

Fact sheet

Solutions to Operation Stack



Background

The M20 / A20 and M2 / A2 routes that run between the London area and the Kent ports are some of the south-east's most important roads.

Thousands of vehicles use these roads on the shortest, quickest and cheapest route to mainland Europe.

Maintaining free-flowing traffic on these routes is essential for local people, businesses and freight hauliers.

While extra parking has been provided at the Kent ports, capacity is often exceeded when severe weather, industrial action or operational problems occur.

When this happens, port-bound lorries start to form a queue on Kent's roads. This causes disruption for other road users traveling on the M20 / A20, M2 / A2 corridors and surrounding local roads.

Operation Stack

When extraordinary levels of disruption occur, Operation Stack is activated by Kent Police, on behalf of the Kent Resilience Forum, to manage the congestion on Kent's motorways and major roads. Under this arrangement, port-bound lorries form a queue on the M20.

This causes issues for non-freight traffic as Operation Stack closes parts of the M20 and adversely impacts surrounding roads, local communities and businesses in Kent.

Between January and August 2015, Operation Stack was in place for 32 days. During this time, carriageways were closed to general traffic and used to hold over 5,000 lorries.

Without further intervention, existing and future issues will continue to put pressure on Kent's roads. The forecast increase in general and lorry related traffic on the M20 / A20 and M2 / A2 routes means that doing nothing is not an option.

Our proposed solution

The government has asked Highways England to bring forward solutions to reduce traffic congestion caused by periods of extraordinary cross-Channel disruption.

By keeping the M20 open to traffic in both directions, we expect any proposed solution will reduce the effect of traffic congestion on Kent's motorways and major roads, and so avoid Operation Stack in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

On-road and off-road solutions

Our proposed solutions could include on-road and / or and off-road locations.

The development of an on-road solution would make use of our existing roads, as they currently exist or in a modified form.

By contrast, any off-road solution could include proposals that would require the acquisition of land to build a separate area for lorries.

What we did

Highways England held a 6-week public information exercise between 11 June and 22 July 2018 on its proposed approach to develop a lorry holding area solution.

Information about the project was made available via the Highways England website, newspaper adverts, radio and television interviews. Copies of the project brochure and questionnaire were available at over 30 libraries. Information about the project was also available at 7 public exhibitions across Kent and at mobile exhibitions held at motorway service areas.

The exercise invited feedback on:

- the principle of developing a lorry holding area solution
- possible locations for one or more lorry holding areas
- The provision of additional everyday 24-hour lorry parking in Kent

Ecological surveys

As part of the scheme's development, we are carrying out simple walk-over surveys across Kent to ensure we have a better understanding of the regional landscape.

Surveys are a regular process throughout a scheme's development and are not indicative of any land needed for the construction of the scheme.

The current round of traffic and ecological surveys is simply a means to fill the gaps in our knowledge.

We may have to carry out additional surveys in the future either on the same land, adjacent land or on completely different land.

However, no sites have yet been selected or identified for use as potential lorry holding areas.

Temporary measures

We are also developing temporary traffic management measures for use on the M20 while we prepare the permanent solution which must follow a formal planning process.

The temporary measures will only be used if necessary and will involve a contraflow on the London-bound carriageway of the M20 between junction 8 at Maidstone and junction 9 at Ashford.

The measures will be available by March 2019 and will ensure the M20 remains open to traffic in both directions during periods of cross-Channel disruption.

Next steps

The public information exercise is the first step of a wider consultation process that will take place to identify a permanent solution.

We are currently in the process of analysing over 1,200 responses received as part of the public information exercise and will publish a report which summarises the feedback later in the year.

Subject to the feedback received and government decisions, we intend to consult on more detailed options in winter 2018-2019.

If advanced, the scheme will be progressed through a comprehensive and transparent planning process that will include extensive public consultation and a full environmental impact assessment.

Further information

You can visit our website and sign up for email alerts whenever the webpage is updated at:

www.highwaysengland.co.uk/kentlorryarea

Further information about the temporary measures can be found by visiting the above website or:

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Please quote the Highways England publications code **PR94/18**

Highways England creative job number GFD18_0184

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Registered office Bridge House, 1 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford GU1 4LZ

Highways England Company Limited registered in England and Wales number 09346363