

Motion to Call for Urgent Government Support for Tourist Travel in Kent

Proposer: Mr Tim Prater

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Motion

The County Council resolves to:

1. Recognise that there is a real risk of significant traffic delays in Kent during the forthcoming summer due to tourist and other traffic subject EES, in addition to the well-known delays caused by freight management through Operations Brock.
2. Request the Cabinet Member for Highways produce and publish an action plan to mitigate the impact on Kent residents, so far as the council is able to do so with the tools available to it.
3. Agree that Kent's unique national role as the UK's principal gateway to mainland Europe should be recognised by Government and that Government should:
 - Put forward a credible plan to manage freight traffic without Operation Brock.
 - Provide additional funding, policy levers, and operational powers to support Kent County Council in actively managing traffic subject to EES during peak travel periods and periods of cross-Channel disruption.
 - Work in partnership with Kent County Council, National Highways, border agencies, and port operators to deliver a coordinated national approach to tourist traffic management that reflects the risks associated with the Entry-Exit-System and seasonal travel demand.
 - Utilise Sevington, or another suitable facility, for offline queuing or traffic management purposes, to alleviate pressure on the strategic and local road network, and to minimise the impact on Kent residents and businesses.

And that the Clerk to the County Council should provide a copy of the motion to the relevant Government Officers.

Background information provided by the Liberal Democrat Group:

Kent holds a unique and disproportionate role as the United Kingdom's principal gateway to mainland Europe, resulting in the county accommodating millions of passengers and freight movements each year. During peak travel periods such as Easter and the summer holidays, traffic volumes through Kent increase substantially, placing sustained pressure on both the strategic and local road network and heightening the risk and impact of cross-Channel disruption.

The introduction of the Entry-Exit System (EES) presents a further and ongoing risk to the resilience of Kent's road network. During Easter 2026, EES operations across Europe resulted in markedly increased processing times, technical failures, and long queues, with authorities repeatedly suspending or reverting checks in order to manage pressure and congestion. France became a focal point of these operational challenges, with technical failures affecting kiosks and border processing, leading to significant delays. The application of EES at Kent's border points significantly increases the risk that even minor disruption will quickly escalate into severe constraints on traffic movement during the summer period.

Kent residents are painfully familiar with the challenging consequences of Operation Brock, the traffic management system that uses sections of the M20 as a lorry holding area when cross-Channel services are delayed. While Operation Brock is intended as a necessary contingency, its activation causes significant negative impacts for Kent residents, including prolonged congestion on roads across Kent, restricted access to communities, pollution, litter and noise impacts, business disruption, and delays to emergency and care services. Further to this, Operation Brock manages freight travel but does not address the volume of tourist and private vehicle travel passing through the county. Despite Kent acting as the main gateway for millions of visitors each year, the county does not receive adequate national support, funding, or operational tools to actively manage tourist traffic during peak travel periods, leaving our communities to absorb the full impact.

Taken together, the combined effect of increased summer travel, Kent's role as a vital link in the UK's transportation network, and delays associated with the implementation of the Entry-Exit System mean that Kent is likely to experience severe pressure on its road network and travel delays during summer 2026. Kent residents will once again bear the consequences of systemic and recurring operational pressures beyond their control, with little respite from Operation Brock and without sufficient government support or intervention to manage the volume and impact of tourist traffic generated by Kent's national gateway role.