

Press release: New Operation Stack options set out

Measures that will help improve the road network's resilience when there are interruptions to services across the English Channel are being set out by Highways England today (Wednesday 15 November).

The steps include a fresh look at options for holding large numbers of lorries at a site near the M20, and an interim solution that would hold freight traffic on the M20 while keeping the motorway open in both directions for other vehicles.

They follow the Government's announcement today that it has withdrawn its July 2016 decision to approve plans for a lorry area at Stanford West.

Highways England project director John Kerner said:

The disruption that people in Kent suffered in summer 2015 underlines the need for long term improvements to how traffic is managed when cross-channel services are interrupted.

Improvements at the port, and changes we have made to traffic management on the A20 near Dover, have delivered real improvements and have also helped prevent Operation Stack from being implemented. Along with our partners we are better prepared than ever, but a better plan for dealing with more widespread disruption is still needed.

Now that the Government has withdrawn the decision to build a lorry area at Stanford West, we have been asked by the Transport Secretary to immediately develop both an interim and a permanent solution to reduce the local traffic impacts if there is cross-channel disruption.

Highways England is committed to delivering the Government's aim of finding a solution that makes Operation Stack less disruptive for people and businesses in Kent, and the improvements we are taking forward will help to do just that.

Highways England have developed a number of options that, while continuing to hold HGVs on the M20, would allow non-port traffic to continue to travel in both directions reducing the levels of traffic disruption seen in Operation Stack. This could, for example, be through holding HGVs in the centre of the motorway rather than on the coastbound carriageway. Different technologies ranging from steel barriers to movable barrier systems could be deployed to deliver these solutions.

A decision on the interim option being taken forward will be made in early

2018, with delivery complete by March 2019.

The Transport Secretary has also tasked Highways England with starting the process to develop a permanent alternative to Operation Stack, incorporating a lorry park, through the normal planning process, including a full Environmental Impact Assessment.

Highways England is currently reviewing the scope, scale and location of potential solutions. The work will take into account changes since the original concept of the lorry park was promoted, in particular the UK's exit from the European Union but also the need for 'business as usual' lorry parking in Kent. Specific investment decisions on both the longer-term and interim solutions will be subject to normal considerations of affordability and value for money. Highways England intends to consult on the options in early 2018 with a view to submitting a planning application in 2019.

The measures announced today build on significant progress that has been made in recent years.

Since the unprecedented deployment of Operation Stack in summer 2015, Highways England has installed new traffic lights and lane control at the end of the A20 dual carriageway on approach to Dover. The arrangements, known as Dover TAP, have helped to prevent Operation Stack being called on at least six occasions. Improvements to holding capacity made in the Port of Dover and at Eurotunnel's Folkestone terminal have also had a positive effect.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.