

Mitigating against the impact of Operation Stack

A report by the Head of Network Management to the Highways Advisory Board on 8 July 2008

Background

1. As reported to the May meeting, the Highways Advisory Board will be aware that Operation Stack is a Kent Police-led incident that closes the M20 coastbound between junctions 11 and 12 (phase 1) and junctions 8 – 9 (phase 2) when there is disruption at the port of Dover or Eurotunnel through bad weather, industrial action or technical failure.
2. Kent Police have made a tactical decision to deploy phase 2 in preference to phase 1 for 2 main reasons:
 - (i) capacity - Phase 1 holds 800 lorries whereas phase 2 holds 3,200 lorries.
 - (ii) resourcing issues.
3. Whilst all agencies (Highways Agency, Interroute, Kent Fire & Rescue, Kent County Council, other local authorities etc.) work together during Stack to minimise the effect of Stack, we do so in support of Kent Police in their role as the lead agency.
4. A number of concerns and suggestions have been put forward by the public, county members and other stakeholders about the management of, and mitigation against, Stack and I have explored these further with Kent Police and the Highways Agency.

Multi-agency de-brief

5. On 19 June, Kent Police led a de-brief focussed on the protracted Stack incident that took place during March.
6. The purpose of the de-brief was to proactively learn from the lengthy deployment of Stack and to formally report the findings. This multi-agency event involved stakeholders including the Highways Agency, Interroute, Kent Fire & Rescue, Eurotunnel, Port of Dover, SE Coast Ambulance and KCC. Learning was centred around the use of intelligence, the command structure, silver control, Operation Stack phases and communication and citizen engagement. The report is awaited with interest.

Suggestions put forward by the public and stakeholders

7. The protracted nature of Stack caused by the industrial action by SeaFrance officers in March, resulted in press, public and member interest – and a number of suggestions about how it might be better managed in the future. Managing Operation Stack is a complex operation; safety of HGV drivers, residents, the travelling public and police personnel is of prime importance, and Kent Police are mindful of the need to keep Kent moving whilst Operation Stack is deployed.
 - (i) **Holding back lorries elsewhere on the network** - preventing HGVs from entering Kent by holding them in France/Belgium or elsewhere in the UK.

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This is a frequent suggestion aimed at sharing the problem and reducing the effect on Kent. It would require co-operation at a national level and centralised control from the Home Office of autonomous police authorities; it is logistically impossible (how do you stop lorries safely and where do you put them?); there are no existing powers that would enable this idea to be effected, nor is there any national appetite to change this. Even at the height of Operation Stack in March there was no possibility of civil contingencies being required – the problem just was not sufficiently severe.

Potential for future deployment: Virtually non-existent.

(ii) **Contraflow to keep the M20 open both ways between junctions 8 and 9.**

Since March, the Highways Agency have significantly invested in signs and cones to implement this option should it ever be required. This option is not without its difficulties – in short, the problems associated with vehicles travelling along the hard shoulder which is not constructed to the same standard as the main carriageway; the need to safely segregate vehicles which are travelling towards each other on the same side of the carriageway at speed with only cones and a buffer lane separating them; the ability to enforce a reduced speed limit.

Potential for the future: High.

(iii) **Improved signing at M20 junction 10.**

Local traffic joining the M20 at junction 10 (coastbound) to travel to junction 11 can be caught up in phase 1 of Operation Stack (when it is implemented) because there are no advance warnings.

The Highways Agency are considering a feasibility study looking at advance signing on KCC's network to approaches to all junctions on the M20. They are also looking at the potential to install quickly implemented gateways to on-slips on all motorway junctions as part of a national programme. KCC will no doubt be consulted as part of any proposals and will have to weigh up the benefits and dis-benefits to Kent's road networks.

Potential for future deployment: Medium.

(iv) **Quick moveable barrier (QMB).**

The QMB is currently being installed by the Highways agency between junctions 11 and 12.

The objectives are to avoid directing local traffic on to the A20 from the M20. However, members should be aware that Kent Police intend to take traffic off at junction 11 before returning it to the M20 to join the contraflow. The Highways Agency intend to monitor performance of the QMB to ensure that it meets operational objectives.

Further feasibility will be required to evaluate whether the QMB could be expanded to junction 13 or towards junction 10, or both.

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Potential for future deployment: High.

(v) **Central reservation gateways.**

Members will no doubt be aware that the Highways Agency have installed gateways in the M20 central reservation between junctions 8 and 9. This is part of a national programme designed to manage incidents more effectively; gateways are being installed where there is more than 5km between junctions.

Potential for future deployment: High. Not designed with Stack in mind but high potential to manage Stack more effectively.

(vi) **Traffic Management at junction 8.**

The congestion at junction 8, caused as all vehicles leave the M20 before HGVs are directed back down the M20 and car and local HGV traffic directed onto KCC's road network, is the most pressing network management issue. Traffic can queue back to junctions 7, 6 and sometimes back to junction 5. As well as the irritation factor, there are inherent safety issues.

On line sorting, keeping HGVs on the motorway and directing only cars and local traffic off at junction 8 runs counter-intuitive to practice as it means swapping lorries into lane 3 and cars to lane 1.

This option could be linked with option 2 (contraflow) and KCC continues to work with Kent Police and the Highways Agency to find a longer-term solution.

Potential for future deployment: Low.

(vii) **Further capacity.**

Widening of the M20 between junctions 11 and 12 and/or 12 and 13 would increase capacity of existing phases. The Highways Agency is looking at this as a longer term option.

Potential for future deployment: Low

(viii) **Junction 10a.**

The Highways Agency are currently consulting on a new junction to the east of junction 10. This may create further, as yet unquantified, options.

Conclusions

8. Discussions continue between a number of agencies to manage Stack more effectively.

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