



Department
for Transport

Councillor Trevor Bartlett
Leader of Dover District Council
Leader's Office
White Cliffs Business Park
Dover, Kent
CT16 3PJ

From the Secretary of State
The Rt Hon Grant Shapps

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail: grant.shapps@dft.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

Our Ref: MC/407844
Your Ref: KC/TB/DJD

19 August 2022

Dear Councillor Bartlett,

Thank you for your letter of 29 July regarding recent traffic disruption in Kent, specifically the weekend of 22-24 July, and the need to find an enduring solution. I fully appreciate the personal impact on local residents, hauliers and passengers when disruption does occur, and the wider impact that it has on individual businesses and our economy.

Weekend of 22-24 July

The weekend 22-24 July saw the start of school holidays and the busiest period for passenger travel so far this year at Port of Dover and Eurotunnel. This combined with fewer French border officials staffing the controls at Dover than expected early in the weekend, and a serious road traffic accident (which caused the M20 to be closed for a prolonged period), led to significant disruption.

It was an extremely challenging situation for the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) to manage given the extent of the disruption caused by factors beyond their control, requiring them to creatively deploy the various traffic management measures. Their efforts, combined with significant activity across government to resolve the issue diplomatically with the French, saw the situation quickly improve and congestion ease by the Sunday evening. Since then, we have continued to engage extensively with our French counterparts to avoid a repeat of this situation in future and explore how border fluidity could be further improved. I am glad to report there was no disruption on the subsequent weekends despite high volumes of traffic crossing the Short Straits.

The Government will continue to support the KRF following the initial funding of £1.7m to enable it to prepare for possible disruption following the end of the EU Transition Period in 2020. The KRF continues to use some of this funding to pay for welfare measures which meant thousands of people were given food and water during the disruption.

Developing a longer-term solution

When Operation Brock was designed, it was intended to help provide a longer-term solution. While it continues to serve its purpose, there is work across central government, our agencies and working with the KRF to develop a more permanent solution. As your letter observes, there are two broad strands to this: how to improve the resilience of the road network when disruption occurs; and, how to improve border fluidity to reduce the overall risk of disruption occurring in the first place.

There is active consideration as to what investments could be made to the road network in Kent. As part of the third Road Investment Strategy (RIS3), National Highways continue to work closely with yourself and local stakeholders to help make the strongest case possible to improve the A2 in east Kent that reflects the potential strategic value of these schemes for improving access to vital ports for trade and tourism. Final decisions on which new schemes will be progressed to construction will be taken in the context of the overall RIS3 Investment Plan that will be set in 2024.

While exploring further possibilities to provide extra capacity during periods of disruption, my Department has already delivered Sevington Inland Border Facility alongside a commercial arrangement with neighbouring Ashford Truck Stop. Use of these spaces is an operational decision for the KRF, but we have worked with them to build them into their traffic plans and are exploring what more use could be made of these sites. Work is also underway on whether the Dover White Cliffs site could be developed to support traffic management. This work sits along wider reforms at the national level to improve lorry parking facilities for hauliers, with a total government investment of £52.5 million.

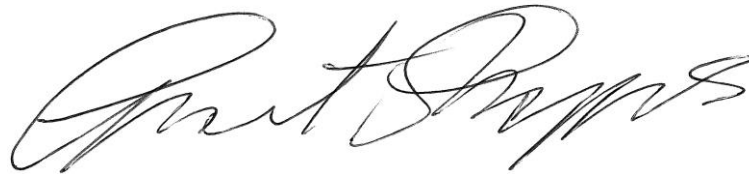
With regards to encouraging a modal shift of freight from road to rail, the Government has long been supportive of international rail freight through the Channel Tunnel as an alternative and more sustainable means of facilitating international freight movements. My Department engages regularly with industry to consider issues facing the rail freight sector and ways in which the sector can play its full part in delivering an efficient and more resilient transport system.

Finally, I agree it is critical that our border makes use of advances in technology to manage changes in flows as outlined in the Government's 2025 UK Border Strategy. We are also discussing with the KRF how technology could be used to improve traffic management as well as more general work on border fluidity. The operation of the juxtaposed controls in Kent though is the responsibility of the French, in line with EU and their own policies, including the planned implementation of the EU's Entry/Exit System (EES). My Ministerial colleagues and I are taking the risks posed by EES at the juxtaposed controls very seriously and raising with our EU counterparts.

Officials from my Department, the Home Office, Cabinet Office, and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office are engaging regularly with France and Short Straits operators, with the aim of ensuring that EES is implemented in a manner which minimises any impact on border fluidity.

I hope this letter demonstrates the seriousness with which we are addressing these issues. As you say, there will be no quick solutions but working with KRF and other stakeholders I am confident we can develop an enduring solution that meets these challenges.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Shapps', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT



Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

By email to:
shappsg@parliament.uk
Grant.shapps@dft.gov.uk

Leader's Office
White Cliffs Business Park
Dover
Kent CT16 3PJ

Telephone: (01304) 821199
Fax: (01304) 872452
e-mail: cllr-trevor.bartlett@dover.gov.uk
Website: www.dover.gov.uk

Councillor Trevor Bartlett
Leader of the Council

Direct Line: (01304) 872090
Our Ref: KC/TB/DJD
Your Ref:
Date: 29 July 2022

OPEN LETTER

Dear Secretary of State

It was another frustrating weekend last week for residents and businesses in Dover, Folkestone and Ashford, cut-off from the rest of the world by gridlocked local roads, causing yet more damage to both the local and national economy.

The impact is also felt by neighbouring areas, such as Canterbury and Thanet, with serious consequences for Kent's vitally important tourism and visitor economy.

Thousands of tourists and freight operators experienced hellish journeys through Kent, with increasing needs for critical aid and welfare.

But this is a bigger problem than Dover and Folkestone. It is damaging the whole UK economy and Britain's global reputation.

As a nation we are reliant on highly efficient and effective cross-Channel services; nowhere can match the capacity of the short straits' crossings from Dover and Folkestone and which remain the first choice for both domestic and international travellers and hauliers.

They are an essential part of our national infrastructure and need to be acknowledged as such.

But the system is fragile. Any disruption to services quickly escalates out of control. And it is local communities, businesses and tourism across Kent that bear the brunt of these increasingly frequent events.

If we want to enjoy holidays abroad, export our goods, and welcome in-bound tourists and trade in return, the government must act and produce a long-term solution.

1. To invest in Kent's road network, including but not limited to, dualling the A2 from Lydden to Dover along with improvements to Brenley Corner, and the Whitfield and Duke of York roundabouts
2. To develop additional border facilities supported by a network of lorry parks throughout the country
3. To create "smart" travel corridors and efficient borders through new technology
4. To improve access and capacity for rail freight and high-speed passenger trains.

This will take time. So, in the interim, we are calling on the government to provide greater resources to the Kent Resilience Forum and its partners so they can more effectively manage disruption on Kent's roads and extend welfare facilities.

The challenge will just get bigger if the government ignores the issue. Next year's planned introduction of the Entry Exit System which requires biometric checks is set to put our County at the forefront all over again.

The clock is ticking and the time to act is now!

Yours sincerely



Trevor Bartlett
Leader of the Council

Signatories:

Cllr Trevor Bartlett, Leader of Dover District Council

Cllr David Monk, Leader of Folkestone & Hythe District Council

Cllr Gerry Clarkson, Leader of Ashford Borough Council

Cllr Ben Fitter-Harding, Leader of Canterbury City Council

Cllr Mike Baldock, Leader of Swale Borough Council

Cllr Reece Pugh, Deputy Leader of Thanet District Council

Cllr Roger Gough, Leader of Kent County Council

Matthew Scott, Kent Police & Crime Commissioner

Deirdre Wells OBE, Chief Executive, Visit Kent

John Keefe, Director of Public Affairs, Getlink (Eurotunnel)