

Operation Stack and the Lorry Park

A report by the Head of Network Management and the Head of Countywide Improvements to the Highways Advisory Board on 8th May 2008

Operation Stack

1. The Highways Advisory Board will be aware that Operation Stack is a Police led incident that closes the M20 coastbound between junctions 10 and 11 (phase 1) and junctions 8 – 9 (phase 2) when there's disruption at the port of Dover or Eurotunnel through bad weather, industrial action or technical failure.
2. Between 28 February 2008 and 21 March 2008 Operation Stack was in place for an unprecedented length of time, causing disruption to residents and visitors.
3. For the first time ever, Kent Police made a tactical decision to deploy phase 2 in preference to phase 1 for 2 main reasons:
 - (i) Phase 1 has limited capacity and holds only 800 lorries whereas phase 2 holds 3,300 lorries.
 - (ii) Police resource issues.
4. During Operation Stack, staff from Kent Highway Services, Emergency Planning and Corporate Communications staff worked with Kent Police to represent the community's interests and to mitigate against congestion on our own road network.
5. This took the form of attendance at Gold and Silver Command Group meetings and Kent Resilience Forum Policy sub-group, as well as sharing information and intelligence and delivering a joint communication strategy.
6. Although the prolonged nature of Operation Stack was extremely frustrating for the public, we did find that, in time, people staggered journey times and found alternative routes and forms of transport.
7. There are a number of concerns, shared by the public, such as traffic management on and off the motorway during stack, signage, effects on Maidstone, contingency plans and so on, and these are all being explored further with Kent Police and the Highways Agency.

Lorry Park

8. This disruption caused by Operation Stack as well as significantly inconveniencing the community has an adverse impact on the national economy, because much of the national trade with Continental Europe passes through Kent. This therefore is a national problem and the County Council have been pressing the Government to resolve the issue.
9. With no other options on the table and given the effects on Kent's economy and communities of Operation Stack and overnight HGV parking on local roads the Council decided that we must lead the way on finding a permanent solution. Working with other agencies we carried out a study which found that there was a need for a lorry park in Kent and that it should be dual purpose. As well as providing secure overnight parking it should be available in the event of Operation Stack. The Freight Transport Association supports this proposal. We agreed with the Department for Transport that we would identify a preferred site.

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10. The severe shortage of suitable secure overnight parking facilities means that drivers are forced to stop in unsuitable places such as lay-bys, business estates and some near to residential properties. This leads to inconvenience to local communities and environmental problems. This is particularly evident in Dover and Ashford and to a lesser extent in Shepway.
11. In order for the lorry park to provide an effective and workable alternative to Operation Stack, it has to be along the M20 corridor and fairly close to the Channel crossings. A number of sites were explored before reaching a decision about a preferred location. The preferred site is between junctions 10 & 11 on the south side of the M20 between Sellindge and Aldington.
12. The site, which covers more than 70 acres, was chosen for its good connectivity and proximity to the Channel Tunnel and Dover Docks and because it is isolated from built-up areas. The site is very close to the M20 keeping access roads to a minimum and therefore reducing the impact on the local environment. It is also shielded from view by the Sellindge Converter Station to the east, the M20 to the north, a railway embankment to the south and woodland to the west. There are no planning designations such as AONB or Special Landscape Area applied to this area.
13. To access the site, we propose on and off slip roads to and from the M20 on both east and west bound carriageways. The site will link to the eastbound carriageway via an overbridge or a tunnel if ground conditions permit. The site will not have access on to the A20.
14. The proposed site will provide 500 secure overnight parking spaces for HGVs and an overflow area for up to 2,500 additional HGVs during Operation Stack. The site will have appropriate security, a properly laid out parking area for HGVs, a canteen providing refreshments, toilets, showers and fuel. The remainder of the site will be kept as green as possible and extensive and sympathetic landscaping will be used to further reduce the visual impact.
15. The County Council's approach has been that the cost of building a lorry park should not fall on Kent's tax payers. Currently 75% of the lorries crossing the Channel are foreign registered and enjoy cheaper costs than UK firms. The best way to generate the capital to build and run the site is by introducing a vignette system of charges on HGVs entering the country, similar to systems already operating in Austria and Switzerland, we have proposed this to the Government. UK hauliers could be rebated by a corresponding reduction in Vehicle Excise Duty.
16. This would mean that overnight HGV parking would be free at the lorry park, encouraging HGV drivers to use it. The current cost a night to park on a licensed site is around £20. The proposal means that there will be no excuse for HGV drivers to park on local roads overnight. At the same time HGV parking ban on local roads can be effectively enforced and there should see an end to lorries parking on verges and lay-bys in many parts of the county. Two further secure overnight lorry parks are also being proposed; one along the M2 corridor and the second along the M25.
17. We are in the early stage of the process; we have discussed the aims of the proposal with the Highways Agency, Kent Police, Kent Fire & Rescue Service and Ashford Borough Council. Their comments are expected by the end of April 2008. This will be followed by a detailed planning process which will include a full public consultation.

