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To: Cabinet

Date: 8 February 2007

Subject: Lorry Parking Issues

Summary

A response to the Highways Agency's consultation document on Policy for Service Areas and Other Roadside Facilities is recommended

For Decision

1. Introduction

1.1 The Highways Agency published the consultation document "Policy for Service Areas and Other Roadside Facilities" in November 2006, with a closing date on 8 February, 2007.

1.2 The consultation document mainly covers issues related to Motorway Service Areas – determining need, spacing, signing, retail activities, standard of facilities and potential for park and ride facilities; similar issues on trunk road service areas, use of laybys but little on lorry parking. It is considered that the County Council needs to respond on lorry parking issues related to overnight use and Operation Stack.

2. Lorry Parking

2.1 The document sets out Government's objective for the provision of roadside facilities that provide the opportunity for road users to make safe and efficient journeys. It aims to achieve this for lorry drivers by extending the range of facilities provided for lorry drivers, particularly in areas where inadequate provision is known to exist.

2.2 However, since 1992, Government policy has been that the private sector should take the initiative in identifying and acquiring sites for Motorway Service Areas (MSAs), although some older MSAs are still owned by Government and leased to private operators. It has always been left to the private sector to bring forward lorry parking facilities off the motorways.

2.3 The document also states that the Highways Agency is aware of concerns regarding problems arising from lorry parking in inappropriate places due to a lack of suitable locations and facilities. The Agency is specifically asking how can the role of the private sector in the provision of lorry parking be maximised.

3. Kent's Particular Lorry Parking Problems

Operation Stack

3.1 Since the end of November, there have been a number of occasions when Phase 2 of Operation Stack was initiated (i.e. stacking lorries on the M20 coast bound carriageway between Maidstone and Ashford) – on and off between 28-30 November, 5-6 December, 7-9 December and 11-12 January. One of these incidents was due to a strike by French workers, but the rest were due to bad weather – strong winds in certain directions which seriously disrupt ferry sailings into and out of ports of Dover and Calais.

3.2 The effect of stacking cross-Channel lorries on the M20 is significant traffic congestion on the A20 when all other traffic is diverted off the motorway and impacts on local residents and businesses causing staff lateness, lost sales and output, and late or cancelled meetings. There is also a perception that Operation Stack has a negative effect on attempts to attract new businesses to East Kent.

3.3 Other concerns are that the police do not initiate Operation Stack quickly enough causing increased problems in Dover and that the police do not always separate out particular flows within the two queues of lorries in the Stack well enough so that unaffected lorries could be sent on (eg Channel Tunnel flows when ferries are affected or Norfolk Line ferry flows (Dover – Dunkerque) when Calais is adversely affected).

3.4 The Highways Agency is looking at the detailed design of a Quick Moveable Barrier (QMB) which could be deployed relatively quickly to form a two-lane contraflow on the London-bound carriageway of the M20 between Junctions 12 and 11, enabling strategic traffic to remain on the motorway in both directions, whilst international lorries are stacked on the coast bound carriageway. The Agency is due to complete its design in February and will consult before submitting the case to Ministers. The concerns some have over this method is that it only deals with Phase 1 of Stack (i.e. when some 850 lorries are parked on the motorway near the Channel Tunnel entrance). Phase 2 of Operation Stack is when lorries are parked between M20 Junctions 8 and 9 (Hollingbourne to Ashford (West)) which can accommodate (with Phase1) up to 4,500 parked lorries. Another criticism of the QMB is that it undermines the case for an emergency lorry park in the longer term.

3.5 The County Council considers that a permanent solution to Operation Stack should be found as quickly as possible and will be working with partners to identify a suitable emergency lorry parking site before meeting with Government Ministers within the next few weeks.

Overnight Lorry Parking

3.6 Research by the County Council and partners (including the Highways Agency) found a shortage of appropriate facilities for lorry drivers to park overnight of some 550 spaces in Kent. The consequences are drivers parking in inappropriate places such as laybys, industrial estates, and supermarket car parks with no facilities. This leads to problems associated with public health (no toilets), crime (unsecured sites), road safety (poor parking and slow acceleration out of laybys) and damage to the highway. Problems are particularly acute around Dover, Folkestone and Ashford, but the problems are growing and the detrimental effects of overnight parking are spreading throughout the county.

3.7 What is required is more secure lorry parking and when this is delivered, enforcement by the police to ensure the capacity is used. Although there is an acute shortage of parking at present, it is known that many lorry drivers cannot afford or chose not to use good lorry parking facilities at Motorway Service Areas, Ashford Truckstop or smaller private facilities to save money.

3.8 A solution to this problem is difficult as Government is adamant that that it will not devote any public money to lorry parking, although this is an international problem. It sees it is the responsibility of lorry drivers' employers to provide rest facilities for their employees, but the road haulage industry is not structured in such a way to deliver this and when 75% of lorries crossing the Channel are foreign registered and originate in many countries from mostly relatively small companies, it is highly unlikely that the finance will come from this direction.

3.9 A more likely source of funding is from developers providing lorry parking facilities as part of a larger development, as the profits to be made out of lorry parking are relatively small - particularly in Kent where fuel costs are so much higher than over the Channel.

Queuing from Dover Eastern Docks

3.10 In 2006, 2.32m lorries passed through the port of Dover – a 13.6% increase on 2005 and growth is forecast to grow to some 3.1m lorries in 2014. Currently there is regular queuing of lorries on the A20 right through the town in the mid-week evenings and when there are peaks of tourist traffic. These queues cause the town to seize up with additional air quality problems and increased severance of the town from the seafront.

3.11 Ways of relieving this problem include encouraging more lorry traffic to travel to and from Dover via the A2/M2 corridor and the construction of a Lower Thames Crossing would encourage the switch from the A20/M20 to the A2/M2. Additionally, Dover Harbour Board is proposing a free-flow slip road from the docks to the A20 which would stop queues trying to exit the port impeding traffic trying to get in; and redevelopment of the Western Docks and the relocation of some ferry services there, reducing the numbers of lorries passing right through the town. Finally, there are proposals for a Buffer Zone – an out of town parking facility to be used when queues in the town develop and where lorries can be held and released in batches which can be readily handled by the port.

4. What is Required?

4.1 The requirements are for:

Short Term

The County Council to work with District Council partners to identify a suitable site for an emergency lorry park which can replace the need for the closure of the M20 during Operation Stack

Government to take a proactive role in reaching solutions caused by the ever-increasing lorry traffic

Government to alter its position on not providing finance for lorry parking

The Police to investigate how effectively the segregation of Dover and Channel Tunnel lorries is currently achieved in the Stack

Eurotunnel and Ferry Companies to investigate how tickets can be interchangeable when Operation Stack is initiated

Longer Term

The Highways Agency with the County Council and District Councils to seek sites for lorry parking adjacent to the M20 and M2 for overnight lorry parking

The Highways Agency and the County Council, once sufficient appropriate lorry parking is provided, to restrict physically or by traffic regulation orders access to inappropriate sites

The Police to actively enforce the traffic regulation orders

The County Council and relevant District Council to positively advise private developers to bring forward lorry parking facilities in appropriate locations.

The Highways Agency to provide appropriate VMS signs to enable all Dover traffic or Dover ferry traffic which is running freely to be routed via A2/M2 to avoid the Stack and for similar arrangements if Channel Tunnel is unaffected via A2/M2/A260

Recommendation

It is recommended that a response is made to the Highways Agency based on the discussion in Sections 3 and 4 of the report.

Contact :

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Background Documents:

Kent Overnight Lorry Parking Study – KCC, DfT, Highways Agency, DDC, ABC, Port of Dover, July 2005.

Policy for Service Areas and Other Roadside Facilities on Motorway and All-Purpose Trunk Roads in England: Highways Agency, November 2006