

Transformation of the Dartford Crossing gets underway

It's one of the most congested parts of the road network in the UK, but now work has started to transform and improve the journey for the millions of motorists who use the Dartford Crossing every year. This major road improvement programme will reduce the delays along the route, which crosses the River Thames and links the M25 between Essex and Kent

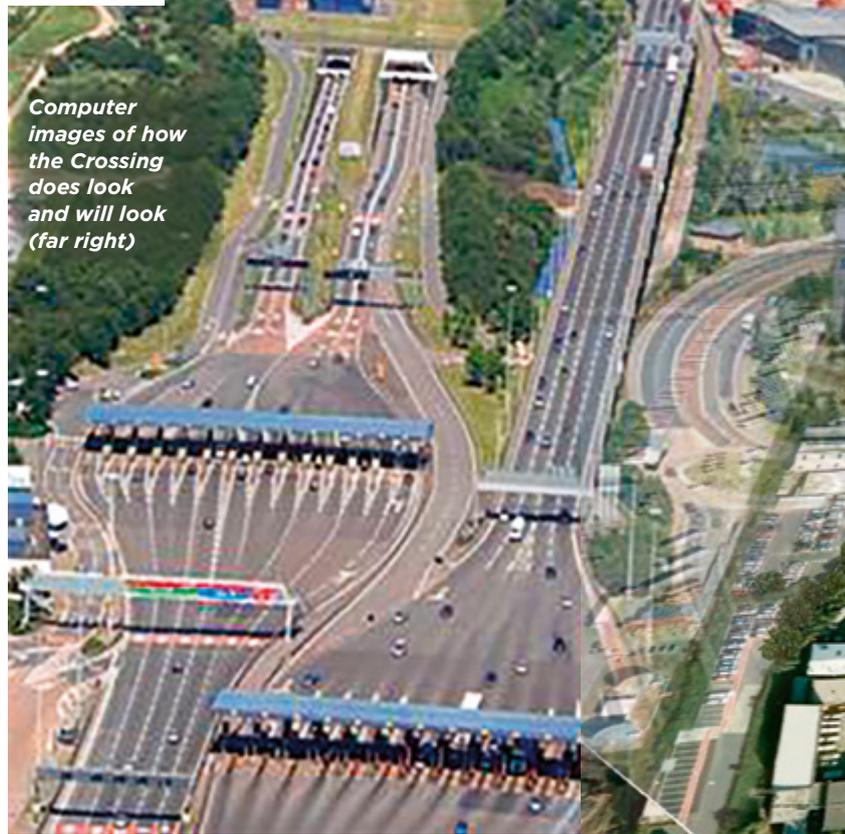
A new payment system called Dart Charge is until further notice being introduced from late November. This means that drivers will no longer stop to pay at the barriers, but instead will be able to pay in advance or by midnight the day after their journey.

As a vehicle makes a crossing, number plate reading cameras, lasers and tag readers will identify it to see how much needs to be paid.

By removing the payment booths, traffic will be able to flow freely across the crossing, reducing the time that it takes to cross.

The Highways Agency's Dart Charge project director, Nigel Gray said: *"The Dartford Crossing was originally*

Computer images of how the Crossing does look and will look (far right)



designed to handle up to 135,000 vehicles each day, but it is not uncommon for 160,000 to use it, so it is time for change. We need to put in place these new measures now, so that journeys are less frustrating and congestion is reduced."

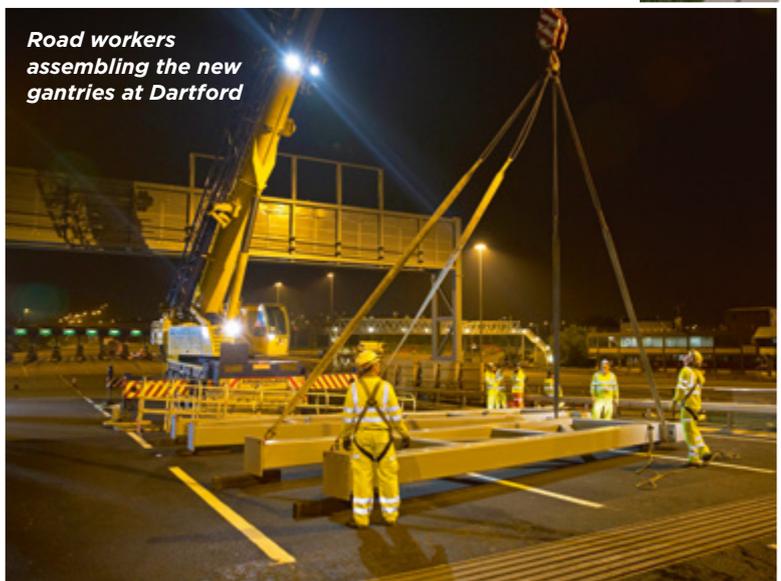
New ways to pay

There will be four ways to pay - online, by phone, by post or at one of the many Payzone retail outlets.

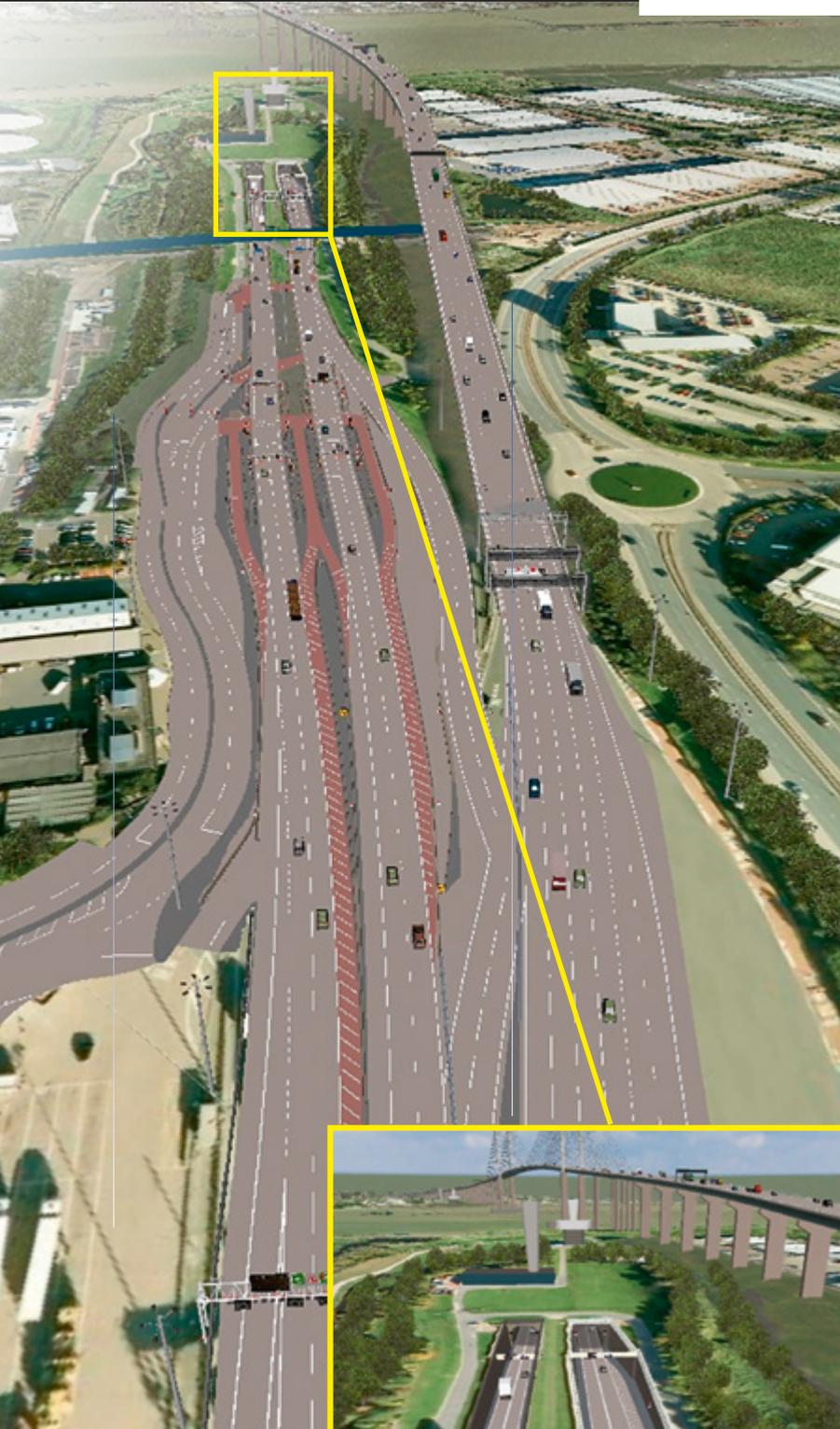
The cheapest and easiest way to pay, will be to sign up for a pre-pay Dart Charge account, which offers savings of up to one-third on every crossing. It also means that drivers don't need to remember to pay, as it can be automatically topped up from a bank or building society account, or by a credit card.



Road workers assembling the new gantries at Dartford



The Dartford Crossing in November 2013



Computerised close-up showing how the approach road to the tunnels will look



There is also the option of a Dart Charge pay-as-you-go service that will enable drivers to automatically pay the charge each time they use the Dartford Crossing, once they have registered their payment details, but this will not include a discount.

The new payment arrangements will apply to vehicles from the UK and from abroad. The Highways Agency is serious about tackling evasion and will use effective penalty and recovery processes for those both inside and outside the UK.

The new road layout

Preparation work, including the installation of five gantries to house the technical vehicle identification equipment and new signs, has already begun, but from late November, the major construction work will start to transform both the southbound and northbound carriageways. The current 27 lanes and payment booths will no longer be required, so this will allow for a much simpler road layout to be created, with four lanes in each direction. New signs will also be installed.

On the southbound route over the QEII Bridge, the improvements will happen quickly. It will take a little longer on the northbound route as a new safety system that stops over height vehicles from entering the tunnels will need to be installed. The system of traffic signals and barriers on the approach to the tunnels, will also prevent vehicles with hazardous loads entering without an escort.

There will be significant roadworks while these changes are underway and drivers should expect some impact on their journey, but they are being planned to minimise disruption for road users.

There will be a temporary road layout and temporary speed limits while the work takes place, so drivers are being asked to look out for the new signs.

Gray added: *"The re-design of the road layout is complicated, especially on the northbound carriageway, where we need to protect the tunnels from over height vehicles, but once all the work is done by spring next year, then the full benefit of the improvements will be felt."*

What's not changing? Do current discounts and exemptions still apply?

Where vehicles are currently legally exempt from paying the Dartford Crossing charge, these exemptions will continue. This includes vehicles exempt from paying Vehicle Excise Duty (VED). Blue badge holders are not exempt; the vehicle itself must be registered as exempt from vehicle excise duty (VED).

Residents of the boroughs of Dartford and Thurrock will continue to be entitled to discounts on the road user charge, through the Local Residents' Discount Scheme.

Mopeds, motorcycles, motor tricycles and quadricycles (quad bikes) will still not be charged, and everyone will continue to use the Dartford Crossing for free from 10pm-6am. 🚫

To find out the latest about the introduction of Dart Charge and more about opening a Dart Charge account, please go to www.gov.uk/highways/dartford