

From: Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport
Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 7 September 2016

Subject: **Proposed Response to Operation Stack Lorry Area Consultation**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Division: All divisions

Summary:

On 6 July 2016, the Government announced a major new lorry area would be created near Stanford in Kent as a long-term solution to the problems caused on the M20 and surrounding roads when Operation Stack is used. The Government's preferred site is 'Stanford West' (the preference of both Kent County Council and Shepway District Council).

Highways England are currently conducting a public consultation on the detailed design and potential environmental impact of the scheme. The consultation was launched on 12th August and will run until 23rd September 2016.

This paper sets out the proposed outline for Kent County Council's response to the consultation; given the timing of the consultation, detailed comments from relevant KCC teams are not yet included in the draft response, and at the time of writing, comments from KCC's Heritage, Natural Environment, Drainage Flood Risk, Resilience and Emergencies, and Highway Operations teams are to follow. These will be included in the final response and approved by the Cabinet Member before the response is submitted.

Recommendation:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the proposed outline response that will be finalised and approved by the Cabinet Member before submitting to Highways England by the closing date of 23 September.

1. Introduction

1.1 Operation Stack was used on a record 32 days last year as Kent was hit with unprecedented disruption in cross-Channel services, affecting traffic not only in and out of the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel, but right across the county during June and July 2015.

- 1.2 In last year's Autumn Statement, the Government announced it would be providing up to £250 million for a permanent lorry area to help mitigate such congestion.
- 1.3 Highways England (HE), the government-owned company responsible for motorways and trunk roads, was instructed by the Government to deliver the proposed lorry area. Subsequently, HE conducted an 8 week consultation from December 2015 to January 2016 on two potential sites; 'Stanford West' and 'Junction 11 North'.
- 1.4 In response to the consultation in January 2016, both Kent County Council (KCC) and Shepway District Council (SDC) confirmed that their preferred site was 'Stanford West'.
- 1.5 The consultation results showed strong support for a permanent lorry area. More than 1,000 drivers, residents and workers attended 8 public events during the consultation on the lorry area and nearly 1,300 people provided written responses to the proposals. The majority of people supported the idea of creating a new lorry area, with less than a quarter thinking Operation Stack should continue in its current form. Nearly twice as many people thought that the lorry area should be located at 'Stanford West' than those who thought it should be built at the alternative site of 'Junction 11 North'. The alternative site would have been closer to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

2. Announcement by the Government on 6th July 2016

- 2.1 On 6 July, the former Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin announced a major new lorry area will be created near Stanford in Kent as a long-term solution to the problems caused on the M20 and surrounding roads when Operation Stack is used. The preferred site is 'Stanford West' (see map in Figure 1).
- 2.2 The lorry area will help keep the M20 moving during disruption to cross-channel services, helping to mitigate the impact of such disruption on business, residents and visitors.
- 2.3 Highways England and the Department for Transport (DfT) are also exploring using the site for overnight parking of lorries, which would relieve pressure caused by some drivers parking in unsuitable or illegal locations. A solution to the problem of inappropriate overnight lorry in Kent is a strategic priority in KCC's new draft Local Transport Plan (LTP4) which is currently undergoing a public consultation.

Figure 1 Location of proposed 'Stanford West' Lorry Area



- 2.4 The lorry area will provide capacity to queue up to 3,600 lorries (enough capacity for Stages 1 and 2 of Operation Stack, Junctions 8 to 11 coast-bound).
- 2.5 Balfour Beatty has already been appointed as the lead contractor for the project. New entry and exit slip roads will be built on the eastbound carriageway, providing direct access to the lorry area to the north of the M20. However, the slip roads are not part of the current consultation and proposals for them will be brought forward later. The part of the site on the south side of the M20, between the motorway and the railway lines (High Speed One [HS1] and mainline) will be accessed from the northern part of the site by a new bridge over the M20 and through the Stop 24 services via Junction 11.
- 2.6 Highways England is committed to working closely with residents and local stakeholders to ensure the design of the new lorry area minimises any negative social and environmental impact the new site might have, while meeting the wider need to address the requirement for a logistical solution to cross-channel traffic disruption for Kent and the UK. KCC, SDC and the Environment Agency (EA) have been meeting with Highways England and the DfT on a fortnightly basis to discuss issues surrounding the planning and potential operation of the lorry area.
- 2.7 HE are now consulting the public on the detailed design, operation and the potential environmental impact of the scheme. The consultation will close on

23rd September 2016. Construction work will then start as soon as possible and DfT are planning for spaces to be available from summer 2017.

3. Responding to the Consultation

3.1 At the time of writing, there has been insufficient time to adequately assess the proposal published in the consultation; therefore, a comprehensive response will be drafted and agreed by the Cabinet Member before the consultation closes on 23rd September. Section 3.2 below sets out a proposed outline response to address issues that KCC has identified through the stakeholder meetings with Highways England, DfT, SDC and the EA (see paragraph 2.6) and from an initial high level review of the consultation documents.

3.2 It is proposed that KCC's response will include the following points:

- **The importance of delivering the lorry area to the Kent and Medway economy** (Operation Stack is estimated to cost £1.45 million per day to the local economy due to delays and disruption from the closure of the motorway).
- **The need to deliver 'at pace'** (the original promise by the Government was for spaces to be available from April 2016, this is now estimated as summer 2017).
- **Access to the lorry area must include effective traffic management**, acknowledging that temporary traffic management might be needed initially to enable delivery 'at pace' but a permanent solution involving gantry signing and variable speed limits is essential to ensure safety and minimise the human resources required for its implementation. The current consultation states that proposals for gantries with variable speed limits will be brought forward later but it is critical that KCC stresses the importance of these measures. Further, Kent Police and Kent County Council should not be liable for the cost of traffic management when the lorry area is in operation.
- **The need to ensure that lorries are directed to use the new lorry area rather than remaining on the M20.** The issue of powers to the Highway Authority (Highways England) to direct lorries off-highway into the lorry area needs to be resolved urgently. KCC also expects the Government to encourage Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover to help to enforce compliance so that lorries use the lorry area when there is disruption to cross-Channel services. It would be unacceptable for lorries to still queue on the M20 when there is a lorry area due to a lack of powers and non-compliance.

- **Operation of the lorry area must ensure fluidity of freight movement to Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover during times of disruption to cross-Channel services.** Firstly, this means that the design and operation of the site must be agreed in collaboration with Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover so that freight is released to the ports efficiently and the backlog is cleared quickly. Secondly, the consultation design includes control booths to receive and despatch the lorries but it does not propose who will operate them.
- **The lorry area's access slip roads should not require permanent closure of the Junction 11 coast-bound off-slip nor impact on the long term potential for growth in the Shepway district,** including the proposed Garden Town at Otterpool Park. The current proposals have indicated that there will be a need to close the off-slip when the lorry area is operational until the gantry signs and permanent traffic management are in place. The consultation states that proposals for the lorry area's slip roads will be brought forward later, but it is essential that this permanent solution is implemented as soon as possible.
- **Highways England must also implement a permanent scheme for the Dover Traffic Assessment Project (TAP).** This requires variable speed limits to ensure the efficient movement of traffic along the A20 while also providing a rolling road to queue port bound freight vehicles and minimise disruption within Dover.
- **The lorry area must also be used to help alleviate the problem of a lack of capacity for overnight lorry parking.** Kent's connectivity to continental Europe and the high volumes of freight vehicles that cross the county leads to hundreds of lorries parked inappropriately and, in many instances, illegally, which causes considerable distress in many communities. The number of spaces allocated for daily parking should reflect a robust assessment of current and future demand. KCC undertook a count of lorries parked overnight on the local road network in June 2016 and this will be followed up with a count of lorries parked on the strategic road network in mid-September. In the first instance, the overnight parking provision should be located on land to the south of the M20 adjacent to the existing Stop 24 services with appropriate environmental mitigation measures and steps to minimise the impact on Westenhanger Castle.
- **However, commercial lorry parking operators should not be disadvantaged by the addition of overnight parking spaces in the lorry area.** The private sector should operate the part of the site used for overnight lorry parking and this should be awarded by competitive

tender. Further, existing commercial lorry parking facilities should also be encouraged to expand to meet the demand which is currently outstripping supply.

- **We also request from Government that KCC and Medway Council are given powers to ban inappropriate lorry parking countywide without the need for individual Traffic Regulation Orders on every road.** This will then allow us to move vehicles onto designated overnight lorry parks and reduce the nuisance that this causes our residents. Delivery of more capacity for overnight lorry parking countywide will then complement the work of KCC, the Districts and the Police with enforcement.
- **The most effective environmental mitigation measures must be incorporated into the design of the lorry area to reduce the impact on the AONB and on local communities**, including from noise and vibration both during construction and operation. Early engagement with the AONB Unit and local partners should be sought in designing the landscaping other environmental mitigation measures.
- **Of utmost importance, property owners who have already been blighted by the proposal must be fully compensated for the loss of property value and inability to now sell if they need or want to move.** KCC understands that discussions have started between Highways England and property owners bordering the proposed site; however, we urge that those affected by the lorry area proposal should have the benefit of a scheme similar to that which was put in place to compensate property owners affected by the building of the Channel Tunnel. Government must commit to such a compensation scheme as a matter of urgency.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 In addition to the outline response above, the detailed views of KCC's Heritage, Natural Environment, Drainage Flood Risk, Resilience and Emergencies, and Highway Operations teams are being collated and will be included in the final consultation response. This final full response will be agreed with the Cabinet Member before being sent to Highways England by the close of the consultation.
- 4.2 KCC continues to engage with Highways England and other stakeholders through fortnightly planning meetings pertaining to the lorry area. KCC will continue to use these meetings to try to resolve as many of the concerns expressed in our outline response.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 No financial implications.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 No legal implications

7. Equalities Implications

7.1 No equalities implications for KCC.

8. Other Corporate Implications

8.1 No other corporate implications.

9. Governance

9.1 The final consultation response will be approved by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport.

10. Conclusion

10.1 The current consultation on the lorry area detailed design, operation and potential environmental impacts of the scheme is open until 23rd September 2016. KCC plans to respond in line with the above outline response, incorporating the comments from KCC's Heritage, Natural Environment, Drainage Flood Risk, Resilience and Emergencies, and Highway Operations teams.

11. Recommendation:

11.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the proposed outline response that will be finalised and approved by the Cabinet Member before submitting to Highways England by the closing date of 23 September.

12. Contact details

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