

Agenda Item No: 7

Report To: CABINET

Date: 14th January 2016

Report Title: **Managing freight vehicles through Kent – responding to the Highways England consultation on a proposal to create a permanent lorry area adjacent to the M20 at Stanford**

Portfolio Holders: Cllr Mike Bennett - Planning, Development & Enforcement
Cllr Bernard Heyes - Highways, Wellbeing and Safety

Report Authors: Ian Grundy - Principal Policy Planner
Jo Fox - Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager

Summary:	In response to growing concerns about the impacts of Operation Stack Highways England are currently consulting on proposals to establish a permanent lorry park close to junction 11 on the M20 motorway. This report sets out the Council's formal response to that consultation.
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Key Decision: No

Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: That the Cabinet:

- a) **Welcomes the proposal to provide a permanent lorry parking area adjacent to the M20 to tackle the problems caused by Operation Stack and help to meet the need for over-night lorry parking;**
- b) **Considers that the detailed evaluation of the site location options is a matter primarily for Shepway District Council but considers that in operational terms option 1, with its direct access to the M20, is likely to be the better option;**
- c) **Supports the use of the site for alternative 3 which is for the site to operate as an emergency lorry holding area (with free provision for Operation Stack and Dover TAP/Eurotunnel excess traffic) but with additional chargeable basic overnight parking all year round**

Policy Overview: Operation Stack has a significant impact upon the local economy and overnight lorry parking has an adverse impact upon residential amenity – these are both policy objectives that are undermined by the current situation and will be improved if this project is implemented.

Financial Implications: None resulting from the report.

Contacts: ian.grundy@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330213
jo.fox@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330641

Report Title: Managing freight vehicles through Kent – responding to the Highways England consultation on a proposal to create a permanent lorry area adjacent to the M20 at Stanford

Purpose of the report

1. The purpose of this report is to agree the Council's response to the current consultation by Highways England on the proposal to create a permanent lorry area adjacent to the M20 at Stanford to deal with the issue of Operation Stack.

Background

2. On average around 10,800 (5,400 in each direction) freight vehicles cross the Dover straits every day and in 2014, the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel handled record numbers of freight vehicles and both predict a potential doubling of freight vehicles over the next decade.
3. A significant cause of congestion and delay on the roads in Kent is delay at the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel, often caused by factors such as severe weather or disruption to services at terminals. Any delay to ferries and Eurotunnel services causes queues of lorries that are too great to be accommodated within those locations. These lorries are currently queued on the M20 using the procedure known as Operation Stack.
4. Operation Stack was first implemented in the 1980s in response to occasional major disruption. Historically it has typically been used for a few days a year and only for a day at a time. However, between January and November 2015 Operation Stack was implemented on a record 32 days. This included three implementations each lasting five days, and on two occasions, both carriageways were closed to general traffic and used to accommodate over 500 vehicles. Operation Stack causes major disruption to residents and businesses in Kent and has a major impact within Ashford. Other traffic is unable to use the motorway and local road become severely congested. This results in disturbance, increased travel times, missed appointments, late or cancelled deliveries, increased air pollution and a general negative impact on residents, businesses and visitors.
5. The Government, Highways England and many local stakeholders have agreed that Operation Stack should be the last not first resort and consequently there is a strong and urgent case for an alternative approach to traffic management in the form of an off road permanent lorry area that would hold freight vehicles currently queued on the M20 during operation Stack, while also helping to maximise freight flows.
6. In the Autumn Statement the Government set funds aside to build a permanent area where lorries can wait their turn to cross the Channel and mitigate disruption to local people or the economy. As a result Highways England have now launched a consultation on a possible location for a lorry park adjacent to junction 11 on the M20.

7. As a related issue, there is a significant shortage of overnight lorry parking spaces in Kent. A number of commercially operated sites exist but these are often full with lorries being turned away. The shortage of spaces leads to inappropriate lorry parking, sometimes known as “fly parking”, where lorries park in areas not intended for them, such as motorway hard shoulder, rural verges, industrial estates or local streets. Sometimes such parking is illegal and can be dangerous requiring action to be taken by the authorities. It can cause damage to verges and pavements and residents are subject to noise and visual intrusion. Litter and waste can be a particular problem given that often toilet facilities are not available. Consequently, as well as seeking to solve the problems associated with the queueing which arises whenever there is a lack of capacity at the port or Eurotunnel, the Highways England consultation is also asking whether a permanent lorry area could help address the issue of illegal and other inappropriate parking.

The Proposed Sites

8. Highways England has focused its search for a possible site on the M20 between junction 8 and Eurotunnel. Within this area there are two potentially suitable sites identified, near junction 11 of the M20 at Stanford, to construct a lorry park with at least 3,600 spaces. It is Highways England’s view that the lorry park should have sufficient capacity to avoid Operation Stack stages 3 and 4 (where London bound carriageways are used) and in most circumstances avoid the need for stage s1 and 2 (where coast bound carriageways are used). With a lorry park with 3,600 spaces, in the scenario of the summer of 2015, it would have resulted in only needing to use the current Operation Stack twice and only on the coast bound carriageway between junctions 8 and 9,
9. The first location is at **Stanford West** to the north and south of the M20 just west of Junction 11. The main entry and exit to the site would be direct from the M20 but with a secondary access through the Stop 24 services via a new bridge. When being used for Operation Stack, the secondary access would enable lorries to approach from the east without having to travel to and turn around at junction 10. Similarly, the secondary access would enable the site to be used for any overnight parking or Truckstop purposes, while minimising the impact on the M20.
10. The alternative site is **Junction 11 North** which would be accessed via junction 11 and the B2068 which would be dualled between the site entrance and M20 junction. There would be improvements to the roundabout and possibly the coast bound on slip road at junction 11. (a plan of both sites is appended)

What would be on the site?

11. Highways England are consulting on how these sites should operate in terms of how the site should be used and when they would be available. Four main alternatives have been proposed.
 - a) **Alternative 1 - Emergency Use** – an emergency lorry holding area which reduces or removes the need for Operation Stack only. It would only be required to operate only when Operation Stack currently operates. Lorries would not be charged for using the area except, possibly, if they failed to

leave the site when required to do so. It would be used for a similar number of days to the current Operation Stack

- b) **Alternative 2 - General disruption** – an emergency lorry holding area which reduces or removes the need for operation Stack and/or the Dover Traffic Assessment Project (this is the process where port-bound lorries are queued on the A20 approaching Dover, forming a rolling road, to respond to short term freight capacity shortage at the port). It could also take excess HGV traffic from the Eurotunnel terminal. Lorries would not be charged for using the area except, possibly, if they failed to leave the site when required to do so. In this configuration it could be used a few times per week.
- c) **Alternative 3 - General disruption + overnight parking** – this would be for an emergency lorry holding area as above (with free provision for operation Stack and Dover TAP/ Eurotunnel excess) but with additional chargeable basic overnight parking. This would operate as (b) above but also provide overnight parking for about 500 lorries. It is suggested that could be sufficient to meet local needs but HE say they will obtain further evidence before finalising this part of the proposal. The intention is to provide sufficient formal parking to avoid the need for lorries to use informal parking. This would make it easier for local authorities to move on lorries that were parked in inappropriate locations. There would be a charge for overnight parking. In this configuration the lorry area could be used every night.
- d) **Alternative 4 - General disruption + Truckstop** – this would be an emergency lorry holding area as above, with free provision for operation Stack and Dover TAP/Eurotunnel excess but with additional chargeable overnight parking and 24 hour lorry focused motorway service area facilities including hot food and drink. This would operate as per (c) above and also provide a Truckstop and could operate 24 hours a day 365 days a year.

The Council's response

- 12. Firstly, the implementation of Operation Stack has had a considerable impact upon the Borough of Ashford especially when it has lead to the closure of the M20 between junctions 8 and 9. This was particularly acute at times this summer. Therefore it is to be welcomed that the Government has provided funding for a permanent solution.
- 13. Secondly, in terms of actual location, both sites are adjacent to junction 11 of the M20 and lie outside the borough and as such there is no immediate environmental impact upon the Ashford Borough. The local council, Shepway District, is best placed to take a view based on their local understanding of the environmental and social impacts of the proposals but there appear to be more significant environmental impacts associated with Option 2 and it would appear that in operational terms Option 1, with its direct access to the M20, is likely to be the better option.
- 14. This Council does, however, have a strong interest in the site selected being operationally effective to reduce the impacts both of Operation Stack and the

ever present overnight parking. In operational terms the location at Junction 11 north would be accessed from the existing junction 11, utilising local roads which would need to be improved. The ability of this existing junction to handle the volume of lorry traffic exiting the M20 when Stack is in operation needs fully investigating.

15. The Stanford West option would provide a new access directly off the M20 coast bound and there would be access London bound from the existing Stop 24 site via a new bridge. Simply in terms of the ability of the new site to deal most effectively with lorry traffic without disrupting local roads at junction 11 the Stanford West option may be the more efficient option. It also provides the opportunity for Stop 24 facilities to service overnight lorry parking users should the Stanford West site be used simply for overnight parking, without full food/drink and other services.
16. Thirdly, turning to the issue of the type of operation of the lorry park, the complementary use of the site for other types of lorry parking in addition to Operation Stack is of particular significance to the Borough Council. Overnight lorry parking has been a major issue in the borough for some time and whilst recent enforcement efforts have been helpful the Council is faced with the problem of not being able to direct lorry drivers to lorry parks where there is no capacity to accommodate them. The Council has been the pioneer in terms of dealing with fly-parking in Kent and, when other Councils take similar action, the need to have a location where lorries can be parked overnight will become even more pressing.
17. This proposal for a lorry park to deal with Operation Stack lorries would be the ideal opportunity to enable provision to be made for overnight off-road lorry parking. It would be of a size that could deal with a significant Kent-wide problem and could complement the existing paid lorry park facilities (e.g. at Stop 24 in Shepway and at Waterbrook). Highways England will need to undertake further work to ascertain the appropriate scale of provision required to deal with the issue. The consultation indicates that there would be a charge for overnight parking and there would need to be further consideration by Highways England of appropriate pricing to ensure maximum usage without undermining existing operators. It should also be acknowledge that increasing overnight provisions (especially if charges are applied) will not stop some of the most persistent drivers from parking their lorries illegally or inconsiderately. There needs to be an appropriate enforcement framework to enable the authorities to take action when necessary.
18. On this basis it is proposed that the Council supports the use of the site for alternative 3 as this is the only option that proposes dealing with Operation Stack and providing basic chargeable overnight lorry parking – that is that the proposed lorry park should deal with general disruption and operate as an emergency lorry holding area with free provision for operation Stack and Dover TAP/ Eurotunnel excess, but with additional chargeable basic overnight parking. Work is needed with the haulage industry and lorry park operators to test pricing structures and to explore whether providing charged parking with basic facilities for drivers at a lower rate would complement existing overnight lorry parks that offer a wider range of services. Charging structures would need to be kept under regular review.

Working together

19. The Council has been closely involved with the multi-organisation Operation Stack working group convened by KCC and has liaised closely with Shepway District Council and has had detailed discussions with the operators of the Waterbrook Truck Stop site.

Risk Assessment

20. The proposal represents an opportunity to deal with the Stack parking issue that has become a significant issue for the Borough that was particularly acute in the summer of 2015. The risk of not supporting this proposal is the continuation of the existing position whereby Stack lorries continue to be parked on the M20 with the consequent impact on the productivity and economic prosperity of the district and the wider East Kent sub region. If the opportunity is not taken to deliver an overnight lorry park then the risk is the continuation of the local disruption and the constant nuisance caused by inappropriate overnight lorry parking.

Other Options Considered

21. The various other proposals for the actual use of the site have been considered but the recommended approach is deemed to be the most appropriate in the circumstances

Handling

22. It is worth noting that this Highways England consultation is a first, “informal” stage. If there is a case for proceeding with the proposal there will be a report identifying the preferred site and the level of facilities to be provided. This will be followed by a detailed design and further consultation that is likely to be in spring 2016.

Conclusion

23. Operation Stack causes significant disruption in the Borough and the opportunity to deal with the issue in a dedicated new lorry park is to be welcomed. The anti-social parking of lorries in the borough is a significant and constant issue and the opportunity exists in this proposal to provide overnight lorry parking to tackle this problem and as such the Council supports Alternative 3

Portfolio Holder’s Views

24. Will be reported at the meeting.

Contacts: ian.grundy@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330213
jo.fox@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330641

Appendix

