

Written Evidence by Kent County Council to support the Oral Evidence Session of the House of Commons Transport Select Committee Inquiry: Operation Stack

1. Summary

- 1.1 Kent County Council (KCC), as the Local Transport Authority for Kent, welcomes the opportunity to attend the evidence session in this inquiry into Operation Stack.
- 1.2 This summary note highlights the key issues still to be addressed if the impact of Operation Stack is to be mitigated.
- 1.3 KCC's concerns can be summarised as follows:
 - Operation Stack has been implemented 48 times between 1997 and January 2015 with an average duration of 5-6 days a year. However in first 7 months of 2015, Operation Stack was implemented for 32 days, 5 days in January and then almost continuously in late June and throughout July.
 - Operation stack is a national problem. The economic impacts of Operation Stack are significant both locally and nationally. The events of June and July 2015 clearly demonstrate that when there is disruption at the Channel Ports (Eurotunnel and Port of Dover), the current use of Operation Stack with complete closure of the M20 motorway between junctions 8 and 11, is unacceptable. The economic impacts are felt nationally, especially by businesses reliant on just in time deliveries as well as local companies. Kent enjoys a strong logistics and tourism sectors and both reported real losses. Furthermore, local residents are in effect captured in their own homes and travel to work, school, doctors/hospital appointment (to name just a few) are all severely compromised.
 - Short term measures to improve the configuration of Operation Stack are being put into place. However, a permanent solution must be delivered "at pace" as per the Government's instruction in July. KCC is concerned that the impetus from Government is not lost and that the momentum gathered in the summer to ensure delivery of a quick solution to Operation Stack continues.
 - An off-highway lorry holding area along the M20 corridor, in combination with on-highway improvements to the motorway and trunk road links to the Channel Ports are being led by Highways England. However, funding has not been committed by Government despite promises during the height of the crisis; this is a major concern to KCC. Furthermore, it is very concerning that the planning process being led by Highways England is suffering delays which jeopardises the quick delivery of a solution.
- 1.4 Kent County Council asks the Committee to seek assurances that action is taken by the Government to:
 - Continue to deliver 'at pace' a solution to Operation Stack which is vital to local and national economic prosperity.
 - Provide certainty of funding for the package of measures, including the off-highway lorry holding area.

2. Introduction: The Implementation of Operation Stack in 2015

- 2.1 Operation Stack has been implemented 48 times between 1997 and January 2015 with an average duration of 5-6 days a year. However in first 7 months of 2015, Operation Stack was implemented for 32 days, 5 days in January and then almost continuously in late June and throughout July. Reasons for its implementation were initially industrial action by ferry workers at the Port of Calais which was then exacerbated by migrants trespassing in the Channel Tunnel. At its peak there were 7,000 Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) taking 36 hours to work through the queue.
- 2.2 The usual 2 phases of Operation Stack did not provide enough capacity and Phase 3 (J9-8 London-bound) was implemented for the first time along with new phases involving closure of both carriageways between junctions 9 and 11. Phases have now been renamed as 'Stages' given that Operation Stack phasing has had to be re-designed to cope with the unprecedented numbers of HGVs.

3. Economic Impacts

- 3.1 Figures produced by KCC, the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and 'Visit Kent' demonstrate:
- An estimated cost to the Kent and Medway economy of around £1.45 million per day. Scaling the Kent figure up to the 32 days' disruption caused by Operation Stack gives an approximate cost of £46 million. However, it is likely that this figure is a substantial under estimate.
 - 45% of tourism businesses reporting cancellations, with 59% considering that they had lost up to 20% of business as a result of Operation Stack.
- 3.2 The £46 million estimate relates to costs borne by the Kent and Medway economy only; i.e. costs accruing nationally or internationally (e.g. to the freight industry based outside or carrying goods from outside Kent) are not included, therefore the national costs are substantially greater. The Freight Transport Association (FTA) estimates a wider cost to the UK economy of £250 million per day.
- 3.3 KCC incurred direct costs in June to August for the provision of food, water, wash kits, blankets and additional emergency planning staff of £47,378.

4. The Need for Action

- 4.1 The current situation is unacceptable and has been forecast by KCC for many years. Efforts have been made to find solutions but with little real engagement with the Department for Transport (DfT). With significant growth forecast (annual growth of between 2% and 4% at the Port of Dover and up to 30% over the next 5 years at Eurotunnel) there will be an increase in average daily flows of HGVs from the current 10,000 per day to up to 16,000 per day over the next decade.
- 4.2 Closures at the port are often unavoidable (bad weather, technical problems etc) and likely to increase in frequency given the prevalence of industrial disputes and migration problems. A solution to the lack of resilience and freight holding capacity is needed to ensure that the M20 stays open.

5. Short Term Measures

- 5.1 During the June/July crisis, the DfT instructed Highways England, KCC, Kent Police and other partners to utilise the former Manston Airport site as a temporary lorry park for Operation Stack. Manston will be used when Stage 2 (J9-11) is half full, which allows approximately 3 hours' notice to mobilise the former airport site. Stages 1 and 2 (J8-11) would then be drained of all Port of Dover traffic, leaving only Eurotunnel HGVs on the M20. Subsequent Dover bound HGVs will then be directed via the A249, M2 and A299 to Manston and released to the port via the A256 and A2.
- 5.2 Manston would hold approximately 3,500 HGVs and should prevent the closure of the London-bound carriageway J11-8 (Stages 3 and 4). Use of Manston is a temporary measure until June 2016 and so far it has not been implemented.

6. Long Term Solutions

- 6.1 After the January Operation Stack event, the European Gateway Group was set up consisting of KCC, Kent Police, Highways England, Eurotunnel, Port of Dover, ferry companies, Road Haulage Association (RHA), FTA, logistics operators, lorry park operators and the district/borough councils of Ashford, Dover and Shepway.
- 6.2 This group produced a report that outlined the strategic importance of the Channel Ports and its projected growth; the problems and impacts from disruption to international freight fluidity; and potential solutions. The report was presented to the Transport Minister Andrew Jones MP during the height of the crisis in July.
- 6.3 Under instruction from Government to deliver a solution "at pace", a subsequent report to the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR) in August outlined a package of on and off-highway measure to hold approximately 5,500-6,500 HGVs which includes:
 - Strengthening the hard shoulder M20 J8-10 coast-bound and amendments to central reservation J10-11a to improve resilience and flexibility of use of the link;
 - Potential improvements to A20 in and around Dover to increase capacity and remove bottlenecks;
 - Increased use of traffic technology to improve communications and management of Operation Stack;
 - Potential lorry holding area close to the M20 capable of catering for approximately 4,000 HGVs;
 - Potential extension of STOP24 lorry park site capable of catering for up to 1,000 HGVs.
- 6.4 A combination of on and off-highway measures are needed to accommodate the number of HGVs (7,000) that were experienced in the recent Operation Stack events and to deal with the average of 10,000 HGVs per day at the Channel Ports (expected to increase up to an average of 16,000 per day in the next 10 years).
- 6.5 Highways England is now leading on the land acquisition, planning and delivery of a Lorry Holding Area with Permitted Development rights as the Highway Authority under Section 115 of the Highways Act 1980. However, there is real concern at the delays to the planning process and the impact this will have on the delivery 'at pace' of a solution. A Planning Group consisting of Highways England, KCC, Shepway District Council and Statutory Environmental Bodies meet fortnightly to oversee the project and report to a multi-agency steering group (the former European Gateway Group).

- 6.6 The holding area will accommodate approximately 4,000 HGVs that would replace Operation Stack Stages 1 and 2 (J8-11) and in all but extreme circumstances prevent the need to use the London-bound carriageway for Operation Stack (Stages 3 and 4). Work is progressing “at pace” as directed by Government but continued impetus from DfT and Highways England is needed to maintain the momentum and ensure quick delivery of a permanent solution to Operation Stack.
- 6.7 Despite significant development work by Highways England there is still no certainty of funding for delivery of a solution to Operation Stack. The Department for Transport is making the case to Treasury for funding in the Autumn Statement. It is a concern to Kent County Council that despite promises from Government at the height of the crisis, funding has not been committed.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 In conclusion, KCC’s concerns can be summarised as follows:

- Operation Stack has been implemented 48 times between 1997 and January 2015 with an average duration of 5-6 days a year. However in first 7 months of 2015, Operation Stack was implemented for 32 days, 5 days in January and then almost continuously in late June and throughout July.
- Operation stack is a national problem. The economic impacts of Operation Stack are significant both locally and nationally. The events of June and July 2015 clearly demonstrate that when there is disruption at the Channel Ports (Eurotunnel and Port of Dover), the current use of Operation Stack with complete closure of the M20 motorway between junctions 8 and 11, is unacceptable. The economic impacts are felt nationally, especially by businesses reliant on just in time deliveries as well as local companies. Kent enjoys a strong logistics and tourism sectors and both reported real losses. Furthermore, local residents are in effect captured in their own homes and travel to work, school, doctors/hospital appointment (to name just a few) are all severely compromised.
- Short term measures to improve the configuration of Operation Stack are being put into place. However, a permanent solution must be delivered “at pace” as per the Government’s instruction in July. KCC is concerned that the impetus from Government is not lost and that the momentum gathered in the summer to ensure delivery of a quick solution to Operation Stack continues.
- An off-highway lorry holding area along the M20 corridor, in combination with on-highway improvements to the motorway and trunk road links to the Channel Ports are being led by Highways England. However, funding has not been committed by Government despite promises during the height of the crisis; this is a major concern to KCC. Furthermore, it is very concerning that the planning process being led by Highways England is suffering delays which jeopardises the quick delivery of a solution.

7.2 Kent County Council asks the Committee to seek assurances that action is taken by the Government to:

- Continue to deliver ‘at pace’ a solution to Operation Stack which is vital to local and national economic prosperity.
- Provide certainty of funding for the package of measures, including the off-highway lorry holding area.