to be transported and our communities to go about their day to day business. The investment in a new crossing should restore effective connectivity for Halton and the region. Further, the benefits of this investment are intended to support economic growth and improve quality of life in a robust and sustainable manner over the foreseeable future.

5.3.8 At a more local level delivering a relieved Silver Jubilee Bridge and restoring connectivity for Halton is the highest priority of the Council. The economic, social and environmental challenges facing the Council as I have described in this evidence are all adversely affected by the failing Silver Jubilee Bridge as a transport facility. I would stress the impact that this failing system has on the economic competitiveness of the area, thereby presenting a barrier for inward investment in Halton resulting in a major constraint on the ability of the Council and our partners to deliver our corporate aims. These constraints are again described in considerable detail in the evidence of Mr Pauling, Mr Russell and Dr Twigger-Ross. Relieving Silver Jubilee Bridge should also restore effective access throughout the Borough particularly for cross river movements. By transferring around 80% of traffic currently using Silver Jubilee Bridge to the new crossing will enable the Council to bring forward our Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy and Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy.

Objective 2: To apply minimum toll and road user charges to both the Mersey Gateway Bridge and the Silver Jubilee Bridge consistent with the level required to satisfy the affordability constraints;

- 5.3.9 The Council recognises and accepts that public funding to meet the full £604m estimated cost (in outturn terms) is unrealistic given the competing pressures for Government investment nationally where transport is consistently a lower spending priority than health and education and regionally where the project would compete for the Regional Funding Allocation set at around £115m per annum for all projects in the north west. Whilst Government support through the PFI assists in delivery, a further funding source is required.
- 5.3.10 Faced with the prospect of living with the failing SJB and putting in jeopardy the Council plans and ambition for social and economic regeneration, combined with the call from our partners to restore effective regional connectivity, the Council looked at tolling as a delivery device. It became clear in the early consideration of tolling that charging on both bridges would be essential to sustain delivery and to achieve the desired relief of SJB and the removal of congestion (objective 1). In accepting tolling as a solution to the SJB problem and thereby removing a critical barrier to the development of Halton, the Council recognised the need to keep tolls to a minimum, where charge levels would be acceptable in general terms, and to maximise the opportunity of discounts for local residents and frequent users. Any funding agreement with Government would need to accommodate these aims. The Programme Entry submission to the DfT was consistent with these tolling aims, which are explained by Mr. Nicholson. Working within the funding agreement with the DfT, as explained by Mr. Nicholson, the Council, when negotiating with the private sector bidders, will continue to seek the best value outcome in terms of securing minimum tolls and the maximum opportunity for discounts for local residents and frequent users of SJB (see section 6 for key resolutions).

- 5.3.11 The evidence of Mr Threlfall explains how the funding will take place and addresses the funding issues in more detail and the evidence of Mr Nicholson addresses the proposed arrangements for tolling in more detail.
- 5.3.12 The commercial structure which allocates financial risk with management opportunity, to be taken forward in the procurement of Mersey Gateway will be required to protect the Council from excessive financial liability. In addition to managing the cost of delivering the Project, the private sector (the Concessionaire) will be required to take the majority of the risk associated with the project revenues, including the revenue received from tolls. The evidence of Mr Threlfall explains how funding will take place and the evidence of Mr Nicholson addresses the proposed arrangements for tolling.
- 5.3.13 Halton recognises the concerns of the potential users of the two bridges with regard to the levels of tolls, and those who consider they might be affected by the diversion of traffic onto other routes as a result of the imposition of tolls. It is clearly desirable to get the balance right between the need to finance the project and the impacts that tolling may have from a transport and social perspective.
- 5.3.14 The existence of Mersey Tunnel tolling sets a local benchmark for affordability where users pay for crossing the Mersey. The Council has noted that this level of charging has been accepted generally by users, as manifest in traffic levels passing through the tunnels on a daily basis. The Council also expects there to be operational benefits in harmonising toll charges crossing the Mersey. It is therefore the Council aim to deliver Mersey Gateway with toll charges for the New Crossing and SJB that are equivalent in broad terms to those operating at the Tunnels. The Council also recognises, however, that government funding is constrained and that the financial forecasts are uncertain when projecting over the proposed thirty year concession terms. The proposed regulations for setting the actual tolling levels reflect the need to provide prudent measures to be able to manage this uncertainty.

5.3.15 Although the Council are looking to secure the maximum opportunity for supporting local and/or regular uses of the SJB by offering toll discount arrangements (see section 6 for key resolutions), it wants to (and is bound by law to) do this in best value terms. It is most likely that this best value outcome for securing toll discount arrangements would be achieved when contract terms are being negotiated with the private sector bidders. For this reason the proposed tolling and charging Orders permit the Council to operate a discount scheme but do not specify the details of such a scheme.

5.3.16 The transport and social consequences of tolling are discussed in detail in the evidence of Mr Pauling and Dr Twigger-Ross respectively. The Council has already resolved to make the Silver Jubilee Bridge toll free for public transport (see section 6 for key resolutions) and to give priority to local residents when considering concessionary rates.

5.3.17 The inquiry can be assured that in setting tolls proper regard will be paid to the balancing effects of toll and traffic consequences and toll and social consequences of tolls. Mr Nicholson explains how this will operate and the procedures that apply.

Objective 3: To improve accessibility in order to maximise local development and regional economic growth opportunities;

5.3.18 I have identified a number of consequences of restricted transport and accessibility above. The removal of a constraint to transport - both private and public - has been assessed as having material benefits in terms of accessibility, particularly for journeys within the Borough of Halton itself and within the sub-region. In addition to the Project itself, the Council is advancing planning and other policy (paragraph 5.1.4) designed to seize the advantages offered by the release of land by the project and potential for de-linking of the Silver Jubilee Bridge in Runcorn as well as regeneration opportunities elsewhere in the Borough. Examples of regeneration benefits

that flow as a consequence of Mersey Gateway are explained by Mr Russell (HBC/9/1P).

5.3.19 At a regional level and as already noted in paragraph 4.3.3, the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) recognises the Mersey Gateway as a transformational project. The RES gives the reason as “Relieves congestion, supports two strategic regional sites, improves reliability of access to Liverpool Airport and improves linkages within the Liverpool City Region”. The Council’s approach is therefore consistent with this policy.

5.3.20 Many of the challenges currently facing Halton that have been identified earlier in this evidence (section 3) are due to, or affected by, poor accessibility and it is known that accessibility is a key factor in economic growth. Improvements in accessibility as a result of the Mersey Gateway should contribute to improvements in employment, skills, health and other amenities.

5.3.21 The evidence of Mr Pauling explains that bus operators are already building delay into their timetables for cross river trips and that the congestion during peak hours is spreading. This means that in the future the interpeak will be similar to the morning peak. The evidence of Dr Twigger-Ross shows that people already avoid the SJB at peak times because of the congestion. The Mersey Gateway is necessary to improve accessibility and reliability for all cross river travellers (see also Objectives 5 and 6).

Objective 4: To improve local air quality and enhance the general urban environment;

5.3.22 As already described in section 3, Halton suffers from a degraded environment as a result of its industrial history. Quality of life, amenity and health are important priorities for Halton Council and the corporate aims are targeted at achieving a general uplifting of the Borough. The Council sees the Mersey Gateway as a unique opportunity to enhance the urban

environment of Halton and to improve local air quality, particularly in those areas adjacent to the Silver Jubilee Bridge which have been increasingly impacted by the congestion.

5.3.23 The Council expects the Mersey Gateway to provide an iconic structure across the estuary which can be appreciated for generations to come. This should be a catalyst for improved perceptions of Halton in its own right. These impressions should be assisted by the changes brought by the project elsewhere, particularly in Widnes and regeneration opportunities.

5.3.24 Therefore, the Mersey Gateway should also offer an opportunity to regenerate areas of Runcorn and Widnes through implementation of a regeneration strategy. Also, the Mersey Gateway should provide the opportunity and means to address areas of historic contamination within the areas of land acquired for the project.

Objective 5: To improve public transport links across the River Mersey;

5.3.25 At present public transport is reliant on the congested Silver Jubilee Bridge. As a result of the Scheme, public transport should benefit from freer-flowing traffic conditions. Not only should the Silver Jubilee Bridge be relieved as a result of the Project, but the Mersey Gateway Bridge should enable new routes to be opened up. In addition, the Borough Council has approved a Sustainable Transport Strategy (CD182) designed to maximise the advantages offered by the Scheme. To support and encourage public transport opportunities the Council has resolved that public transport vehicles will be toll free on and given priority on approaches to the Silver Jubilee Bridge

5.3.26 As already stated in 5.3.21, bus operators are already building delay into their timetables for cross river trips to allow for congestion (HBC/8/1P). The scope for improving cross-river bus services without the Mersey

Gateway is very limited, hence the reason for this objective. The Borough has a lower than average car ownership so frequent, reliable public transport services are very important. Improvements to public transport services are also important in attracting car users to consider alternative modes of transport in line with government policy.

Objective 6: To encourage the increased use of cycling and walking;

5.3.27 Other alternative modes of transport to the private car include walking or cycling, both of which have health benefits as well as the benefits associated with reducing car use, such as enabling air quality improvements. The current, unattractive route for pedestrians and cyclists between Runcorn and Widnes via the Silver Jubilee Bridge will be markedly improved as a result of the Scheme with dedicated routes being provided for both modes. Alongside the Sustainable Transport Strategy, to which reference is made above, this objective has importance in terms not just of sustainable transport, but in encouraging a healthier lifestyle.

Objective 7: To restore effective network resilience for road transport across the River Mersey.

5.3.28 As highlighted in the evidence of Mr Pauling, and as I explain above, part of the problems associated with the Silver Jubilee Bridge is that - as the only major link between the Mersey Tunnels and M6 Thelwall Viaduct - it has a significant regional role. When it fails, or cannot perform this role owing to accidents, vehicle breakdowns, essential maintenance work or straightforward congestion, significant problems result to business and communities. These affect the local transport network, but can extend further afield. The provision of an alternative route within the Borough of Halton and at a more strategic level will provide greatly enhanced network resilience for all those people and businesses reliant on journeys that cross the River Mersey. After the opening of the six-lane new bridge as part of

the Mersey Gateway Project, the number of traffic lanes crossing the River Mersey at this location will double, enhancing network resilience.

5.3.29 The extra capacity provided by Mersey Gateway will also enhance the borough's resilience and civil contingency capabilities which at present are fragile, and heavily reliant on Silver Jubilee Bridge as discussed in paragraph 3.1.13 of my evidence

6. RESOLUTIONS

6.1.1 In addition to promoting the Mersey Gateway project, the Council has made a number of key resolutions associated with the wider Mersey Gateway initiative (paragraph 5.1.4) and potential toll discounts:

Date	Committee	Resolutions
19/05/2008	Mersey Gateway Exec Board	That the Mersey Gateway Executive Board approve the Mersey Gateway Relocation Strategy for formal adoption as the Acquiring Authority's Relocation Strategy for the Mersey Gateway Project.
24/07/2008	Exec Board	<u>Sustainable Transport Strategy</u> That the draft strategy be approved for consultation;
19/06/2008	Exec Board	That the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy be agreed as a document that demonstrates the potential regeneration opportunities arising from the Mersey Gateway Scheme; That the Strategy is used to support the case for the Mersey Gateway Scheme; That the Strategy is used by the Council as Local Planning Authority to judge the potential regeneration benefits that may arise from the Mersey Gateway Scheme in consideration of planning applications made to it and in response to consultation from the Department of Transport;
05/03/2009	Exec Board	That the Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy be approved to support the delivery of the Mersey Gateway Project, subject to any minor amendments being delegated to the Strategic Director, Environment, in consultation with the Executive Board Member for Planning, Transportation, Regeneration and Renewal.
18/07/2007	Full Council	That it be accepted that the financial case for Mersey Gateway Bridge can only be met through a tolling regime that encompasses both bridges, as without tolling the project is not deliverable;

Date	Committee	Resolutions
		and That the Council seek to maximise toll discounts for local residents and frequent users.
02/09/2008	Exec Board	That it be determined that the proposed discount scheme in respect of SJB and Mersey Gateway should make provision for public transport to be exempt from tolling on SJB and Mersey Gateway.

7. SUPPORTERS

7.1.1 As already explained in 4.3.2 the Mersey Gateway benefits from widespread support from the City Region and some of the major employers in Halton and the City Region. Letters of support received to date in response to the publication of the various applications and orders, and to the announcement of the Public Inquiry are included at Appendix 1. The list of the organisations who have submitted letters of support includes:

1. Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) - is responsible for stimulating the economic growth and regeneration of England's Northwest
2. Cheshire County Council
3. St Helens Council
4. Cheshire Constabulary
5. Wirral Council
6. Merseyside Police
7. Knowsley Council
8. Sefton Council
9. Merseytravel - co-ordinates public transport and acts in partnership with private bus and rail operators to provide public transport in Merseyside
10. Halton and St Helens Primary Care Trust
11. Cheshire Fire Service
12. Liverpool City Council
13. Cllr Rob Polhill (Halton Council)
14. The Mersey Partnership
15. INEOS Chlor Vinyls
16. Derek Twigg MP (Halton)
17. Mersey Maritime
18. LCR Leaders Cabinet

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1.1 The Mersey Gateway Project is much more than the delivery of new transport infrastructure it is a catalyst to the holistic social economic and environmental regeneration of Halton and the sub-region. The “do nothing option” will inhibit economic development, accessibility within and through Halton and compromise the ability of the Council and its partners to address worklessness, improve skills, deliver much needed health improvements and restrict the investment required to enable our communities to maximise their opportunities. The “do nothing option” is not an option and the evidence submitted to this Inquiry makes a powerful case for change – Mersey Gateway is central to a transformed Halton, Liverpool City Region and the North West.