

Operation Stack – Managing freight vehicles through Kent

Response to Highways England’s consultation on a proposal to create a permanent lorry area adjacent to the M20 at Stanford West

Decision Announcement – 6 July 2016

Executive Summary

The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Spending Review and Autumn Statement in November 2015 that Government would be “...providing up to £250 million for a major new permanent lorry park to increase resilience in Kent, by taking pressure off the roads in the event of Operation Stack.” This followed unprecedented disruption to the roads of Kent when parts of the M20 had to be closed on 32 days during 2015 due to a reduction in cross-Channel capacity.

Highways England launched a public consultation on the proposal on 11 December 2015 and this closed on 26 January 2016.

Today (6 July 2016), the Secretary of State for Transport has announced that Stanford West near M20 Junction 11 in Kent is the proposed site for a major new lorry area. The lorry area will alleviate the queuing of lorries on the M20 during disruption to cross-channel services, in almost all foreseeable events, so easing congestion to ensure drivers and companies go about their business.

This note explains the rationale and highlights some of the factors considered in making this decision.

Background

Disruption to cross-Channel services using Port of Dover and Eurotunnel causes congestion and delays on roads in Kent. Historically, the approach to managing this - known as Operation Stack - has been to close sections of the M20 motorway to create space for lorries to queue up and await a passage across the Channel.

Whilst this makes the best of a difficult situation using existing infrastructure, it does not prevent a lot of disruption to residents and businesses in Kent. Over the years, there have been a number of studies of possible locations for a permanent lorry area in Kent. The case for a permanent off-road solution has most recently been set out in Highways England’s document, ‘Managing freight vehicles through Kent’, available at this link:

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/management-of-freight-vehicles-through-kent.

In consultation with key stakeholders, Highways England reviewed the earlier studies and considered whether the sites identified were suitable, given the high levels of disruption during 2015.

More recently, following the European Gateway Strategic Delivery Group, Highways England, local authority partners and emergency services concluded in July 2015 that ideally any lorry area should meet the following criteria:

- be as close as possible to Eurotunnel / Port of Dover to minimise travel times once capacity is restored and to help achieve the cooperation of lorry drivers;
- enable freight vehicles to be marshalled efficiently and effectively in to, within and out of the site, including enabling drivers to take any required rest periods;
- provide an appropriate level of welfare for drivers / passengers while using the facility;
- enable efficient and fair marshalling of lorry drivers so they are not disadvantaged by entering the lorry area, and therefore to be a single, rather than multiple location site;
- minimise disruption to local roads by being as close as possible to the M20;
- minimise vehicle miles and local and strategic network disruption by facilitating easy access to and from the M20 in the desired direction of travel (i.e. Coast-bound); and
- in achieving these benefits, also meet any relevant environmental, social and/or economic requirements.

With these criteria as a basis, Highways England worked closely with stakeholders to focus its search on the M20 between junction 8 and junction 11a. Within this area, Highways England considered there were two potentially suitable sites, both near M20 Junction 11, to construct a lorry area with around 3,600 spaces. The 3,600 spaces is equivalent to the lorries that can be queued in Operation Stack on the coastbound carriageway of the M20 between Junctions 8 and 11 (Operation Stack Phase 1 and 2).

Consultation on lorry proposal

Highways England launched a non-statutory consultation from 11 December 2015 until 26 January 2016. This set out the case for a new lorry area. Highways England consulted on the two potential sites, which had been identified for the lorry area along with four potential ways on how it could be operated in the future.

The two potentially suitable sites were as given below:

1. Stanford West; and
2. Junction 11 North.



Highways England received nearly 1,300 responses to the consultation from which it provided a report to the Department for Transport.

Consultation Outcomes

The vast majority of respondents and attendees to the eight exhibition events were from the Kent area and described themselves as daily users of the M20 or A20 in Dover to Maidstone area.

Overall the social, economic and environmental impact that Operation Stack personally had on respondents was noted as being considerably negative. A sizeable number of respondents (60%) said they would like to see an alternative to reduce or remove the need for freight traffic to park along the M20 and so reduce the impacts that Operation Stack currently has on the Kent area.

Over half the respondents strongly supported or supported the provision of a permanent lorry area as an alternative to reduce or remove the need for freight traffic to park along the M20.

Over half the respondents agreed that a lorry area would address the current traffic problems on the M20, with a preference for the Stanford West site amongst those that wished to see a permanent lorry park progressed.

The outcomes of the consultation can be found in Highways England's document, 'Managing freight vehicles through Kent – Public Consultation Report', available at this link:

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/management-of-freight-vehicles-through-kent.

Factors considered in making the decision

In reaching the decision announced today, a wide range of factors were considered, of which the main considerations were:

Stakeholder Views

In the consultation, the public and stakeholders suggested a range of alternative options and a number of alternative sites. These were evaluated by Highways England. However, overall a lorry area was the best performing option and Stanford West was the best performing site. In the period between the evaluation and the decision more detailed work was carried out by Highways England on the Stanford West and Junction 11 sites and the decision takes account of this work.

Highways England received responses from many stakeholders (Non-Governmental Bodies, Local Authorities and Business Groups), from people living close to the two proposed sites for the permanent lorry area as well as other interested parties. There was a clear indication that Stanford West is the preferred site of the two. It is also the view of many stakeholders that a lorry area should be delivered quickly.

Environment

The Junction 11 North site impacts on the setting of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The topography of the site is such that it slopes towards the North Downs and the visual intrusion would be seen from a considerable distance.

The Stanford West site also has an impact on the setting of the AONB; but to a lesser degree than Junction 11 North.

There are adverse environmental impacts at both sites. Highways England will continue to work closely with local residents, the local authorities and the statutory environmental bodies to try to mitigate the environmental impacts at Stanford West as far as possible.

Capacity and Cost

Both options are sized to deliver around 3,600 spaces. Current cost estimates indicate that both sites can be developed within the £250 million budget allocated.

Purpose of the Site

The primary focus of the lorry park is to provide a solution to Operation Stack in its current form.

In the responses to Highways England's consultation, there was strong support for use of a lorry area to provide overnight parking.

There was also some support for a lorry area to also provide relief for the Dover Traffic Assessment Project (Dover TAP). Dover TAP is where port-bound HGVs are queued in the nearside lane of the A20 approaching Dover; forming a "rolling queue" with lorries entering the town and the port as capacity allows.

Highways England will focus on use of the Stanford West site to provide an early solution to Operation Stack. But they will consider how potential additional uses, such as overnight parking and Dover TAP can also be provided, if necessary at a later date.

Conclusion

There continues to be an urgent strategic need for measures to reduce the impact of Operation Stack. This is best served by a single large lorry area.

As a result of the consultation, and of further work undertaken by Highways England into the design of the Stanford West and Junction 11 North sites, the Secretary of State now has sufficient information to make a decision on the way forward.

The Secretary of State has decided to propose a single large lorry area at Stanford West.

Next steps

Highways England will be engaging with stakeholders shortly to set out in more detail the proposed design and operation of the preferred site, and what it proposes to do to mitigate the environmental impacts. This will be a further opportunity for local stakeholders to provide input to the lorry area.