

Press release: Operation Brock: ready for action

Traditionally when there has been severe disruption to cross-channel services, sections of the M20 have been closed and used to queue HGVs heading for mainland Europe, under arrangements known as Operation Stack.

In November 2017 the Government announced that, alongside ongoing work to find a permanent solution for Operation Stack, Highways England would take forward interim alternatives for Operation Stack that could be ready for use in March 2019, and that, crucially, would keep the M20 open in both directions

From next week, Operation Brock will be available as an extra tool for managing disruption in Kent. Operation Brock queues lorries bound for mainland Europe on the coastbound M20 and uses a contraflow on the London-bound carriageway to enable other traffic to travel in both directions.

Under the new arrangements, in addition to the M20 contraflow lorries can be routed to Manston Airfield and, if needed, the M26 motorway can be closed and used to queue HGVs too.

The M20 contraflow is planned to be in place by 6am on Monday 25 March, and there will be roadworks on the M20 and M26 over the weekend and into next week as the final preparations and adjustments are made.

Highways England project director John Kerner said:

Since Operation Stack's 32-day deployment in summer 2015 we have been working tirelessly with our partners across Kent to make the county more resilient to disruption than ever before. Operation Brock strengthens this resilience even further and offers a safe, scalable response to disruption that can be used to queue up to 11,000 lorries heading for mainland Europe, while keeping other traffic flowing for people living, working and travelling in and around Kent

From Monday (25 March) the M20 contraflow will be in effect from north of Junction 8 (for Maidstone) to Junction 9 at Ashford. Lorries heading for mainland Europe will be routed down the coastbound carriageway, with a 30mph speed limit in place. All other traffic will be directed onto the London-bound carriageway, with two lanes in each direction operating at 50mph. The deployment will help to demonstrate Kent's preparedness for disruption and allow the contraflow to be in place for any traffic disruption in the coming weeks. Three lanes in each direction could be restored, with a 50mph limit, if Operation Brock is assessed as unlikely to be required in the following weeks.

Drivers are advised that sections of the M20 will be closed this weekend for the final work to take place, signed diversions will be in place. From Monday drivers will need to follow the different layout on the M20 from just north of Junction 8 (for Leeds) to Junction 9 (Ashford).

The M20 will be closed overnight (8pm – 6am) each night until Monday morning between Junction 7 (for Maidstone) and Junction 9. Overnight closures may also be required on this section next week if there is remaining work to complete. For the preparations for the M26, there will also be overnight closures on the weekends of the 23 and 30 March.

Operation Brock has stages that can be deployed sequentially, scaling up or down to meet demand. This is how Operation Brock will work:

- in recent years there have already been significant improvements to the holding capacity in the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel, as well as the A20 on approach to the port, where peaks of traffic arriving at the Port of Dover can be managed by traffic lights toward the end of the dual carriageway
- if this increased capacity looks set to be reached, Highways England can activate a contraflow on the M20 between junctions 8 and 9. Lorries bound for mainland Europe will be queued on the coastbound carriageway, with cars using a clearly signed contraflow on the London-bound carriageway
- if the M20 becomes full, lorries heading for the Port of Dover will be directed to Manston Airfield, while the M20 is used to hold traffic for Eurotunnel. Traffic lights on the A256 will help to manage traffic arriving at the port from Manston, similar to the existing system on the A20
- If the M20 holding area becomes full after Manston airfield has been activated, the coastbound M26 could additionally be used to hold lorries heading for the Eurotunnel terminal.
- lorries would move through the queue in sequence and would be released from the front of the queue as soon as there is capacity in the port and tunnel terminals
- instructions for lorry drivers will be clearly signed, well managed and monitored at every step
- the holding areas are all temporary and will be stood down as soon as they are no longer needed. They will be safe and secure with appropriate welfare facilities and access for emergency services throughout
- the queuing system only applies to drivers of lorries heading to mainland Europe from Kent. All other drivers should check conditions before setting out and, if they are crossing the channel, check with their service operator for updates

The arrangements offer a significant improvement to Operation Stack and, crucially, keep the M20 motorway open to traffic in both directions in all but the most extreme circumstances.

For more information on Operation Brock and other contingency measures in Kent, visit:

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.