

Louise Ellman MP
Chair
Transport Select Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

12 October 2015

Dear Mrs Ellman

Evidence Session: Operation Stack

Transport Focus is the statutory, independent consumer watchdog for transport users. You will recall that we took on the remit for representing users of the Strategic Road Network in England in March this year following the passage of the Infrastructure Act.

The Committee, as it conducts its one-off session on Operation Stack this week, may find it helpful to be aware of the steps we have taken so far on behalf of affected road users.

At the height of disruption to cross-channel traffic in July 2015, Transport Focus was concerned about the impacts of Operation Stack, not only on cross Channel journeys but domestic travel within Kent. Anthony Smith, Chief Executive, wrote to the three lead agencies, Kent Police, Highways England and Kent County Council (copy enclosed) urging them to ensure the interests of users of the M20 and other affected roads were at the forefront in shaping their response to the disruption. He highlighted key areas including information, the welfare of drivers, and alternative methods of traffic control. Kent Police and Highways England both responded with helpful explanation of the steps already being taken, and we had constructive discussions with the County Council.

While Manston Airport is now available as a valuable interim measure, we share the desire for a permanent, better-located solution. We are ready to help Highways England and its partners ensure that the solution works effectively for all roads users.

It would also help to understand better the experience of those caught up in Operation Stack itself. We have research fieldwork lined up, in the event that Stack has to be implemented again, to capture HGV drivers' views and priorities as they emerge from the queue. Whilst we hope it won't be necessary to run this research, the queue organisations agree that the outputs should prove valuable in identifying improvements in how the consequences of cross-Channel disruption are managed.



Finally, Transport Focus examined the quality and consistency of online information provided to road users by a range of sources when Stack was in force in July. This led to the short report *Online Information for road users during Operation Stack* (also enclosed), which we shared with the lead agencies, cross-Channel operators and road freight representatives. It highlighted the absence at the time of a 'single source of the truth' on which road users could rely. Improvements in this area will be an important part of a better service to users should disruption on this scale happen again.

We are happy to answer any questions from the Committee about road user needs as it assesses the progress being made to a more sustainable solution.

Yours sincerely

Guy Dangerfield
Road User Director

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