

# Transport Committee

House of Commons 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor 14 Tothill Street London SW1H 9NB

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Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin MP  
Secretary of State for Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
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22 October 2015

Dear Patrick,

## Operation Stack

The Transport Committee took oral evidence regarding Operation Stack on 14 October. The Committee has asked me to draw your attention to the evidence we took. I am taking this opportunity to ask you to clarify a number of things in respect of the further action that could be taken by your Department.

The witnesses emphasised that Operation Stack is a symptom of cross-channel disruption; keeping Calais open would obviate the need for Operation Stack. This summer, Operation Stack was in place almost continuously in late June and throughout July and the evidence of freight haulage industry representatives agreed that the impact of closing trade to the continent is a national issue. I therefore ask you to set out what steps the Government is taking to keep the vital trade routes through Dover and Folkestone open.

As made clear in the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2013-14, *Access to Ports*, access to ports is of national importance and not solely a local issue. It is vital that infrastructure improvements that help to keep this major national route open are made. I think it would help the Committee in its deliberations if you set out how the Road Investment Strategy will tackle the infrastructure surrounding Dover and Folkestone, what discussions you have had with local government about the improvements it will need to make, and how soon work might start.

In the evidence we heard there was a consensus that an off-road lorry park offers the best solution, as this would potentially eliminate the need to close parts of the M20 and would improve the situation for local communities. Local councillors told us how a lack of sufficient HGV parking areas was causing disruption both while Stack was in place and during business as usual.

As this solution has been recommended from numerous quarters, and any solution that keeps the M20 open would be of national benefit, I would like you to make clear what the Government intends to commit to the development of an off-road solution, how quickly you expect one to be put in place, and what other steps your Department might take to mitigate the effects of Operation Stack until an off-road solution can be put in place.

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While it was made clear that use of the former Manston airport site is a temporary measure, there was widespread scepticism regarding its viability as a solution, as well as particular concerns on the impact this re-routing would have on Dover District. While we must look to keep the M20 open, without further details on this deal it is not possible to take a fully informed view on whether this arrangement represents value for money.

In responding to this letter it would be helpful if you could set out for the Committee the costs of leasing the former Manston airport site, the duration of the current agreement, and whether the Government plans to keep this arrangement in place until a permanent solution is available. I also request that you provide the Committee with the full business case used to inform the decision on using Manston in this way, as well as a note on whether the problems identified by local government, freight operators and Kent Police were considered before any decision was taken.

It is clear that while an off-road lorry park may provide a solution to the impact of this emergency mitigation measure, the road network in the South East would benefit from further investment to improve the network and remove bottlenecks. I refer to the Transport Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2014-15, *Strategic river crossings*. In this Report, the Committee criticised the small amount of progress that the Department for Transport had made towards a new crossing in the Lower Thames. The Government responded that they agree that a new crossing would be beneficial, but that issues were raised at public consultation that warranted further investigation, and that consultation on proposed solutions is expected in late 2015 or early 2016.

I reiterate the importance of finding a consensus so that a new Lower Thames crossing can be delivered, and ask that you provide more information on likely timescales.

Operation Stack causes disruption whenever it is put into effect, and the circumstances of this summer could be repeated at any time. With Operation Stack having been implemented 48 times since its creation, with an average length of 5-6 days a year, it is clear that the problem is not going away. It is vital that any mitigation is put in place as soon as possible. I urge you to find a solution that balances the national interest of keeping this vital route open as well as the concerns of local communities in a sensible and sensitive way, and to set out when we can expect solutions such as an off-road lorry park to be put into place.

Yours sincerely,



Louise Ellman MP

Chair of the Transport Committee



## Department for Transport

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From the Secretary of State  
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Thank you for your letter of 22 October 2015 seeking further clarification around Operation Stack related actions following the evidence session on 14 October. Please bear with me if I repeat information with which you and other Committee members may already be familiar.

### **Operation Stack**

As you know, Operation Stack is a coordinated multi-agency response to increased demand on the road network in Kent when capacity for vehicles to leave the UK through Dover or the Channel Tunnel is restricted, as we saw exceptionally this summer with the combined effects of industrial action at Calais and the migrant crisis.

During the summer disruption, my priority was to keep traffic and goods moving and ensure that people on both sides of the Channel could go about their lives as normally as possible. I can assure you that the UK Government continues to work with its French counterpart to strengthen the security at borders to keep our trade routes open. For example, the UK Government provided funding this summer for additional fencing to secure the perimeter around the Eurotunnel terminal at Coquelles. With our French counterparts we are also determined to find practical solutions to resolve the migration pressures in the Mediterranean.

### **Short-Term Solution - Manston Airfield**

The Government secured the use of Manston Airfield as a short-term measure to relieve pressure on the M20 during Operation Stack. The introduction of Manston Airfield into Operation Stack when required will provide additional capacity to help manage freight traffic on its way to Dover and provide immediate relief to those living around the M20 under any future deployment of Operation Stack. Its use will of course be kept under review and the impacts on local routes and at the Port of Dover monitored.

The use of Manston as part of Operation Stack was considered and adopted by the Kent Tactical Co-ordinating Group and the overarching Strategic Co-ordinating Group. Membership of these groups is drawn from all emergency services including Kent Police, local authorities, Highways England and a range of other public sector and voluntary sector organisations.

The cost to Government of leasing Manston Airfield cannot be disclosed to the public at this stage as this is commercially sensitive information that could be prejudicial to securing value for money in commercial negotiations for both short and long-term solutions to Operation Stack.

### **Long-Term Solution - Options**

Work to find a sustainable long-term alternative to Operation Stack had in fact started well before the summer disruption, but in response to the severe disruption was accelerated over the summer. My officials and Highways England are working closely with Kent County Council, Kent Police and other local partners on this. Highways England has been analysing several potential sites off the motorway network and exploring these options with landowners and stakeholders.

This work has moved at pace and today the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Spending Review and Autumn Statement that the Government is providing up to £250 million for a major new permanent lorry park to increase resilience in Kent. The Government will consult on a preferred site at Stanford and other alternatives shortly. Please be assured that Highways England is progressing the project as quickly as possible.

I am also acutely aware of the impact that a lorry holding site could have on the local area. I am keen for Highways England to maintain open dialogue with key partners as they look at how to mitigate any such impacts.

### **Lower Thames Crossing**

My officials along with Highways England have been working with stakeholders to garner consensus on the shortlisted options and Highways England expect to launch a public consultation on a proposed route option early in 2016.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'P' followed by 'atrick'.

**THE RT. HON. PATRICK McLOUGHLIN**