

**Report by the
Strategic Planning
Scrutiny Committee**

**Operation Stack –
Emergency
Lorry Parking for Cross-
Channel Traffic**

November 2000

1. Introduction

(1) On 3 October 2000, the Strategic Planning Scrutiny Committee heard evidence from Mr Richard King, Vice Chairman of the County Council's Strategic Planning Committee, Mr Richard Thompson, Director of Strategic Planning and Mr Nick Rowe, County Emergency Planning Officer, on proposals for an alternative to Operation Stack, the current method of dealing with the build-up of lorry traffic that results from disruption to the services provided by Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover.

(2) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to hold a further day's Topic Review on the subject, which took place on 3 November 2000 in the offices of Ashford Borough Council. The Committee had before them the report of the Director of Strategic Planning to the Cabinet (11 September 2000), a copy of the letter from the Leader of the County Council to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the DETR, and a copy of his reply. The suggested themes for questions to the witnesses are attached as Appendix 1 to this report

(3) This report also contains the evidence gathered to support the Topic Review, and the conclusions and recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee, based on the evidence received.

2. Evidence

(1) On 3 November 2000, Members of the Strategic Planning Scrutiny Committee heard evidence from the following witnesses:

Chief Inspector S Hansford, Kent County Constabulary;
Councillor MLR Cloughton, Chairman, Joint Transportation Sub- Committee,
Ashford Borough Council,
Mr A Joynson, Highway Manager, Ashford Borough Council,
Mr S Goulette, Head of Environmental Services, Shepway District Council;
Mr G Prince, Strategy - Commissioning Manager, East Kent Health Authority;
Mr R Willcox, General Manager - Safety & Finance, Dover Harbour Board,
Mr J Wheeler, Services Development Manager, Eurotunnel.

The evidence provided by these witnesses is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

(2) Written evidence was received from the following:

Damian Green MP, Ashford;
Michael Howard MP, Folkestone;
Gwyn Prosser MP, Dover & Deal;
Dover Joint Transportation Committee;
PB Kennedy & Donkin Ltd;
The Confederation of Passenger Transport UK;
The Freight Transport Association;
The Highways Agency

Their evidence is attached as Appendix 3 to this report.

(3) At Appendix 4, there is a schedule showing the details of each Operation Stack 'event' this year, up to 23 November, giving the date and duration of each event; whether Phase Two of the Operation was required; and the reason for the Operation being set up. The schedule is based on Police records.

3. Findings

(1) Based on the evidence it received, the Scrutiny Committee made the following findings:

(a) The Scrutiny Committee accepts that in the present circumstances Operation Stack is the most practical means of dealing with the build-up of lorry traffic when services at the Channel Tunnel or the Port of Dover are disrupted.

(b) The Committee agrees with the need for an alternative to Operation Stack, because of the disruption it causes to local residents; the effect on ambulance and other medical and emergency services caused by the disruption; and the effects on both local businesses and potential investors in Kent.

(c) The Committee accepts that spending equivalent sums of money on improvements to the local road infrastructure, whilst desirable in itself, would not be sufficient to ease congestion when Operation Stack is in force; that road developments costing considerable more would be needed and that these may still not be sufficient to relieve the pressure at certain locations.

(d) The Committee agrees that it is not practical to consider widening the Motorway to accommodate parked lorries while leaving lanes open for other road users on the grounds of both cost and safety.

(e) The Committee also agrees that incremental improvements to the current system will not reduce the problems significantly.

4. Conclusions

(1) The Committee therefore concludes that:

(a) For the foreseeable future, a purpose-built lorry park is the only viable alternative to Operation Stack, and that to operate effectively such a park needs to be:

(i) situated between Ashford and the Channel Tunnel terminal, as close to the Terminal as possible;

(ii) as close to the coastbound carriageway of the M20 as possible, with dedicated sliproads in and out;

(iii) capable of holding up to 1000 lorries at anyone time;

(iv) available for use within thirty minutes of a problem being identified, and therefore unlikely to be available for other purposes

(b) There would be advantages, particularly with the present arrangements, in being able to put speed restrictions into effect to slow the rate at which traffic arrives, and to extend the use of messages on the Motorway network, to divert as much traffic as possible when Operation Stack is in force.

(c) The cost of providing a lorry park should not fall on the Council Tax payers of Kent; and that there is a responsibility on the Government to consider the funding of this proposal.

(d) The majority of delays and disruption result from causes beyond the control of Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover. The Committee also recognises the commitment made by these operators to the current Operation Stack and the proposed Lorry Park.

(e) There may also be opportunities for obtaining European funding for this project, bearing in mind the contribution that the Cross-Channel route through South East Kent makes to the European economy as a whole. Such funding might be broadened to include more general infrastructure improvements to both the road and rail networks in East Kent; and

(f) There may be an opportunity to dispose of the existing Truckstop site, relocate some of the facilities to the proposed new park, and use some or all of the proceeds towards the new park. It was agreed that it would be helpful to obtain a view from Eurotunnel's lawyers about whether they consider that this site fulfilled Eurotunnel's obligations under the Channel Tunnel Act; the planning background to the development and the current ownership of the site.

5. Recommendations

(1) The Strategic Planning Scrutiny Committee recommends that:

(a) The proposal to establish a purpose-built-lorry park is pursued.

(b) The Government is asked to use its influence to make sure that a solution to the question of funding is obtained, including exploration of European funding opportunities.

(c) Further information is obtained about the ownership of the Truckstop site and the planning background.

(d) The Highways Agency is asked to give urgent consideration to the development of variable speed limit orders for use to assist the current Operation Stack.

(e) The Highways Agency is also asked to consider the extension of variable signing on the Motorway network to warn road users of delays or disruption to the Cross-Channel services.

(f) Secondary uses for the proposed park continue to be investigated.

(g) The Government is urged to continue to work with its European partners to do everything possible to minimise disruption to Cross-Channel services.

November 2000

**Alternative Proposals for Operation Stack
Suggested Themes for Discussion**

Members may wish to ask questions on the following (some will apply to particular agencies more than others):

What happened before Operation Stack was agreed as a means of dealing with traffic congestion arising from difficulties with the Ferries or the Tunnel?

Is the frequency with which Operation Stack is having to be put in place increasing? What is the average duration and is this increasing?

At what point is the decision to start Operation Stack taken? How quickly does it need to be in operation?

What is the effect on the regular services of your organisation? Can you estimate any costs in financial or staff terms?

What difficulties arise for your service in dealing with Operation stack while it is in force?

What risks are there, if any, to the lorry drivers and personnel from various agencies involved in the operation, and to the safety of the public?

Do you have any knowledge of the effects on members of the public, for example those who would normally be using the M20?

Is it possible to say how long on average it takes to get things back to normal after Operation Stack has ended?

Overall, why in the view of your service, is an alternative necessary?

What alternatives have been considered and on what grounds have they been ruled out?

If the proposed alternative of a purpose-built lorry park were to be given the go- ahead, what are the requirements in terms of size and location?

What would be the ideal location?

Would it be possible to find an area of brownfield land of a suitable size and location?

What services would need to be provided on the site?

How would you envisage the site might be used, if at all, when not required for Operation Stack?

Would the alternative improve conditions for the lorry drivers, and for the agencies who need to manage the operation? Will there still be difficulties, albeit different ones, and what effect would it have on the cost to your organisation?

Will it improve safety?

The alternative will be expensive to set up and will have associated running costs. Who in the view of your service should pay for this?

Do you have any information about the likely running costs of such a site (the basic year-round costs rather than when in use as a lorry park)?

Statements of Witnesses

STRATEGIC PLANNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TOPIC REVIEW: OPERATION STACK, 3 NOVEMBER 2000

Chief Inspector S Hansford, Kent County Constabulary

Chief Inspector Hansford confirmed that he had no objection to tape-recording of the proceedings.

In reply to a question about how Operation Stack had developed in its present form, Chief Inspector Hansford said that it might be helpful if he began by outlining his current responsibilities. Chief Inspector Hansford said he was currently Chief Inspector of Tactical Operations, which includes the Traffic Central Motorway Patrol Unit which has responsibility for the tactical policing of Operation Stack. Chief Inspector Hansford said strategic control of the Unit was with his immediate superior, Mr Hatfield, who had been unable to attend the hearing today and gave his apologies. The Chief Inspector said that he had been in his current role for about fifteen months and that prior to that he was, in the Force Control Room which takes the overview of controlling incidents across the county and so it was there where the responsibility for taking the decision, or at least jointly taking the decision, to implement Operation Stack lay. Chief Inspector Hansford said that he had no direct contact with

Operation Stack prior to that but that he was aware of the background and that he had been involved since about May of 1998.

Chief Inspector Hansford explained that there were a number of reasons why Operation Stack might need to be implemented. He said that it was a complex situation which could be caused by disputes across the Channel in France, such as the fishermen's disputes and blockades, weather circumstances causing restriction on the outflow from Dover, or a total closure of Dover. How the effects would be mitigated would depend on the cause. Chief Inspector Hansford explained prior to that when records for Operation Stack began in 1995/96 only the ferry ports were in operation, at that time the Channel Tunnel was not. The main cause of disruption therefore was severe weather in the winter or industrial disputes. What then occurred is a build-up of lorries which, on the M20, could be anything up to 500 vehicles per hour currently. He said that it was therefore necessary to react very quickly. Chief Inspector Hansford added that the port of Dover is normally fairly full of traffic waiting to board ferries and therefore the build-up happens particularly fast. It is then necessary to make a quick decision with the other agencies about how long the build-up is likely to last and whether there is anything that can be done immediately to reduce the problem by finding enough extra capacity in the port. This involves the calculation of how quickly traffic will start to tail back from the port with the obvious danger of static traffic and the resulting delays around the town to other traffic.

In terms of other ways of dealing with the situation that have been tried, Chief Inspector Hansford said that there had been a number of alternatives tried. At one time there was an operation called "Blockade" when the Jubilee Way was used and traffic was diverted down the old A2 through Lydden. That obviously caused problems of getting lorries across from the M20 to the A2, there was insufficient space there because lorries had to be arranged in a single line as the road is only a dual carriageway at that point, and there was a tremendous number of complaints from residents in Lydden and the surrounding area about congestion, traffic noise and fumes. On the A20 there was a similar picture when lorries were stacked on the section running through Aycliffe to Court Wood. This caused an equal amount of complaints from local residents and, in particular, a local old peoples' home. There was therefore, he said, a great deal of public concern. There were diversions out along the A260, Elham - Valley, which is not a particularly suitable road anyway, and there was a great deal of difficulty with the diversion routes around that area in terms of

the dangers that were caused, particularly late at night where insufficient lighting was a problem with moving traffic encountering static vehicles around bends and so on. When the Channel Tunnel opened there was the truck stop at Ashford, but as trade through the Tunnel built up, the truck stop proved to have insufficient capacity and the catalyst for some other form of action then was the Channel Tunnel fire which caused a long closure and the problem of how to deal with complete closure of that route for what was at least a five day period. That was when Operation Stack came into being and it has been reviewed a number of times since then including a major review with all the other agencies involved. There was then a whole operational system which was signed up to by all the agencies and commercial undertakings defining the part each would play.

Chief Inspector Hansford said that in reply to the question about why Operation Stack continues to be implemented, the bottom line is that it works. There are not the same problems as were encountered with the alternative arrangements. When the truck stop was used it caused enormous problems at junction 10 on the M20, the A2070 became blocked, there was congestion in Ashford town, and the emergency route to the William Harvey Hospital also became heavily congested. Overall, there were great problems in trying to manage traffic around junction 10. As far as Operation Stack now is concerned, Chief Inspector Hansford said that nobody wants to do it in the way that it is currently implemented but that there is no alternative that has been shown to work in a practical sense. In reply to a question about how many vehicles could be contained within the port of Dover and at the truck stop, Chief Inspector Hansford said that the maximum capacity at the port was 470 vehicles with a further 170 in the Channel Tunnel area. Chief Inspector Hansford explained that Tuesday and Wednesday nights are the peak build-up time for the Channel Tunnel and the port of Dover, and that it is therefore then when it is always possible to forecast the possibility of Operation Stack being needed and that as a result, if the resources are available, the Police will attempt to be pro-active and put extra officers in the area to manage the traffic flow and wherever possible, speed it up to make sure that blockages do not occur. The slip road at junction 11 a is also managed and at times the Police will queue lorries on the slipway, protecting the rear of the vehicles, simply in order to prevent the need to implement Operation Stack. There are therefore a number of occasions when the Police actively manage the situation to avoid the need to implement Operation Stack and they now keep records of the number of times they do manage the situation to prevent that need. In practice this occurs probably as many times as does implementation of Operation Stack.

In terms of the port of Dover, the Police have collaborated with the Dover Port Police who will come out and manage the roundabout at the bottom of Jubilee Way while at the same time the Police are in contact with the port control to ensure that boarding processes are carried out as quickly as possible. Despite full co-operation, Chief Inspector Hansford said that there is a limit with the number of weighbridges available in the port and any minor failure within their processes can quickly lead to a build up.

In reply to a question about what he would like to see in operation in an ideal world to avoid the need for an operation like Stack, Chief Inspector Hansford said that he would like to see a much larger off-road collection point where the lorries could be held before they reach the Tunnel or the port. Chief Inspector Hansford said that this was based on his experience and that he had considered on a number of occasions when dealing with the inevitable complaints from local residents what alternatives there might be, but he could, not think of any others. He said that the key decision was when exactly to put Operation Stack into effect. The Police try and share this decision with the other agencies and that takes the form of a notification system which says first of all that Operation Stack is possible, then probable, then that it must be put into operation. This is done on a fax distribution system so that everybody is on notice. There is also a lot of communication between the Force Control Room and the commercial undertakings in terms of their capacity. There is then a complex calculation based on information gathered from various

points about traffic flows which inform the decision to implement the operation. Chief Inspector Hansford added that it was clear that if the flow of traffic was at its peak of 500 vehicles an hour the decision has to be made very quickly because if the decision is not made quickly enough, undoing the impact can be very complicated. By way of example, the Chief Inspector said that if traffic was already heavily congested around Dover and Aycliffe, lorry drivers would not appreciate being asked to turn their vehicles round.

In reply to a question about whether there was a halfway position between Operation Stack and the ideal solution supposing that and the ideal solution could not be afforded for whatever reason. Chief Inspector Hansford said that there were only really two possibilities, one was to reduce demand the other was increase capacity to deal with the demand. Chief Inspector Hansford said that he meant this in the commercial sense and that if demand could not be reduced then the alternative was for the commercial undertakings to find extra capacity within their areas. Failing this he could see no other alternative to the operation that is implemented at present.

In reply to a question about whether, with a flow of vehicles at 500 an hour, a lorry park with the capacity of a thousand would be sufficient, Chief Inspector Hansford explained that that flow was not a constant figure and that it tended to peak at around 6.00 pm to 7.00 pm when drivers tried to get out on particular crossings and the police do what they can to mitigate the impact in those circumstances including using all the electronic warning boards on the motorway network. Chief Inspector Hansford explained that there are agreements in place with Surrey and Essex to place messages on the motorway boards in those counties. In addition they use every form of media to get information out that Operation Stack is being implemented and that delays will result. Chief Inspector Hansford said that the lorry drivers and haulage companies now have a very good understanding of what is meant when they know that Operation Stack has been implemented and Police hope therefore lorry drivers in many cases will park up further away from the immediate area which in turn relieves the pressure on Operation Stack. Chief Inspector Hansford said that part of the reason why Operation Stack was able to cope successfully, was the fact that it was now well known and the implications were well understood by lorry drivers and the haulage companies. As a result, he said that it was often a question of dealing with that bulk in the first one or two hours and as phase 1 has a capacity of 800 vehicles this would normally be sufficient. In addition, as long as there was not a total blockage at both the port and the tunnel there was still an outflow relieving the pressure of about 200-250 lorries an hour. Once the police have stacked the lorries they then take them down in groups of 50.

In a reply to a question about how far back the warnings were issued, Chief Inspector Hansford said that in terms of the media, it was national media and therefore coverage was as wide as possible and that in terms of signs on the motorway these would be in Surrey and in Essex particularly on the M25 giving advance warning.

In reply to a question about whether a lorry park would provide a complete solution to the need for Operation Stack, Chief Inspector Hansford said that it would not be a solution in every situation. For example if there was a total blockade both at the tunnel and the ports over a sustained period there might not be sufficient capacity. However, looking back at the records, 75% of the incidents were contained within phase 1 of Operation Stack, Phase II is only implemented two or three times a year. If the lorry park had the capacity of Phase I therefore, it would be possible to contain the great majority of incidents and deal with what the public finds difficult to understand which is the disruption caused simply by heavy traffic flows which can occasionally be the case. When crossings are reduced through bad weather people tend to find that far more understandable and understand the need for special arrangements to deal with the consequences.

In reply to a question about whether it was possible to stop lorries at the point of departure from the depots, and how quickly the warnings could be issued so that motorway service stations could take the bulk of the traffic, Chief Inspector Hansford said that they had had lengthy discussions with the commercial undertakings about the precise wording of the warnings on the motorway signs. Chief Inspector Hansford said that the stages that the Police go through are that they either become aware of the build up of traffic or of a problem around the ports of the tunnel but they have to be careful and aware of the commercial sensitivities involved in putting up signs that say for example that the Port of Dover is closed or that there are delays, because of the possible effects on trade and because sometimes it only affects the freight side of the business and the passenger side is still running. As soon the police know that there is a growing problem they will deploy officers in the area to try and mitigate the congestion and start putting messages out straight away saying that there are delays. Nevertheless, he said there is a kind of "I've paid so I'm going" approach amongst some members of the public and indeed many lorry drivers which means that if they need to get across the channel they believe there is no real alternative and attempts to divert them to other ports or destinations just do not work. When, for example, the police know that there is a likelihood of industrial action, as seems to happen particularly at bank holidays at the moment, they will start to use the media as soon as they can be reasonably specific. When stack is implemented diversion signs are put in place so that cars making for the tunnel or port can still get there, but Chief Inspector Hansford said that it was the disruption to local people who would normally use the M20 for their journeys that was the problem with journey times, increased by perhaps as much as two hours on many occasions.

In reply to a question about whether there was a possibility, as an alternative, of making improvements to the M20 so that lorry traffic could be diverted onto what was in effect an extended hard shoulder, with contraflows in place, and whether this would then avoid the need for a lorry park which may well pose difficulties in terms of security, Chief Inspector Hansford explained that with the current operation all the lanes of the motorway were used. Traffic was segregated into lorries going to the Channel Tunnel and lorries going to Dover, so that there was a tunnel queue and a ferry queue. For safety reasons there was a need to segregate certain vehicles which may be carrying hazardous chemicals for example. The hard shoulder is taken up with toilet and feeding facilities, and there is a lane kept open for moving and segregating vehicles and for emergency vehicles. Chief Inspector Hansford said that the problems that arose if you did not segregate vehicles were that if, for example, it was the Tunnel that was closed and lorries at the front of the queue wanted to go to the Tunnel it would block the route and elongate the queue unnecessarily. There is no queuing system in Phase II of Operation Stack but vehicles are then brought down through a chicane and split. This also means that if one queue is going down more quickly it gives lorry drivers the chance to move across to that queue and speed things up without the police being seen as commercially influencing the drivers in their choice of route. So the problem with using the single lane down the side of the motorway is that you cannot split lorries into separate queues and it also raises issues about what you do with a lorry fire and how you get access for emergency vehicles. Therefore, he said, you need three lanes as an absolute minimum. The Chief Inspector said that introducing a contraflow system on the motorway which was fully safe, bearing in mind motorway speeds and so on, fully safe and in accordance with all the legislation, over a stretch of some 10 to 20 miles would take anything up to one to two days whereas of course, Operation Stack needed to be introduced in less than a hour.

In reply to a further question about how lanes on the motorway were used, Chief Inspector Hansford confirmed that at the moment four lanes were used for Operation Stack. The hard shoulder was used for Tunnel traffic, the inside lane for facilities, there was then a clear lane for emergency vehicles, and the outside lane was used for Dover traffic. He added that this arrangement was not without risks in terms of lighting and emergency vehicles travelling through, especially with drivers on both left and right hand side vehicles

coming out of doors on either side and people moving up and down using toilets, food, services and so on. You would then need an additional safety margin to segregate yourself from moving traffic and you would be unable to control the speed of the traffic because there would not be time to obtain a speed order to enforce a speed limit. In conclusion Chief Inspector Hansford said that the idea of an additional lane or lanes on the motorway to keep motorway traffic moving was impractical.

In reply to a question about whether, given the need to bring in Operation Stack within a timescale of about half an hour, there was any possibility of using a lorry park for any other purpose in order to prevent it being effectively sterilised when Operation Stack was not in force, Chief Inspector Hansford said that, whatever use one could think of, the park would have to be cleared within about 30 minutes and there were not many uses therefore that he could think of that would allow this to happen, other than perhaps some recreational uses that did not require the prior setting up of some form of equipment that was difficult to take down quickly. There was therefore the possibility that it could be used as a skateboard park or something like that but the uses would be very limited.

In reply to a question about traffic orders which, suggested that cable companies, for example, were able to apply for traffic orders that lasted 18 months and that therefore it would seem possible for the Police, when Operation Stack was brought into force, to apply for an order that would last for a similar period and could be brought in on future Operation Stack situations, Chief Inspector Hansford said that his honest answer was that he did not think so but that he would need to take further advice.

In reply to a question about whether there were any road improvements that could be made to the roads in the immediate vicinity of the motorway that would improve journey times for local people when Operation Stack was in force and they were unable to use the motorway, Chief Inspector Hansford said that he thought that the scale of improvement that would be required would cost at least as much if not a great deal more than a lorry park. He said that the impact was in the first couple of hours when you get the demand that cannot be absorbed within the port and that this causes a build up of traffic and congestion around the Dover area by itself and he was not sure that this could be overcome in that initial pressure time. After that, when Operation Stack was implemented, while there were clearly delays to people using the A20, people were able to move reasonably freely up and down through the towns. He said there were pinchpoints such as where traffic needs to come off the motorway and again these would still tend to exist and, short of some major dualling of stretches of the A20, he repeated that he did not think that this would be a practical alternative any more than dualling Jubilee Way would be for bringing traffic down that way or using both. Again the Chief Inspector said that the main problem was deciding on the point on which Operation Stack was brought into effect. If Operation Stack was brought in as a response to a temporary blip in the system which caused delays for about half an hour and then was eased, people would find it difficult to understand why Operation Stack had been brought in and people had been involved in setting up the arrangements, which could take perhaps two hours, unnecessarily. He said that as a result the police tended to err on the side of confirmation, so traffic was allowed to build up towards the Western Dock before the decision was taken because it was important to be sure of the need, unless of course it was a complete closure in which case the decision would be fairly obvious.

Mrs Lowe then thanked Chief Inspector Hansford for attending the meeting and answering the Committee's questions. (The Committee agreed at this point that in view of the fact that Operation Stack which had been in force twice in the current week, had stopped the day before the meeting, their original intention to visit Operation Stack to see it in operation was now no longer worthwhile.)

Mr J Wale, Head of Network Management KCC, and Mr N Rowe, Head of Emergency Planning, KCC

In reply to a question about whether it was possible to organise traffic orders so that they would already be in place should Operation Stack be implemented, Mr Wale said that on behalf of the local highway authority, Kent County Council, there had to be a reason for an order and this would usually be due to roadworks or some other emergency set of provisions. For the motorway and trunk road network he would have to refer the question to the Highways Agency as the responsible authority because the legislation was different and he was not familiar with it. However Mr Wale added that he knew that the variable speed limits that were in operation on the M25 were the subject of the a multi-county working group which was looking at their extension not just on the M25 but to other parts of the motorway network, although he added that that was likely to take years other than months. Mr Wale said that he assumed that the type of order envisaged by the question was a blanket order that could be brought in at the discretion of the Police and that he would be prepared to approach the Highways Agency and seek clarification from them.

In reply to a question about the anticipated cost of providing a lorry park for up to 1,000 lorries and how that cost would compare with, for example, improvements to the A260 which was part of the original plan for infrastructure to support the Tunnel which had not been put into effect; and to a further question about whether, if those improvements to the A260 were in place, this would relieve the pressure. when Operation Stack was in force, Mr Rowe said that as a result of the work done by the Group he chaired, it was thought that a suitable park could be built, including the necessary facilities of a toilet block, PA system, a small office, secure fencing and provision for food vendors to come in with mobile snack bars and some fuel supply to be brought in so that lorries would not run out of fuel and be stuck there. Mr Rowe also reminded the Committee that while the lorry park would stand empty for the majority of the time, so did the Thames Flood Barrier and other emergency facilities when not actually in use to address a particular emergency, such as fire extinguishers. Mr Wale said that in terms of cost to provide a park in the way that Mr Rowe had just described, he thought that there would be very little difference between a greenfield site and a brownfield site. There may be lower costs of acquisition associated with a brownfield site but there would be probably be higher costs of development because it was a brownfield site and therefore overall the capital costs would probably be very similar.

In relation to improvements to the A260, Mr Wale said improvements on any substantial scale would be vastly more expensive than building a lorry park and would run into tens of millions of pounds probably of the order of £50-£60 million. He added that building a dual carriageway on a stretch like that would certainly cost tens of millions of pounds and would probably not by itself be a solution to the problem of the Channel Tunnel. Mr Wale confirmed that whereas such an improvement might help ease local traffic it would not provide a solution to traffic wanting to go to Dover or through the Channel Tunnel, in that a more immediate relief would be provided by dualling the A2 from Lydden to Dover. Mr Wale also explained that the cost of the proposed lorry park was believed to be in the region of £8.5 million. Mr Rowe added that a "ball park" figure given to him by the Highways Agency for adding a further lane to the motorway would be in the region of £5 million per mile. In any event it would be impractical now between Leeds Castle and Ashford because of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link running alongside the motorway there. The Highways Agency had said that to provide an extra lane, if it were practical, on that stretch of motorway with the necessary widening alterations to bridges would cost between £50 and £100 million.

In reply to a question about whether, when the M20 was built and indeed "the Channel Tunnel was built, there had been any plans or provision in the knowledge that from time to time situations would arise which would mean that the Port of Dover was unable to clear

traffic and a build up would occur. Mr Rowe said that there had been two different bits of thinking.

The first had been when the bill for the Channel Tunnel was going through Parliament. This potential problem was identified and within the legislation permitting the Channel Tunnel there was a requirement for Eurotunnel to provide emergency parking capacity for this purpose and the Truckstop site at Ashford was provided for that reason. The basic lorry park was intended to hold about 350 lorries and the extension on a piece of stabilised land, which was land into which lime had been put to a depth of 18 inches, was supposed to hold another 250 lorries. Mr Rowe said that the first time that the system was brought into operation as a result of snow and prior to the Channel Tunnel fire, it emerged that the piece of stabilised land was in fact completely unsuitable and lorries that were driven on to it sank into the ground. The 350 capacity of the Truckstop was quite inadequate particularly as at any given time the park is relatively full of lorries in the normal course of events. As a result, any notion of attempting a fair and equitable queuing system was impossible, leading to immense problems with both the lorry drivers and the agencies involved. For whatever reason, Central Government at the time did not press Eurotunnel to rectify what some would have considered to be a failing on their part in not providing adequate facilities in accordance with the Act. Mr Rowe added that as far as he was aware, Eurotunnel had never sued the company that had built the site. Mr Rowe added however, that with current level of knowledge no-one would actually want a lorry park in that location and therefore pressing for improvements to that site was not considered an option. Mr Rowe said that the effects on Ashford were such that it was not the right place for a lorry park and that experience had shown that such a park needed to be immediately adjacent to the motorway with dedicated slip roads on and off and away from towns and from other junctions so that it is an entirely separate operation. In reply to a question about whether such a site could exist Mr Rowe said that the Group he chaired believed that such a site could be found.

The second piece of thinking at the initial stage was that a large number of cars would also get held up and originally there was a plan for a motorway service station at Westenhanger with additional parking on an adjacent piece of land for coaches and cars. However experience since then has shown us that cars and coaches on the whole are not a problem in these circumstances. Private cars make their own arrangements, day trippers disappear, the operators in effect give preferential treatment to private cars and coaches, and coaches are free agents and make arrangements to take their passengers to somewhere where they can wait comfortably, so the failure to provide a car and coach solution has not been the problem that was originally predicted. Mr Rowe said this was a further example of how the reality is different to the expectation for which people were planning and that it was the knowledge and experience gained from this that has helped the Group come up with the current proposal.

In reply to a question about whether the reason behind the dualling of the A2, allowing for the fact that it was desirable in itself, was so that lorries wishing to use the Port of Dover could be separated and that if that were the case a lorry park situated adjacent to the M20 would only cater for part of the lorry traffic, Mr Rowe said that firstly the dualling of the A2 was desirable in itself and that secondly traffic wishing to get to the Dover area but not wanting to use the Port was always advised to use the A2. Since the M20 had been built and the new link to Dover had been put in place that a lot of traffic had transferred to that route and this would help the attempt to get it back to the A2. Mr Rowe confirmed that it was not envisaged that the A2 would be used for queuing lorries. He said that the whole idea of queuing the lorries in one place together was that it helped the lorry drivers to see that they were in a queue and that the queue was being managed fairly.

In reply to a question about whether there was any other use for such a lorry park when it was not being used as an alternative to Operation Stack, Mr Rowe said that he entirely

agreed with the view that, because of the speed with which Operation Stack had to be implemented and the park would have to be ready, he could not see any possible use for the park other than perhaps as some form of recreational use such as a skate boarding park, for cycling proficiency tests or something similar under control, but any commercial use, he said, would produce immense conflict of interest and make it impossible to use the park quickly enough. Mr Rowe added that if such a park were built adjacent to the motorway as previously described, the Highway Agency had indicated that it would be possible for them to acquire the site as part of the motorway infrastructure and therefore for the Highways Agency maintenance contract to maintain it. However if a dual use was envisaged it would probably not be possible for the Highways Agency to act as the purchasing and promoting agency.

In reply to a question about who would have had to bear the ongoing costs of the Truckstop park that Eurotunnel originally provided, Mr Rowe said that that would be Eurotunnel.

In reply to a further question about whether it would be possible to get money from Eurotunnel to contribute towards the cost of maintaining the new lorry park, Mr Rowe said that he was unsure but pointed out that Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover do contribute significantly to Operation Stack when it is in force and that they had indicated that they would effectively run a lorry park with the Police when it was needed for emergency use. In terms of Eurotunnel responsibilities, Mr Rowe suggested that perhaps pressure should be put on the Government to press Eurotunnel, but added that he thought that it was not for him to suggest this. He added that Eurotunnel responsibilities covered delays or difficulties with the Tunnel whereas experience in the last few years had shown that it was just as likely to be delays at the Ports that required the introduction of Operation Stack.

In reply to a question about what other alternatives had been considered and why they had been discarded, Mr Rowe said they had considered the use of motorway service stations further back along the motorway network but had concluded that the motorway service stations were generally fairly full at any given time. Part of the parking area was taken up by cars and it was already established that cars did not cause the problem on the M20. Part of the reason for this was that they were already seeking alternatives in motorway service stations. The other difficulty with small numbers distributed over a wide area was controlling and managing the situation and allowing lorry drivers still to feel that they were being dealt with fairly, that they were in a single queue and that they knew where their place in the queue was.

Mr Rowe added that he could not emphasise strongly enough the importance of lorry drivers feeling that they were being dealt with fairly. He said that it had been quite obvious during the recent fuel crisis that a lorry driver with a grievance in charge of a 40 ton lorry could cause considerable disruption and this was something that all the services, including the Police, were keen to avoid.

Another proposal that had been looked at was whether there were already existing areas of hardstanding in Kent that could be used as an alternative to Operation Stack. Whereas perhaps 30 or 40 years ago there were old airfields still in existence that might have been possible sites, these no longer existed. The other difficulty with this was that it was important to be adjacent to the motorway.

The other approach is to prevent traffic coming in the first place and Mr Rowe said that he genuinely believed that this did have an effect and that all the efforts that when into informing and warning people were part of the effort. However, Mr Rowe said that very often these events start with the build up on a Tuesday evening and last only for a few hours and that once lorry drivers had set off from their depots there was little time to make

alternative arrangements and many continued to head for the Ports. Overall therefore, he concluded that all these efforts helped but they were not a solution to the whole problem. The other alternative was to simply do nothing and let things happen, however, the costs in economic and safety terms were immense and Mr Rowe said, that whereas in the past this had been the approach taken by the authorities in France, more recently they had studied a copy of the procedures for Operation Stack and had now introduced a process of their own to manage the situation.

Mr Wale added that the concept behind much of the thinking was to keep different types of vehicles away from each, other that is to say cars and lorries and coaches separate, and also to keep vehicles away from communities and close to the motorway network to avoid the kind of difficulties that had been seen in Dover and Ashford.

The second key point was to minimise impact upon local communities. Mr Wale said that this was difficult. For example in Phase 2 of Operation Stack it was difficult for the traffic to travel from Maidstone towards the coast, and even when only Phase 1 is in operation, Mr Wale said that he had recently heard from a member of the public who had joined the queue of traffic in Maidstone and travelled in first and second gear as far as Sellindge. The intention therefore was to keep the motorway open using an adjacent site and making sure that entrances and exits from the site did not disrupt traffic or affect the local communities. Mr Wale said that this was a concept that everyone involved in the Group had signed up to.

Mr Wale added that the other important feature was the long distance communication and he thought it was possible to ask the Highways Agency how they could improve the variable message signing and make it a little bit more flexible, because if you could control the flow of traffic in the first place and give some other options then not so many vehicles would arrive on the M20.

In reply to a question pointing out that the existing Truckstop had been located on the wrong side of the motorway and asking if the same sort of mistake would be repeated, Mr Rowe replied that it would not.

In reply to a further question about the difference that it would have made if the Truckstop had been located on the other side of the motorway, Mr Rowe said that basically it was the capacity and the dedicated slip roads that were the most important aspects. Locating Truckstop on the other side of the motorway with reasonable access would have been an improvement over driving through the Beaver Estate in Ashford which had expanded considerably in the last few years anyway. Mr Wale emphasised once again the importance of making sure that any route used to divert lorry traffic away from the motorway to a lorry park should not interfere with the local community and local traffic.

In reply to a question about whether the Group looking at the alternative to Operation Stack had views about whether or not it was the Government's responsibility to provide funding for an alternative and whether the park would be provided free of charge to lorry drivers when in use, Mr Rowe said that he had a personal view that because many of the causes of disruption were beyond the control of the commercial operators and because effectively the park should form part of the national transport infrastructure, it seemed appropriate to him that a significant proportion of the cost should be borne by Central Government, although he added that again as a personal view he felt that a proportion of the cost could be recovered from the operators as a proportion of the disruption resulted simply from capacity problems.

Mr Rowe also added that if one was now building from scratch the largest ferry port in the world one would not choose to locate it at the bottom of the cliffs with little room for expansion as was the case in Dover. You would include in it the necessary infrastructure

and parking facilities. Therefore, Mr Rowe concluded as a personal view he did not see why the operators should not contribute to the cost.

In reply to a question about whether the French and Belgian authorities were now considering building an £8 million lorry park, Mr Rowe said that the situation was different in that there was a lot more space around the Port of Calais and the motorway route ran past it rather than ending in a dead-end at the Port and therefore, it was possible to move to other locations. Mr Rowe continued by explaining that the Tunnel terminal on the French side was three times as large as on the English side and that similarly the Port of Calais was very much larger than Dover and not constrained by the Cliffs behind.

In reply to a question about whether any calculations had been done on the full cost of Operation Stack, Mr Rowe said that looking at it over a 30 year period the cost was some £10 million for not having a purpose built park and about £13 million having one, purely on the costs of delayed traffic on the other routes. However, Mr Rowe added that there were other costs which were unquantifiable but which he was sure existed. These included companies not expanding in East Kent because of transport difficulties, companies deciding not to locate in the area for similar reasons, loss of business through delay and in general the feeling about whether Kent is a sensible place in which to do business. Mr Rowe repeated that these factors certainly existed but they were unquantifiable. Mr Rowe also said that the models that were being used were the same models as used by the Highways Agency to determine for example whether it was necessary to build a bypass in a given area.

In reply to a question which suggested that the Government was unlikely to provide the necessary funds, that the County Council was unable to do so and the private sector was likely to say that it was not their responsibility, whether there was then any point in even considering such a proposal, Mr Rowe said that the position of that Central Government at present was that until they were formally asked they were not going to consider such a proposal but that at this stage they had not been formally asked. He said that the Highways Agency was very unhappy with the way its motorway was being used at present and is therefore, effectively very supportive of concept.

Mr Rowe said that the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) attended the meeting of the Group looking at this and that the conclusion was that unless we ask we are not going to get an answer and that therefore, we should at least be asking.

Mrs Lowe then thanked Mr Rowe and Mr Wale for attending the meeting and answering the Committee's questions.

Mr S Goulette, Head of Environmental Services, Shepway District Council, Councillor M R Cloughton, Chairman, Ashford Borough Council's Joint Transportation Sub-Committee, and Mr A Joynson, Highway Manager, Ashford Borough Council

In reply to a question about whether from Ashford's point of view there had been any calculation of the on-costs or additional costs caused by disruption on the motorway and the introduction of Operation Stack, Mr Joynson said that there had been no specific calculation in financial terms and that such evidence that they had was verbal evidence from local businesses rather than financial evidence.

In reply to a question about the effects on Ashford when Operation Stack was enforced. Mr Joynson said that Operation Stack in its current form uses one of the major communications routes to Ashford and therefore the effects on Ashford were: queuing at junction 10 especially as local residents now knew they could come off at junction 10 rather than 11. The Borough Council is very sensitive about congestion there because of the hospital. Mr Joynson said that Operation Truckstop had highlighted the difficulties at junction 10. He added that it also results in rat runs through the lanes between Ashford and Folkestone. Mr Joynson said that these were the physical problems that the town had to cope with but that in addition there was concern about the overall image of the town and that part of Kent and the effect on potential investors and businesses who saw possible interruption to communication links in the area on a regular basis and this could deter investment. He added that while this was a little more intangible it was a major concern.

Councillor Cloughton said that the Operation Stack system was generally regarded as antiquated and that it could frequently catch motorists out with the speed of implementation, and there was certainly considerable delay. Mr Cloughton said that in his own experience of driving from Ashford to Folkestone motorists were caught up in lengthy delays and there was considerable frustration as a result. Councillor Cloughton added that he agreed with what Mr Joynson had said about the effect on business and would go further and say that the potential investors saw this happening regularly and it appeared to be happening more frequently now. They would certainly think twice about moving to an area like Ashford and this was a very major consideration for the town.

From Shepway's point of view, Mr Goulette said that Shepway had never seen Operation Stack as anything more than a temporary solution to the problem. Whereas Shepway realised that it was necessary at the moment they had always sought a proper off-highway solution to the problem. Mr Goulette emphasised what had already been said about the effect on businesses. He said that there was a clear perception that Operation Stack was needed more and more and although he was not sure whether this was in reality the case he was clear that the public believed it to be so and the businesses and large employers in the Shepway area have made representations on a regular basis to the District Councils about the disruption that it caused which not only affects deliveries but effects the whole nature of their business. From the point of view of a company like SAGA, a major employer.

In reply to a question about what would be seen as the best alternative, Mr Goulette said that Shepway would want to see a permanent off-road solution that did not disrupt the motorway and local traffic. He said that this went back to the assurance that was given by the Minister at the time that suitable facilities would be provided off highway to meet emergency parking needs.

Mr Joynson said that he would certainly endorse the view for an off road site at least large enough to avoid the need for the first phase of Operation Stack.

Councillor Cloughton said that an off road site was essential in the area of Ashford, Folkestone and Dover. Ideally as near to the Eurotunnel Centre as possible.

In reply to a question about where would be the best place for such a park, Mr Joynson said that it had to be borne in mind that lorry drivers' aim was to get as close to Folkestone or Dover as possible and it seemed therefore a shame that you need to locate the operating centres as closely as possible so that they could work together. The aim therefore was an off-road site certainly no further away than Ashford, probably close to and before Eurotunnel because once you got past Eurotunnel on the way to Dover you have the potential problem of lorries having to turn round.

Mr Goulette added that the Group that had been looking at sites for sometime all over Kent had looked at a range of factors and the premise that the site needed to be located as closely as possible to Eurotunnel and the Port had proved to be correct.

Councillor Cloughton said that while there had been extensive consultation about this issue both in Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council he thought that the time had come now for further Government involvement. When asked if he could expand further on this Councillor Cloughton said that he was not sure how much interest the Government was taking in this and certainly when it came to the question of funding he felt that the Government should take responsibility for funding in the future.

There was a series of questions about the impact on the visual amenities of that area given that the park would be of considerable size: would that be acceptable? Could the effects be mitigated? Were there other solutions that could get over the problem caused for the local community and local transport? And a further question about funding responsibility which asked, given that sometimes the cause of the disruption could be laid at the door of the operators, whether or not they should therefore make some contribution to the costs, Councillor Cloughton said that the importance of an off-road park far outweighed the disruption to a major arterial route.

In reply to a question about the District Council's views on having a large area of effectively sterile land within their boundaries, Mr Joynson said that throughout all the discussions about the proposal they had been sensitive to this issue and were aware of the problem that such a site could not easily be used for any other purpose because of the need for it to be available within a very short time. It was difficult therefore, even to hold events on it because you would have to clear it so quickly.

Mr Joynson said that he believed it would be possible to find such a site even though it would need carefully landscaping and would need to be in a location that could take a site like this. Mr Joynson agreed that there would not be many suitable sites but it was considered possible to find somewhere suitable. He added that all the experience that has been gained from Truckstop had informed people and really defined how such a site should be run and serviced with access, for example, straight off of the motorway and back onto it. All these criteria combined to limit the choice of sites available. Nevertheless Mr Joynson said that he still considered the benefit to be there with an off road site rather than the disruption of Operation Stack on the M20.

Mr Goulette said that clearly a mixed use for the site would be in many ways ideal but that in all the discussions about it, it had not been possible to come up with an additional use that could be cleared away in time. Mr Goulette added that it should be borne in mind that from Shepway's point of view the District Council received complaints that Operation Stack took too long to set up and that the disruption had already taken place. In terms of the cost Mr Goulette said that, as far as he was concerned, the Minister had given an assurance and they felt that the Government had an obligation to meet that assurance. Secondly, he said, the operators have agreed that they will manage the operation and

therefore they have in effect given a commitment and the commitment was considered sufficient at present to show that all parties were involved.

Mr Joynson added that a very high proportion of the lorries using the Tunnel and the Port were not stopping in Kent and that in this respect Kent was the gateway to the country and serving a problem for the country as a whole and he thought that this was what the Government should accept.

In reply to a question whether, if a lorry park site could not be found or funded, there were any other alternatives or whether the situation could be mitigated by road improvements to the surrounding roads, Councillor Claughton said that he thought this might be feasible but that it did not address the immediate problem. He said that that was a very long-term idea and that the situation existed now.

Mr Joynson said that there had been some investment in variable message signing which was an attempt to get drivers to stop further away from the Ports or not start their journey at all. He said that in their experience many drivers tended to ignore them and just press on and that while they took note of messages about delays that was just seen as information for them on route to their destination. Mr Joynson added that he had not seen any major areas of investment that would ease Operation Stack and although you could make some improvements perhaps to rat running through some of the lanes, there was not one single item that he could put his finger on that would ease the problem.

Mr Goulette said that he thought that the economic arguments about the blight that is occurring in South East Kent must outweigh the other arguments and he did not think there was any way in which you could satisfactorily reduce the effects of Operation Stack by using other roads that would make a significant impact on the disruption. Mr Goulette said that given the volume of traffic he could not see how the disruption could be eased significantly. He added that even with the variable signing clearly visible on the motorway drivers still kept coming and the majority of other road users would still commit themselves to reaching their destination.

Mr Joynson that he believed that many of the lorry drivers were owner operators or on contract and their insurance, if there is disruption, did not cover them unless they reached the point of transportation and so there were also genuine financial reasons why they had, to get to the Tunnel or Dover.

In reply to a question about the lessons that could be learnt from the experience of Truckstop Mr Joynson said that he had personal experience of operation Truckstop and that it had turned out in practice to be almost a lesson in how not to do it. He said that there had been good intentions and that he had hoped it would solve the problem. Eurotunnel had been set the task of providing about 500 spaces in readiness for such a situation but on the day it happened the 250 spaces on the hardstanding were already in use on a daily basis. The overflow park proved to be unusable due to the type of construction. What they then found was that we had to manage the traffic from the motorway to that site, and within two hours of the start they had 500 lorries queued up right around junction 10 back to junction 9. He said that the rate at which the lorries arrived was so fast that you had to have a very slick means of getting them off the motorway without any major junctions in the way, and that there had been some difficulty with ambulances getting to the hospital. This had been one of the major issues in the looking at an alternative site.

Operation Truckstop was also extremely intensive in terms of staffing both for the Police and Ashford Borough Council staff because they found themselves managing lorries in a number of sites when Truckstop itself could not cope. These were out on an adjacent roads and the logistics involved in managing both stacking them in and releasing them

were huge, particularly as it has to be done in a very fair way otherwise you literally had a riot on your hands. The situation became untenable for all the agencies involved which really forced people to Operation Stack. None of the agencies wanted to use the motorway in this way but it was still considered to be the best alternative to Operation Truckstop.

Mr Joynson added that the situation had got particularly bad in the middle of the night with lorry drivers handing over their keys saying that they had been sacked. It was a very fraught atmosphere. In addition many of the drivers could not speak English. Overall Mr Joynson that they had learned a great deal in a short space of time about how to manage this number of lorries. He said that it had been a surprise to everyone. They had expected to be able to manage it on the existing site but found that they were completely overwhelmed.

Councillor Claughton added that although the lessons had been valuable he could not overstate that the pressure on Ashford Borough Council staff had been immense. The lesson had been learnt although they had been learnt in a hard way but would prove useful for the future.

Mr Joynson concluded by saying that he thought that any future alternative would have to be much slicker than Operation Truckstop.

In reply to a question about whether European funding should be sought and whether the District Councils felt that Eurotunnel still had a responsibility under the Channel Tunnel Act in view of the inadequacy of the provision of Truckstop, Councillor Claughton said that as far as European funding was concerned, if it were available he thought it should be pursued and he thought that there should be closer working between the British and French Governments on this issue.

Mr Joynson said that there had been discussions over recent years about Eurotunnel's responsibilities because the District Councils also felt that they had an obligation but he suspected that Eurotunnel would argue that they had effectively discharged their obligation by providing Truckstop even though in the event it had proved inadequate. He added that both operators had committed themselves to operating the proposed site and that there would therefore be no cost to the community as a result. He said that he thought it would be a hard fight to get them to contribute any more than that.

Councillor Claughton added that he thought there was a need to involve the MEPs more closely.

Mr Goulette said that he thought it was right to approach the Government in the first instance. What they then did by way of gaining extra contributions from Europe or the operators was up to them.

Councillor Claughton said that he agreed with this but that it had to be remembered that this was a long term solution and the problem was on, the doorstep now.

In reply to a question about what could be done now given that the lorry park proposal was a long-term solution which could take a number of years, Mr Joynson said that the only alternative now was Operation Stack, there was nothing else. Mr Joynson that you could consider improvements to the local network, you could look at widening the A20 but he did not think that this was the proper way forward and some of the country lanes should not be widened. He said that it would be difficult to ease the business image and he concluded that they were stuck with Operation Stack which in itself is a fairly slick operation but which causes major disruption to the flow of traffic. He said that this was what you should stick with until a proper alternative is available as quickly as possible.

In reply to being asked if he agreed that there was no other alternative, it was only Operation Stack or the lorry park, Mr Joyson confirmed that he could see no other alternative.

Mr Goulette said that he would agree with this, that there was no alternative. He said that they had looked at many different ways of overcoming the problem but as time had gone on Operation Stack had been refilled and there was no alternative. The important thing was to get the timescale for any alternative down to a minimum.

Councillor Cloughton said that he agreed with that and that the short-term, magic wand solution simply was not there. He added that Operation Stack was not being helped by the building of CTRL. He said that the delays and frustration that the building works were causing and would continue to cause until 2003 simply aggravated the problem.

In reply to a question about how long it would take to get a site into operation Mr Joyson said that he thought from the point at which funding was agreed it would take two years to get a site with direct access to the motorway into an operational state. Although he added that at the stage that was a guess.

Mr Goulette said that there was one other thing that could be done which was to mitigate the causes that make Operation Stack necessary and by this he meant instances which were occurring on the French side in particular. He said that if the British Government was lobbying the French side to reduce the number of occasions on which such instances were occurring then Operation Stack would be required less often and that there was therefore an opportunity to ask the Government to consider providing this kind of support to make sure it happens less often. Mr Goulette said that he realised that this was less tangible but that it was important to be taking all possible steps to mitigate the problem.

In reply to a question about the disruption caused by CTRL and whether Operation Stack had any effect in delaying progress with CTRL, Councillor Cloughton said that he was unaware of any effect on CTRL, the main effect was in delays to motorists caused by construction work. He added that when CTRL were talking about closing roads and diverting routes this all added to the frustration being experienced by local people, so that when they encountered Operation Stack as well the results were self-explanatory.

Mr Goulette explained that part of the problem was that the traffic lights on the A20 were timed to let CTRL traffic cross when they wanted to so that priority was given to the construction traffic and that therefore no delays to CTRL resulted, but it had a very disruptive effect on people on the A20 which was then increased when Operation Stack was in force.

Mrs Lowe then thanked Councillor Cloughton, Mr Joyson and Mr Goulette for attending the meeting and answering the Committee's questions.

Mr G Prince, Strategy Commissioning Manager, East Kent Health Authority

Mr Eddy declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he is currently a non- Executive Director of the Health Authority.

Mr Prince was asked if he would like to outline Operation Stack from his point of view.

Mr Prince said that he was the Emergency Services Commissioner and Transport Commissioner for the Health Authority and that transport was part of his remit anyway. He said the Kent Ambulance Service were concerned that when Operation Stack was in force it degraded their emergency response times in parts of South East Kent. Together with the Police Service and the Fire Service they try to use alternative routes but there are occasions when alternatives are not available. He said it was then necessary for them to use the A20 but that it got very heavily congested. He added that it was important to remember that for the Ambulance Service a delay of two or three minutes could be critical for the patient and that each time Operation Stack was in force there was pressure on the emergency services.

As far as the hospitals were concerned, in particular the William Harvey Hospital, there was complete disruption for both the patients and staff, particularly in out-patient services where arrangements were geared to set booking times which were not able to be met. On many occasions appointments had to be cancelled and then re-booked which was clearly a concern to the individuals because it was difficult to make new appointments.

A third area of concern was Dover itself. Mr Prince said that it appeared to the Health Service that Dover had to get gridlocked before Operation Stack was brought into force. The Health Authority Headquarters are in Dover and Buckland Hospital and nowadays many people in the Dover area with hospital appointments need to get to the William Harvey in Ashford.

In reply to a question about whether he could give any figures or examples of delay to ambulances, Mr Prince said that there had been a recent example in Sellindge where the ambulance had arrived without too much difficulty but then was unable to rerun to hospital using the quickest route and had to make a long detour to avoid traffic congestion. The patient in question had had a cardiac arrest and the delay in arriving at the hospital was around 15 minutes. Mr Prince said that a delay of that sort in those circumstances could be a matter of life or death.

Mr Prince said he could give many other examples of the same kind of thing happening and he also added that it seemed to be happening more frequently now. He said that everyone would accept that there will be delays at the Port or the Tunnel from time to time but that it appeared to him that Operation Stack was now becoming part of the norm.

In reply to a question about whether he had a view as to the best alternative to Operation Stack, Mr Prince said that the Health Authority's view was definitely that the best alternative was a park adjacent to the M20 so that the traffic can be controlled and stacked there. Mr Prince said that the Health Authority believed that the park should be located between Ashford and Folkestone near to the point of departure and definitely with a separate feeder road to it designated as just that.

In reply to a question about whether it was true that with a number of lorry drivers involved in an Operation Stack, from time to time there would be some who would need medical attention during the course of the operation, Mr Prince said that that was indeed the case and that on more than one occasion the 999 service had been used to take a lorry driver either to the William Harvey Hospital or to Maidstone Hospital.

Mr Prince said that the other concern was the public health concern. Mr Prince said that this was general concern that had not been calculated in any detail but there were concerns about the toilet facilities after a period of, for example, 12 to 20 hours and after that length of time there were concerns about the quality of drinking water and food. Mr Prince said that if a lorry park was built, proper facilities could be provided and the Health Service could have a presence at the park.

In reply to your question about whether the Health Authority would be satisfied that if lorries were moved from the motorway to a purpose built park there would be no public health risk, Mr Prince said that he assumed that part of the development plan for such a park would be to ensure that it met the current requirements where a longer stay was anticipated rather in the way that motorway service stations have to meet certain requirements.

The current arrangements with lorries parked along the motorway give rise to another concern which is that if the delay is extended lorry drivers will get fed up with waiting and wander off and it is possible to imagine a situation where you could have people walking on the other carriageway of the motorway which again is a health or accident at risk.

In reply to a question about whether he would be satisfied that there would be adequate access for emergency vehicles, Mr Prince said that he would, a slip road off the motorway to the park would give priority access.

In reply to a question about whether there are any figures available for the number of people unable to attend hospital out-patient appointments as a result of Operation Stack, Mr Prince replied that records were not able to show specifically that Operation Stack was the cause of non-attendance although he thought that in future, particularly where patient transport and services were used, a code attributing the non-attendance to Operation Stack might well be used.

In reply to a question about whether there was a possible use for a lorry park to park ambulances to give access to the motorway system, Mr Prince said that that was a possibility particularly if the park was located between Ashford and Folkestone because Folkestone was one area where there were concerns about response times.

Overall Mr Prince said that he and his colleagues had given a lot of thought to alternative uses for a lorry park but had concluded that there were not many uses that would allow the park to be available in the necessary timescale as an alternative to Operation Stack. As a result they could see no practical use for it outside Operation Stack.

In reply to a question about the effects of congestion in towns on the Ambulance Service both during Operation Stack and at other times, Mr Prince said that if you considered the William Harvey Hospital which is probably the largest general hospital, certainly the one with the most specialist facilities, junction 10 is always a problem anyway and a worse problem when Operation Stack is in force. As people start to use other routes to avoid the junction so the traffic starts gridlocking all around the area and not just at junction 10. Mr Prince added that of course it was not just the patients that were affected but it was the staff as well. Mr Prince said that this meant that staff were unable to get in to meet their shift times and equally importantly were unable to get home at the end of their shifts. Asked whether this build up occurred before Operation Stack was implemented Mr Prince said that in the case of Ashford it was once Operation Stack was in force. However, he said that Dover was a different case altogether. Dover, he said, was only affected before Operation Stack was implemented because Dover becomes gridlocked as soon as anything happens in the Port. Mr Prince agreed that once Operation Stack was implemented the situation in Dover for the Ambulance Service was eased. He added that he had no reports of particular disruption at the hospitals in Canterbury or Margate.

In reply to a question about the arrangements for an emergency lane on the motorway during Operation Stack and whether this arrangement was adequate or could be improved, Mr Prince said that his colleagues in the Ambulance Service considered the arrangements to be adequate. He said that there had been one problem which involved a fire engine being called to a lorry fire which then effectively blocked the emergency lane for other vehicles and an ambulance was required further down the road. In this case it was not a Category A life threatening emergency but it might have been, in which case the fire engine would have had to be moved quickly as clearly it is impossible to move a 40 ton lorry or a number of 40 ton lorries with any speed at all but overall Mr Prince said that the system that is in operation for emergency services when Operation Stack is in force is satisfactory.

In reply to a question about what facilities the Health Authority would want to see in a purpose built lorry park, Mr Prince said that apart from the obvious facilities such as toilets and food outlets, he would recommend that there - should be a properly equipped first aid station. He added that staffing it maybe a different matter. He believed that even that could be dealt with but certainly there should be a facility where a doctor and team of nurses could come in and work from, as there is by the Channel Tunnel and in Dover Harbour.

In reply to a question about whether there is anything else he would like to see in a lorry park Mr Prince confirmed that mental health issues for example would be dealt with by the team he would recommend would be on call for the first aid station. Mr Prince agreed that in the event of an extended operation over a number of days there would need some provision for people's more general well-being. However, he said that the Health Service's concentration so far has been on provision for a 24 hour period and even that he said was a long time if you were sitting in a lorry with not much else to do.

When asked if, in the event of a lorry park not being built for whatever reason, there were improvements to the road infrastructure around the M20 that could be made to ease the problems, Mr Prince said that from the East Kent Health Authority's point of view Phase 1 of Operation Stack would not be located where it currently is and they would want to see it move back towards Maidstone. He also wondered, although he agreed that the Police and the Highways Authority had probably considered possible uses of the A2, about diverting traffic there. However, he concluded that this was only really diverting traffic and probably would only move the problem elsewhere.

Overall Mr Prince said that if Operation Stack was to be a fact of life they would prefer to see Phase 1 moved to the longer stretch of the M20 between Leeds Castle and junction 9 because he thought that the A20 near that particular stretch of motorway was more capable of dealing with the other traffic not involved in Operation Stack. But again Mr Prince said that that was a personal opinion and not a Health Authority one. Mr Prince repeated that the preference would be see to Phase 1 of Operation Stack brought back further up the motorway to the stretch he had mentioned leaving the junctions for Hythe and Ashford free and reducing the problems for the William Harvey Hospital. It was acknowledged that there would be more opportunities for people to bypass Operation Stack and join the motorway further down. Mr Prince added that if you were near junctions 4, 5 or 6 on the M20 and there was an announcement over the radio that Operation Stack was commencing you could see lorries diverting up the A249 to get to the M2. Mr Prince added that of course these were probably drivers who had not experienced what happened when they arrived at Jubilee Way and were turned back. However Mr Prince repeated that this section of motorway between Leeds Castle and junction 9 was a long stretch with no exits. Mr Prince repeated that this was not the real solution but that if a lorry park could not be built for whatever reason his preference was to move Operation Stack back and to have earlier implementation of Operation Stack, to relieve the gridlocking around Dover.

Mr Prince was asked if he would support early implementation if it meant Operation Stack being implemented more often. Mr Prince said that would have to be measured but that he thought it should. Certainly, he said, if you asked the people of Dover they would say so. Overall, weighing all the options up, earlier implementation of Operation Stack would be preferred. He did not necessary think that this would mean that Operation Stack would be more frequent. He said that certainly in the case of ferry companies they knew when there were going to be difficulties, they knew when ships could not sail or when Ports were blockaded and that he thought that Operation Stack should be put in place at that point rather than waiting until lorries were backing up the new stretch of the A20 towards Capel, partly because of the frustration of people who were already in that stretch and had nowhere to go. He added that although he could not provide any evidence, he knew from his experience as a motorist that there would probably be a number of frustrated drivers in that stretch getting close to accident point.

Overall Mr Prince said that the lorry park would be the better solution but that if Operation Stack was to continue then bringing it in earlier would be preferred. He said that this was probably a question of information between the Police and the ferry companies. By way of example, Mr Prince said that on one occasion recently Operation Stack had commenced without people knowing why and it had emerged later that it was because two ferries were not sailing due to industrial action on the French side. Mr Prince said that this must have been known about a number of hours before the operation was started.

In reply to a question about whether the Ambulance Service policy of placing vehicles in strategic locations around the County was altered during Operation Stack, Mr Prince said that locations were changed and more ambulances were put on station.

Mrs Lowe then thanked Mr Prince for attending the meeting and answering Member's questions.

Mr R Willcox, General Manager - Safety and Finance, Dover Harbour Board and Mr J Wheeler, Services Development Manager, Eurotunnel

In reply to a question about how they saw Operation Stack and the development of an alternative, Mr Willcox said that firstly both operators would try to do everything they can to prevent Operation Stack happening. It had to be remembered that the people who were sitting in the queues were going to be their customers, and so they were giving them a bad service. Mr Willcox said that one of the things that had taken him by surprise over recent years had been the rate of growth in road traffic in total in South East Kent. He was aware that Eurotunnel had brought in extra freight capacity during the summer which had taken quite a lot of additional traffic, SeaFrance are building new ships and Norfolk Line have started operating, so they were trying to match the capacity of the system to demand, but this could not be done overnight.

He said he hoped that this would reduce the number of occasions on which Operation Stack was needed but that at the moment this was not always within their control. What was needed he said was to find a system that worked as well as Operation Stack even though he knew that it caused a lot of problems for different people. He said that they had tried to have an off-road solution quite a few years ago near Ashford at Seavington but that this had proved to be a disaster and therefore if they were going to have an alternative they had to be able to prove that it would be better in the sense that it had to take the lorries and had to get them off the roads without clogging up other roads and get them back on again because, if they could not get them back into the system easily, they could not deal with the build-up. Mr Prince said that he could see no real alternatives in the Port. He said that they were constrained with the cliffs at one side and the sea at the other.

Mr Willcox said that more land could be created because that is how space had been created in the past through reclamation, however, as the water where they were trying to reclaim land got deeper it became more and more expensive to do so. Current reclamation costs were, he said, about a £1½ million an acre just to provide the land before you start servicing it. Mr Willcox said that therefore, the ideal had to be something that would serve both Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover, because at the different times the problems affect both of them. Ideally it should be by the M20 where the traffic could be controlled.

Mr Wheeler added that to add to what Mr Willcox had said it was the rate of growth that had caught them out. He said that Eurotunnel was originally designed to take the entire freight market and effectively put Dover Harbour Board out of business. They then found that they were full and the Harbour Board was still there. In 1998 Eurotunnel announced that it was doubling its capacity. Since that date it had added an extra 5 shuttles bringing the number to 13 and this number would eventually be 16.

Mr Wheeler said that the rate of growth was something that was very difficult to predict. He said that like any commercial organisation Eurotunnel had had to take a fairly prudent view of what growth is and although it has been in the region of 10-15% per year for the last ten years, he wondered how long can that could go on. Mr Wheeler said that common sense would suggest that it could not continue at that rate because there must be a finite number of lorries wanting to cross through the Tunnel at any particular time but they did not know. He went on to say that their capacity was keeping pace with growth although their plan had been to be ahead of growth. He said that we would see further increases in capacity, although not as much as this year which had seen 30% capacity increase, and Eurotunnel would continue to provide additional capacity subsequent years but at a slower rate.

In summary Mr Wheeler said that the rate of growth was a question to which no-one knew the answer but that he thought it was going to continue because he could not see another route to Europe and he could not foresee a change in the pattern of trade with Europe. In terms of Operation Stack, Mr Wheeler said that having seen the early versions of the operation a great deal of credit should go to the Police in terms of how they have adapted it and got a working arrangement. He said that it was not nice, it was customers being inconvenienced together with the local population, but he thought that credit should go to them for developing over the last couple of years a workable arrangement which he said was probably the best bet that we have got at the moment.

Mr Wheeler said the site of any lorry park needed to be adjacent to the motorway because the problems that had been seen in Ashford when trying to divert lorries to the park there had been "horrendous". He said that one of the concerns for both the Police and the commercial operators was maintaining public order and that when you took traffic away from the motorway area it was very difficult to maintain a system of "first come first go". Mr Wheeler said that truck drivers generally exhibit immense patience as long as they believed they were being treated in a fair manner but that when they felt they were not being treated fairly they had an ability to cause a disproportionate amount of disruption. Therefore, he said, it needs to be close to the motorway and it needs to preserve the first in first out flow, the further away from the motorway the harder that became and probably more labour intensive as well.

Mr Wheeler said that one common theme had been the questions "can't we just tell them not to turn up or get them to go somewhere else?" Mr Wheeler said that as a commercial company Eurotunnel obviously looked carefully at its competitors which ranged from the North Sea to the South Coast and also included air freight, but their conclusion was that there was nowhere else to go, it was South East Kent or nowhere and other routes were not a realistic option to take the volume of traffic. You cannot ask people for example, coming down the M 1 to go somewhere else because there is nowhere else for them to go.

Mr Willcox said that in practice it was actually worse than that because if there was a general blockage people would come from the other Ports and join the queue here in Kent rather than go home, in spite of the knowledge that there would be a queue here.

Mr Wheeler said that there were several reasons for this which they had looked at as part of trying to understand the market. Some of the drivers were foreign drivers who had nowhere else to go. For these drivers there was no point in parking, they might just as well join a queue even if it was moving very slowly. In the past they had tried to send a fax to every customer using an automated fax sending machine saying that they were experiencing difficulties and that there were likely to be delays and it had no effect at all. This was because lorries were on route and it was too late to call them back. Others were at the depot, but it was important to remember that this was a very cut-throat business and they would lose their contract if they delivered late. They may get a warning the first time but deliver late twice and they have lost their contract.

Mr Wheeler said that, as a result, when there were difficulties depot managers were telling their drivers to get out there as soon as possible and get in the queue. He said that it would not wash with most of their customers if they rang them up and said that they had decided to hold back half of the lorries because they realised that there were going to be delays. He said that he suspected at the moment that would be commercial suicide for them. As a result, he said that they were in a cleft stick, their margins were small and they could not risk losing contracts so they would not hold their vehicles back. He said that that brought them back to a solution somewhere close to the M20 with a suitable amount of space.

(At this point Mr Weston said that he wanted to declare an interest because he had a number of Eurotunnel shares.)

In reply to a question about whether they would see that they had the responsibility or capability to contribute to the cost of an alternative to Operation Stack, Mr Wheeler said that Eurotunnel believed that this was a Central Government issue; that they were providing a service to cross the Channel and they did not believe that it was for Eurotunnel to fund basic infrastructure in the UK to support the movement of goods through the country. Unfortunately the phenomenon seen with Operation Stack was part of the infrastructure of the UK. He said that Eurotunnel were doing their bit, they were trying to see that cross Channel traffic ran unimpeded but he did not think that Eurotunnel would feel that it was for them to fund developments whether they were 10 miles up the road or anywhere else in the UK to further assist the movement of goods to Europe.

Asked if this would be the case even though the delays might cause them to lose business with hauliers going elsewhere, Mr Willcox said that if we just created a waiting area by the motorway rather than improving the outflow for everybody else they would not be carrying the freight any quicker, lorries would still be being delayed. Therefore he said he felt strongly the same as Mr Wheeler and that if the operators were going to be spending more money they would rather spend it on moving more traffic than giving it somewhere to sit.

Asked if that meant that they would rather see money invested in improved routes rather than an off-road parking area, Mr Willcox said that he was not sure that supplying an off-road lorry park would make drivers more or less willing to use alternative routes. He said that it was the waiting that was the problem and from their point of view it did not really matter whether they were waiting on the motorway or in the lorry park, they were still waiting.

Mr Wheeler said that he thought that there was a danger of trespassing into the area of whether the UK should have a strategic view of its transportation links. He said that it almost appeared by chance that South East Kent had become the main route to Europe without a debate within the country about whether it was right or sensible to have one route to the Continent or whether another route should have been developed through one of the South Coast or North Sea Ports. He said that the percentage of traffic coming through the South East was enormous but that was a strategic question and he did not think that it would be appropriate for a commercial company to be telling the Government that it should have looked a little earlier.

Mr Willcox said that it was also important to look at where the problems were coming from and that most of the difficulties, although not all of them, were either caused by industrial relations problems in France or bad weather and he did not see any call, when there was bad weather on the M25 and there were lots of lorries around, for the various depots that they came from to provide money to develop it. He said that if they were the root cause of the problem most of the time they would find it much more difficult to defend their position but that at the moment most of it was not caused by the lack of capacity in the market place. He said that occasionally it was, and that it had been on Wednesday of that week. This had been caused by a bank holiday in France on the Tuesday and therefore two lots of lorries which had not been able to go on the road on the Tuesday had arrived.

Mr Wheeler added that there had also been the storm and lorries had been delayed and arrived later than planned.

In reply to a question which asked that, if there were money available to solve the problem, would there be improvements to the local infrastructure which would allow local traffic to keep moving, which would mean that local politicians would not get complaints

and possibly the reputations of Eurotunnel and Dover Harbour would not be damaged when there was disruption, Mr Wheeler said that he could not think how he could spend an equivalent sum of money elsewhere to deliver the same level of improvement or better to the local residents. He could not think of an alternative use of the funds which would give a better return.

In reply to a question about what they would see as their role in a purpose built lorry park, Mr Willcox said that in many ways it would be similar to their role in Operation Stack which was that both organisations normally sent staff to assist the Police, so that in essence they would probably be running the park, getting it badged up so that people knew that they were in the right lane and controlling the first in first out, not dealing with the traffic getting off the road. Then there would also be controls at Eurotunnel and at the entrance to the Port to make sure that the people they were dealing with were people who had gone through the process properly and turning them back if they had not.

Mr Wheeler said that they generally provided between 3 and 6 members of staff to support the operation. He said that it tended to be the operator who was having the difficulty, for example if there was a strike blocking the Port that would tend to free up staff whereas Eurotunnel would probably be running flat out trying to cope with the additional demand. Similarly if the Tunnel was blocked for any reason they would then be the ones who would be more likely to be able to free up staff. He said that generally on the ground staff from the two organisations worked well together and had in fact got to know each other quite well.

Mr Willcox added that they provided certain pieces of equipment such as mobile signing which they had worked on with Kent Police to make Operation Stack work properly.

When asked if they could see that if money for a lorry park was not available for a number of years whether there would be incremental improvements that could be made, Mr Wheeler said that he struggled to see what could be done. He said that there had been a number of times in the early days when they had not got it right but that over a period of time, thanks to all the agencies involved, it had developed and had improved into what was quite a slick operation although it might not look that way to local residents. It was quite slick in terms of putting it on and more importantly taking it off as soon as possible. He said that everyone had a clear idea of what needed to be done and how quickly and that there was good liaison between Dover, Eurotunnel and the Police to make sure that they were bringing the system in as quickly as possible. He said that it was difficult to see from their point of view what more could be done on an incremental basis. That was not to say that the Police or the Fire Brigade might not have some views.

Mr Willcox said that it was important to find a solution to the quantity of traffic that was being handled between junctions 11 and 12 where you were dealing with 800-1,000 lorries, and so dealing with for example 100 lorries would only be tenth of the solution.

Mr Wheeler added that he did not think it possible to build a park for the worst case. He said that he was not sure how many vehicles cross the Channel in a day but that it was probably about 5,000 between the two companies which would suggest that if there was a 24 hour block on both operators there could be 5,000 lorries to look after. Allowing about 20 metres a lorry, that was something like a 100 kilometres of roadway that they would take up. He said that it was therefore a question of hoping that both operators were not out of action at the same time.

Mr Willcox added that in those circumstances the queue would be growing at a rate of 4 or 5 kilometres an hour. He said that it would be impossible to walk to the back of the queue because it would be growing faster than you could get back so that you had to keep pulling lorries off the front somehow.

In reply to a question about whether Eurotunnel considered that they had fulfilled their obligations under the Channel Tunnel Act, given the difficulties with the Ashford lorry park, Mr Wheeler said he thought they had. Mr Wheeler said that one of the difficulties was that the Truckstop seemed to be full on busy nights and that it was on busy nights that problems generally occurred so that although there were 280 or so spaces at the truck park on busy nights it was already 90% full and it was not that effective therefore in terms of providing additional capacity. He said there was some effect because they knew that the lorry park got busier when there was disruption but that it only made a small difference.

When asked if it made a difference to the operators whether lorries were stacked on the motorway or anywhere else in terms of their operation, Mr Willcox said that it did. He explained that what they tried to do was to get the lorries split according to the route they would be taking. He said that if one route was clearing faster than another this gave the drivers an opportunity to swap routes and choose the one that appeared quickest. There was therefore, a commercial necessity to ensure that they were operating as quickly and efficiently as possible or they would lose customers.

Mr Willcox said that the drivers did not have a ticket before arriving at the port. They were therefore not a known customer until they turned up at the gate. Mr Wheeler said that most lorry drivers had an account with all the ferry operators and with Eurotunnel and so they could go to whichever operator was moving the fastest or was the cheapest at the time.

In reply to a question about whether they had any information about how much of the increase of traffic was due to international trade, for example bringing goods into Rotterdam and then roading them back to this country or alternatively bringing cars into Sheerness and then taking them through to the Continent. Mr Wheeler said that the answer was probably not as much as they would like. Mr Wheeler said that he was interested in this type of operation because Eurotunnel was also a rail operator trying to encourage as much use of rail freight as possible but that he did not believe at the moment that there was a significant amount of this kind of traffic.

Mr Willcox agreed by saying that it had always been there but that he did not believe that it had grown significantly.

Mr Wheeler said that there were some plans to use more trains for this and there had been discussions between national rail companies but in terms of the effect on road freight he did not believe there had been anything significant.

Mr Willcox said that he thought there were two main drivers: one was that we had seen growth in the South East that was faster than in the country in general, the competition between the two operators had funnelled more and more traffic into Eurotunnel and Dover to the detriment of other routes. The second was the opening up of Europe and the moving of barriers. When Portugal and Spain came into the EC there was a big surge, a big growth in traffic. The Berlin Wall has come down and there is now a huge amount of Eastern European traffic coming in. So the whole freeing up of Europe has created a lot more traffic generally and a lot more economic growth throughout Europe. As transport becomes more efficient and transport costs come down you can afford to move things around further. Mr Willcox added that Eurotunnel and Dover were at the point where a lot of the traffic comes through.

In reply to a further question about Eurotunnel's obligation under the Channel Tunnel Act to provide additional lorry parking, Mr Wheeler said that he was not an expert on the matter but that he would give his understanding of the situation and no doubt Eurotunnel's lawyers would give a more formal, considered view if required. Mr Wheeler said that the

Ashford Freight Park has about 280 spaces' and then an extra area. The difficulty with the extra area was firstly that it was designated as a green area and therefore Eurotunnel were not allowed to coat it in concrete which would probably have been the more sensible solution.

Mr Wheeler said that as a result a consulting engineer had come up with an alternative proposal which had been put to the authorities asking if this was what they had in mind. They agreed to it and as a result Eurotunnel believed they had fulfilled their commitment.

Mr Wheeler said that unfortunately the surface had proved unsuccessful but that it was a compromise that was forced on Eurotunnel because of the planning restriction in that part of Ashford. Mr Wheeler said that his understanding was that it went to Ashford as the Planning Authority and that this area was designated as a green area of some form. Mr Wheeler said that if the Committee wanted a full and detailed explanation he would suggest that one could be provided in writing by Eurotunnel lawyers.

Mr Willcox added that even if the sites in Ashford had the capacity and the surface had worked, the site still had problems including problems of access.

In a reply to a question about the effects of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, Mr Wheeler said that he did not believe that it would have a significant effect on road traffic. He said that it would improve the Eurostar service and that he hoped as a local resident that the local and commuting rail services would also benefit from the investment but he did not believe it would have a significant impact for freight.

Mr Willcox said that it would free up existing capacity for freight on the tracks but he did not think they would see any more freight unless the Government and Continental Governments actually show that they mean it when they say that they want to move freight from road to rail. He said not a lot happens to actually encourage it to do so.

In reply to a question about the background to commencing Operation Stack, Mr Wheeler said that from Eurotunnel's point of view it was clearly the Police who call Operation Stack. It was their decision based on the information that they have. He said that Eurotunnel did advise the Police if they were aware through anything they heard from the industry of a potential problem and they would normally inform the Police Headquarters in Maidstone. He said that for example they had done that in the past where they have become aware of rumours and as the information became more solid they had continued to let the Police know. Mr Wheeler said that they would try, if they picked up something, to let the Police know as early as possible. Mr Wheeler said that that had happened twice when they had an inkling that something was going to happen at a particular time for which they wanted to be ready. However, he said that predominantly it does not happen that way and they do not have advance warning, in fact he said it came as a surprise to them. Mr Wheeler said that they tended to see the effects as it started to build up on the approach road from junction IIA to their check in, a distance of about 3/4 mile and they see it as the traffic is building up. Mr Wheeler said it does have a somewhat tidal flow in any case. He said that this might occur because something further up the motorway had happened to delay traffic and would give the appearance of light traffic and then all of a sudden there would be a surge, but he said that they would keep an eye on it and that there was a marker point at the terminal at which the advice to their terminal control centre was to "call the Police" and ask if they could see the same things happening on their cameras. Mr Wheeler said the Police normally have a better view because they also have cameras further up the motorway and that they try and do a count of vehicles, try to balance factors to see whether the flow rate was slowing down or whether it was going to start queuing back onto the motorway. Mr Wheeler added that the Police were generally good at doing this. He said that it was for the Police to take the decision whether the operation went into effect or not.

Mr Willcox said that it was similar for them although not on the motorway." He said that their terminal control managers would be in touch with Kent Police or Kent Police in touch with them. He said that within the terminal, from the lorry check-ins, there was probably room for about 200 lorries and if the queue started building up they would start talking to Kent Police and to Eurotunnel to find out if anyone else knew any reason why this should be happening. There was, he said, a lot of communication going on. He added that if Kent Police knew there was something happening, for example an accident on the M20, they would let them know and they would know that when it was finished they could expect a number of lorries to come through quickly.

In summary Mr Willcox said it was a co-ordinated judgement, so that if at a particular time the traffic was starting to queue up they would be in touch with the Police to say that it was more than they would expect at this time and that it looked like it was going to be a heavy evening, for example, and it would be important to keep an eye on it. He said that the Police make the final judgement but that they tried to keep them informed as far as possible and that they all tried to ensure that if Operation Stack was implemented that it was started early enough. He said that the danger in the early days was that they not only had Operation Stack and all the problems with that but that they had also brought Dover to a halt and the traffic was queuing back at junction IIA and that therefore the problems had been doubled. Mr Willcox said that it was a [me judgement for the Police and difficult for them. They do not want to set it up, it is expensive and time consuming, it uses lots of labour and upsets everybody and if it was only going to be for ½ hour there was little point in doing it. However, he said that if you leave it too late it causes as much trouble as if you bring it in too early.

In reply to a question about whether Operation Stack was being used more frequently, Mr Wheeler said that the answer is no and that it probably felt more common than it was. Mr Willcox said that was his feeling as well, that in spite of the fact that the quantity of freight had grown he was hoping that when Eurotunnel had their extra capacity and the Port of Dover did as well, that they would not see an increase in the implementation of Operation Stack and that it would in fact reduce. However, he added that the terminals were only a fixed size and therefore the buffer that they had was limited and the buffer was not growing in line with the capacity which he saw as a potential problem.

Mrs Lowe than thanked Mr Willcox and Mr Wheeler for attending the meeting and answering the Committee's questions.

OO/comm/scrutiny/notes/sp/tr-os-O31100

Written Evidence

Wickenden, Paul – CS LS

From: Green Damian[SMTP:GREEND@parliament.uk]
Sent: 26 October 2000 17:43
To: Wickenden, Paul - CS LS
Cc: Ward Susan
Subject: Operation Stack

Word Document: OPERATION STACK.doc

I attach my thoughts for the Strategic Planning Scrutiny Committee meeting on November 3rd on Operation Stack. Please contact me on 020 7219 3911 if there are any problems.

Damian Green

OPERATION STACK. doc»

OPERATION STACK

COMMENTS BY DAMIAN GREEN, MP FOR ASHFORD

I am delighted that the County Council is assembling evidence to support a case that would end the problems caused by Operation Stack. This is a matter of clear and increasing urgency. As long ago as January 29th 1999 I received a letter from the Chief Constable of Kent, in response to my complaints about the effects of Operation Stack, in which he said:

'I am fully aware that this is not an ideal solution... There is a representative forum involving Kent Police, Ashford Borough Council and County Emergency Planning, the Highways Agency and other emergency services and commercial enterprises, which meets to discuss the present and arising issues, and possible long term solutions.'

It is nearly two years since that letter was written, and apparently no progress has been made.

There are two reasons why Operation Stack is not acceptable even as a second-best solution to the problems of blockages at the Channel Ports. The first is economic.

To quote from the Kent Local Transport Plan 2001-2006;

'Kent is the UK's Gateway to Europe. We provide the major cross Channel links-the Channel ports and the Tunnel which act as the main routes for our trade and tourism. We must ensure that international traffic travels through Kent efficiently, minimising environmental damage, yet providing opportunity for economic growth and regeneration.'

In the context of this strategy, to use Kent's motorways as a car park several times a year, at irregular times and with no warning (through no fault usually of anyone in Kent or indeed the UK) is very damaging. There are often times when the Tunnel is open even if the ports are closed, but if the M20 is shut then the 'Gateway to Europe' is effectively shut anyway. We should look at the motorways as the last resort for a temporary lorry park, not the first resort.

This could have serious implications for long-term inward investment. If it is known that Kent's key road is closed several times a year, international companies will find the County much less attractive as a destination.

The second reason why an alternative to Operation Stack is necessary is the knock-on effect of motorway closures on residents. The move from the M20 to

surrounding roads causes widespread gridlock of the type Operation Stack is supposed to prevent. Many of my constituents have told me of the effects of trying to travel to and from work on over-crowded and unsuitable roads. For the residents of Kent to have to expect this as a price to pay for living in the County is not reasonable.

The solution must involve finding an area which can be set aside as a lorry park both near the motorway and near to the Channel ports and the Tunnel entrance. Ideally, this would be on a brownfield site.

I am sure that traffic management techniques can also be used to minimise the problem, in that lorries should be discouraged and/or prevented from coming into Kent at all when it is known that the Channel is blocked. This would have the effect of spreading the need for parking places, in a way which should make each temporary park less intrusive for local residents.

The main issue is the need for speed. This is not a new problem, not is it one that is becoming less frequent. The authorities need to propose a solution soon, if the effects of recurrent gridlock are not to cause long-damage to the interests of Kent and its people.

From: THE RT. HON. MICHAEL HOWARD, Q.C., M.P.



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HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Paul Wickenden Esq
Scrutiny Committee Secretary
Kent County Council
Legal & Secretariat
Sessions House, County Hall
Maidstone ME14 1XQ

19 October 2000

Dear Mr Wickenden

Thank you for your letter of 4 October about Operation Stack.

I am at present uncertain about my precise movements on Friday 3 November so I do not know whether I will be able to attend your meeting on that day.

I am, however, in full support of the approach to the Government suggested by the Cabinet. Operation Stack causes immense inconvenience and difficulty for my constituents. When the motorway is closed the increase in traffic on the other roads in the area is very considerable indeed. This leads to enormous delays and makes it very difficult for my constituents to go about their ordinary business.

It is clearly wrong in principle that local people should suffer in this way as a result of the fact that actions completely outside their control caused international traffic to use local roads instead of the motorway which was designed for that purpose.

The only solution seems to me to be the provision of an alternative site for the temporary parking of the traffic destined for the Channel Tunnel and the

Constituency Advice Centres:

Second Saturday in every month
Village Hall, Brookland 8-45a.m.
Guild Hall, Lydd 9-30a.m.
Town Hall, New Romney 10-30a.m.
Jubilee Hall, St. Mary's Bay 11-30a.m.
Parish Council Office, Dymchurch 12 noon

Fourth Saturday in every month
Council Office, Oaklands, Hythe 9-00a.m.
4 West Cliff Gardens, Folkestone 10-15a.m.



ports. The sooner this is provided, the better. My constituents have already suffered for far too long.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely

Home Pitcairne

Dictated by Michael Howard and signed in his
Absence abroad by his Private Secretary

Gwyn Prosser MP
Labour Member of Parliament for Dover & Deal



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Paul Wickenden
Scrutiny Committee Secretary
Kent County Council
Sessions House
County Hall
Maidstone
ME14 1XQ

02 November 2000

Dear Paul

Operation Stack

Thank you for providing opportunity to participate in the Strategic Planning Scrutiny Committee's review of Operation Stack. As you know my representative, Martin Garside, is unfortunately unable to join you on November 3rd so I am accepting your invitation to submit my thoughts in writing and I attach a note for your consideration.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gwyn'.

Gwyn Prosser MP

Please direct all correspondence to the Constituency Office:
26 Coombe Valley Road, Dover, Kent, CT17 0EP
Tel: 01304 214484 Fax: 01304 214486



**OPERATION STACK - GWYN PROSSER'S SUBMISSION TO KCC'S
STRATEGIC PLANNING SCUTININY COMMITTEE 03/11/ 2000**

Operation Stack, as presently configured, seems to meet the primary objective of segregating and holding port bound traffic on the M20 in a safe and manageable manner when traffic approaching the port and the tunnel cannot be accommodated by their combined capacities. The system is well tried and tested and Kent Police have developed a good working relationship with officials from the Port of Dover, Eurotunnel and other participating parties.

However there are some very clear disadvantages of the present arrangements - the most notable being the requirement to close the Motorway between junction 11 and 11A together with all the associated disruption and delay that this causes to traffic not bound for the port or the tunnel.

The provision of an emergency parking area would be far superior to the present arrangements but such a park would need to be of sufficient capacity to hold a thousand or more vehicles and ideally be positioned close to the M20 with easy access and egress. Such a site would be costly to acquire and expensive to develop and service. There would also be important environmental issues to consider.

An alternative option is to provide additional holding capacity by the construction of by pass roads or parallel road lanes to the M20 which could have the advantage of being available for use at times other than when stacking is called for.

However I would favour providing stacking capacity by improving and widening the A2 at its eastern most end. The last nine miles of this important road is still largely single carriageway and there is a very strong case for the dualling of the Lydden to Dover section in its own right. The Committee will be aware that this has been on the County's list of recommended works for many years but has never acquired the priority it deserves.

Dualling this section of the A2 would have very clear economic advantages to Dover and Thanet which were recognised by KCC many years ago. Recent developments at the White Cliffs Business Park, the opening of Dover's Port Zone, the proposed developments at Manston and plans for the Sandwich corridor have all served to improve the case for improving and dualling the A2.

Adopting this alternative would open the possibility of attracting European funding by seeking its inclusion as a Trans European Network Scheme (TENS). Bearing in mind that the vast majority of times that port congestion and Eurotunnel delays take place are caused by actions outside our control - such as industrial action and blockades instigated on mainland Europe - it seems entirely appropriate that we should be seeking a trans-European method of funding a remedy.



Highway Manager *zur. Ing.* Robert H. Kersey C.Eng., M.I.C.E.

DOVER
Highway Unit

Mr. P. Wickenden
Scrutiny Committee Secretary
Kent County Council Legal and Secretariat

The Council Offices
White Cliffs Business Park
Dover
Kent CT16 3PG

Telephone: (01304) 821199
Fax: (01304) 872445
E-Mail: pts@dover.gov.uk

Contact: Mr. A. Blackburn
Reply to: Highway Engineering
Direct line: (01304) 872438
Our ref: AB/JMP/H103.11
Your ref:
Date: 8 November 2000

Dear Mr. Wickenden,

Emergency Lorry Parking for Cross Channel Traffic - Operation Stack

I refer to your letter of 4 October 2000.

At the Joint Transportation Committee of 6 November 2000, Members were advised of your need for written evidence on the effect of Operation Stack.

As you may expect the matter was discussed in detail, a concise summary of which is outlined below.

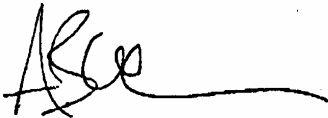
1. Dover has already felt the impact of the freight congestion before Operation Stack is in place. It is those first hours before Stack is set up and working that cause problems, once in place Operation Stack works well.
2. The approach made by KCC to GOSE should be to encourage dialogue with the European Union, stressing that this is a problem of congestion on both sides of the Channel. The focus should be on Emergency Planning generally and not just on providing a hardstanding area.
3. There is a need to look at the wider issues of the road transport infrastructure within East Kent. In particular to pursue the dualling of the A2 from Lydden to Dover and to look at improving certain roads off the M20, at Folkestone, Ashford and beyond.
4. Concern was voiced at the number of occasions that Operation Stack was put in place. There was a general feeling that the frequency is increasing and that French Union disputes are more often than not the reason for such increase.

- 2 -

5. It was appreciated that if a permanent lorry park was constructed it would be desirable for this to have a dual use but that this was difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.
6. A request was also made that before Operation Circle is trialled, the Committee can discuss the implications of the proposals.

I trust that the foregoing is of interest, should you have any need for further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Blackburn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alan Blackburn
Engineering Manager - Highways



PB Kennedy & Donkin Limited
A Parsons Brinckerhoff Company

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Mr P Wickenden
Legal and Secretariat
Sessions House
County Hall
MAIDENSTONE
Kent ME14 1QX

25 October 2000

Our Ref: HHITN103

Dear Mr Wickenden

M20 TRUCK PARKING STUDY - EVIDENCE FOR SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thank you for your letter dated 18 October inviting us to provide evidence for your Scrutiny Committee on 3 November 2000.

PB Kennedy and Donkin have been working with the Highways Agency and the Cross Channel Road Emergency Parking Group. We have carried out numerous surveys and assessments, which have been reported through this Committee.

Our clients for carrying out this work are the Highways Agency and we have assisted them in preparing the evidence you requested. This evidence will be sent to you directly from the Highways Agency. Any further information that we will produce would result in duplication of evidence to your Committee.

If there are any further details that require clarification, we would be pleased to supply them through the Highways Agency where our contact is David Stark.

Yours sincerely

D BLACK
Technical Director

Over a Century of
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Godalming GU7 2AZ



P Wickenden Esq.
Scrutiny Committee Secretary
Kent County Council
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ME14 1XQ

20 October 2000

**EMERGENCY LORRY PARKING FOR CROSS CHANNEL TRAFFIC -
"OPERATION STACK"**

Thankyou for your letter of 18 October.

CPT is only indirectly involved when "Operation Stack" is introduced.

Upon receipt of faxed messages from Dover Harbour Board regarding the status of 'STACK' we advise our Members as appropriate with a view to avoiding coach passenger delays and to coaches avoiding the congestion - if possible.

I am personally involved with the search for a better solution to the emergency parking problem than "Operation Stack" and I support the County Council's Cabinet wish that talks on this matter take place between KCC and the Government.

Trusting this assists your inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Hirst', written over a horizontal line.

Brian Hirst
Traffic Executive

Confederation of Passenger Transport UK

Imperial House 15-19 Kingsway London WC2B 6UN Telephone: 020 7240 3131 Facsimile: 020 7240 6565
email: cpt@cpt-uk.org Web site: www.cpt-uk.org/cpt

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Wickenden, Paul - CS LS

From: Lulu Robertson[SMTP:lrobertson@fta.co.uk]
Sent: 27 October 2000 09:26
To: Wickenden, Paul - CS LS
Cc: Sue Moody
Subject: Emergency Lorry Parking for Cross Channel Traffic - "Operation Stack"

Dear Mr Wickenden

I refer to your letter of 18 October 2000 which was received at these offices on Friday 20 October. Although I am endeavouring to reply to you by the 26th I am sure you will appreciate that 4 working days barely provides the opportunity for a comprehensive response to the request for "written evidence".

FTA is the country's leading trade association when dealing with distribution and logistics issues whether it is by road, rail, sea or air. Many of our members vehicles have over the years been involved in the problems facing operators when for whatever reason it becomes impossible to use either the ferries and/or the Channel Tunnel to take HGVs to France. As I am sure you will appreciate the cost to our members over the years has been massive, involving:

- a.. the delays caused by vehicles having to be stationary on the M20
- b.. the subsequent financial losses from the above
- c.. the loss of availability of both vehicles and drivers
- d.. the inconvenience and hardship to the drivers themselves.

Obviously FTA would support a purpose designed emergency lorry park with direct connections to the M20, subject to certain criteria.

Bearing in mind the speed with which the lorry parking may be necessary would the purpose designed emergency park be available 24 hours a day 365 days a year.

Who would be responsible for monitoring and security at the lorry park. This is an important issue as it is likely that with several hundred lorries situated at one spot for anything between 8 hours and 4 or 5 days it would be a magnet to unscrupulous individuals.

Presumably by purpose built you mean hardstanding; adequate lighting; all the necessary facilities being available ie. food, toilets, etc.

Access to the M20 must be such that it would be easy to both enter and vacate the lorry park without too many problems?

Would commercial vehicle operators be expected to pay for the lorry park? Bearing in mind its use would probably have to be compulsory in the event of a dispute with the French I would assume that its use would be free of charge.

Who would bear the initial costs of the purpose designed emergency lorry park being constructed?

As I say there are a number of issues to be satisfactorily resolved and the above is very much an initial outline of our main concerns.

If I can assist further please do not hesitate to let me know.

Yours sincerely

Sue Moody
Regional Policy Manager
London and South East Region

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Mr Paul Wickenden
Scrutiny Committee Secretary
Kent County Council
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MAIDSTONE Kent ME14 1XQ

Direct Line: 01306 878302
Fax: 01306 878100

30 October 2000

Dear Mr Wickenden

**EMERGENCY LORRY PARKING FOR CROSS CHANNEL TRAFFIC
"OPERATION STACK"**

I refer to your letters of 4 and 19 October inviting the Highways Agency to participate in the County Council's Strategic Planning Scrutiny Committee meeting on Friday, 3 November, at the offices of Ashford Borough Council. As I am unable to participate in the process in person I am pleased to provide the committee with written statement about the Agency's involvement in Operation Stack.

The Highways Agency is an executive agency of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) responsible for the trunk road network in England. Its strategic aim is to contribute to sustainable development by maintaining, operating and improving the trunk road network in England in support of the Government's integrated transport policy.

As the highway authority responsible for the trunk road network in Kent, the Highways Agency, in conjunction with other interested parties, has taken an active role in Kent County Council's 'Channel Road Transport Group' in setting up an emergency plan at the time of the construction of the Channel Tunnel in 1994, to ensure that road access into and out of Dover is maintained during incidents affecting cross channel traffic. The HA attends the Group on a regular basis, together with its maintenance agent, WS Atkins, to assist in reviewing the emergency plan and we have contributed in developing and refining the emergency procedures to the current 'Operation Stack', a process with which I am sure the Committee is familiar.

The Highways Agency is well aware of the major traffic disruption caused to motorists as a result of incidents affecting cross channel services and we recognise that the present arrangements of stacking lorries on the M20 motorway is less than ideal. To assist in minimising the frustration and inconvenience we, through our managing agents and our term contractor, assist Kent Police, who use their powers to invoke 'Operation Stack' as and when the situation demands. The cost of providing the traffic management has been and continues to be funded by the Agency.



In an attempt to identify possible alternatives, including the identification of possible sites and the feasibility of parking lorries off the motorway, the Agency has made available its consultants (Kennedy & Donkin) to assist the Channel Road Transport Group.

The Highways Agency in conjunction with the Group will continue to play its part in seeking a satisfactory long-term solution for dealing with trunk road traffic during periods of major disruption to cross channel services.

Yours sincerely



David Stark
Area Manager
SENCs Team 4
E-mail: david.stark@highways.gov.uk

OPERATION STACK
ACTIVATIONS; 2000.

Appendix 4

No.:	Date:	Time:	Phase	Set up/ Stand-down	OIS Ref:	Reason:
1	19-Jan	2225 hrs	One	Set up	19,0410	Industrial action in France (Port workers and ET).
	20-Jan	0121 hrs	One	Stand-down		
2	05-Apr	1748 hrs	One	Set up	05,0558	Increased demand at Dover Docks.
	05-Apr	2347 hrs	One	Stand-down		
3	17-May	1659 hrs	One	Set up	17,0359	Technical problems in ET followed by industrial action in France (Sea France).
	18-May	0139 hrs	One	Stand-down		
4	30-May	1852 hrs	One	Set up	30,0585 30,0620	Technical problems in ET followed by industrial action in France (Sea France). Compounded by increased demand due to national holiday in France on 1/6/00.
	31-May	1603 hrs	One	Stand-down		
5	12-Jun	1800 hrs	One	Set up	12,0465	Increased demand at Port of Dover and ET following French Bank Holiday on 11/6/00.
	13-Jun	0108 hrs	One	Stand-down		
6	30-Aug	1038 hrs	One	Set up	29,0335 30,0128	French port and ET blockades by French fishermen re fuel duties.
	30-Aug	1855 hrs	Two	Set up		
	31-Aug	1220 hrs	Two	Stand-down		
	31-Aug	2255 hrs	One	Stand-down		
7	30-Oct	0318 hrs	One	Set up	29,1321	Port of Dover closed due to storms in Southern England.
	31-Oct	0329 hrs	One	Stand-down		
8	01-Nov	1613 hrs	One	Set up	01,0487	Increased demand at ET and Port of Dover following storms and French Bank Holiday. "A" carriageway between junctions 10 & 11 also used as insufficient staff available to implement Phase 2.
	02-Nov	0517 hrs	One	Stand-down		
9	14-Nov	1716 hrs	One	Set up	14,0422	Industrial action in France (Sea France) and midweek peak demand. After Op Stack removed, tailbacks on A20 to Sarnphire Hoe. Tailbacks ceased by 2316 hrs.
	14-Nov	1825 hrs	One	Stand-down		
10	22-Nov	1610 hrs	One	Set up	22,0496	Increased demand at ET and Port of Dover.
	23-Nov	0032 hrs	One	Stand-down		

Updated 23rd November 2000.