

Transport Committee: Operation Stack Inquiry
Response from the Kent Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

Introduction

CPRE Kent is the Kent Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, part of the national CPRE network. Within Kent we represent nearly 3,000 individual members, 189 Parish Councils and 40 local amenity groups and civic societies. We are pleased to have the opportunity to offer our evidence to this Select Committee.

CPRE Kent holds to the principle that a single permanent lorry park which is used only in the event that Operation Stack needs to be implemented is the wrong solution to the wrong problem. Kent is an inevitable and unavoidable bottleneck in the flow of traffic between the UK and the rest of mainland Europe, and the high and rising volume of road-borne freight transiting the county is the most important issue that needs to be addressed.

The disruptions to Kent and the UK's economy, as well as the unacceptable impacts on local lives and livelihoods, that resulted from the lengthy implementation of Operation Stack in 2015 served to demonstrate the fragility of the logistics industry's reliance on this concentrated route. We contend that the time has come for a solution which would offer real resilience to the nation's trade and transport links and offer flexible alternatives to the logistics industry, both now and in the future.

We propose a 21st Century solution to the problems of over-concentration of road-based HGVs in Kent.

The effect of a new lorry park on the planning, management and implementation of Operation Stack

Little detail is offered by HE on how any such lorry park would be managed. As we do not consider a new lorry park to be the way to manage delayed HGVs, we offer no comment on this subject.

The predicted benefits and disadvantages of changes to Operation Stack consequent on the building of a lorry park on the economy (locally and nationally) and local communities

A solution which did not require the M20 to be closed for lengthy periods would be of undoubted benefit. However, as we explain under 'other actions', we do not agree that a single large lorry park is the best way to achieve this.

The extent to which current negative impacts will be mitigated by the creation of a lorry park

The negative impacts of the over-concentration of road-based freight through Kent are made acutely apparent when Operation Stack needs to be implemented. However the chronic effects of HGV traffic in Kent are also felt in the congestion on the wider transport network (notably the Dartford crossings) and in the antisocial 'fly parking' of HGVs on the county's road network, and more fundamental changes to the management of freight are therefore essential.

The short-term solutions needed to improve Operation Stack while construction of a lorry park is underway

We contend that the short term solutions that are needed are in fact the ones that we advocate in the next section; quick wins are already available in the form of intelligent fleet management and a robust national freight strategy that takes into account the environmental and economic consequences of the unconstrained growth of road-based freight traffic through the channel crossings.

The other actions that central and local government need to take, including those on road maintenance and improvement, upstream and downstream from the proposed lorry park

We propose that two strands of policy change are needed. The first is the need to dis-incentivise the growth of road-based freight through the current channel crossings, through measures which support other modes of transport (especially rail) and other points of exit from mainland Britain.

The second is a mandatory improvement in fleet management practices so that no HGV driver would feel the compulsion to race to be nearest the front of a physical queue in Kent in the event of delays in the normal operations of the crossings. Fleet logistics are already supported by the availability of GPS, tachographs and a wide range of communications technology; it would be a simple matter to operate management systems which allowed drivers intending to use the channel (or any other) ports to secure a place in a 'virtual queue' and be called forward in a timely manner when crossing capacity is available. These management practices would need to be underpinned by a network of serviced truck stops in Kent and beyond, with overspill capacity in the event of disruptions to the normal operations of the channel crossings.

We contend that such a system should already operate 24/7; of course it would be even more important in the event of the sort of disruptions that currently lead to the implementation of Operation Stack. The regular (several days per week) implementation of the 'Dover TAP', which holds queuing HGVs on the A20 so that air quality in Dover town is not compromised, illustrates the acute need for better management of vehicles.

We need a future-proof solution to the problems of road congestion in Kent. Operation Stack is already past its use-by date.