

To: Maidstone Joint Transportation Board

By: Tim Read, Head of Highways & Transportation

Date: 22nd February 2016

Subject: Request for a 18tonne weight limit on Willington Street & an alternative request for positive signing of all motorway traffic to use Willington Street.

Classification: For information

Summary: Requests have been received from local Councillors to investigate the potential for the imposition of an 18 tonnes weight restriction on Willington Street, Maidstone. A request has also been received by Highways & Transportation for Willington Street to be positively signed as the main route for all traffic travelling from the east on the A274 wishing to access the M20 as opposed to travelling through the town centre. This report considers both requests.

Background

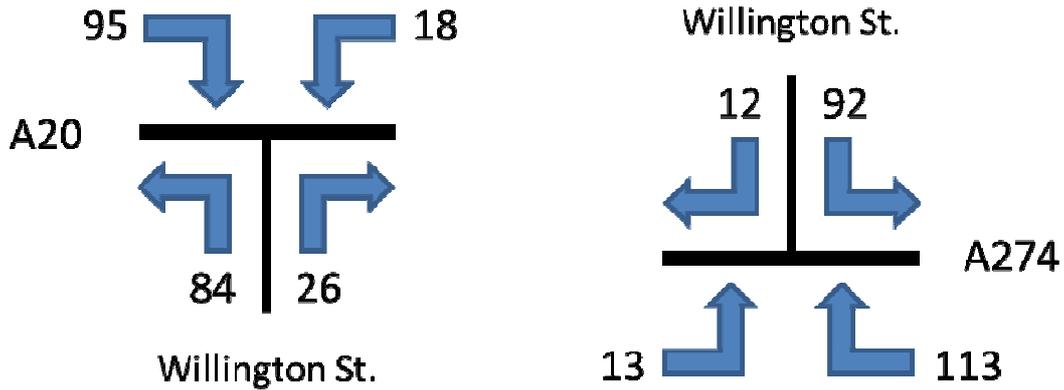
1. Requests have been received for the imposition of an 18 tonnes weight restriction on Willington Street similar to that on the B2163 through Leeds. Conversely another request has been received asking that Willington Street be positively signed for all road users travelling towards the town centre on the A274 that wish to access the M20. This report considers the potential implications on the surrounding roads if such a limit or positive signing were implemented.

Traffic Surveys

2. Traffic surveys were conducted in July 2014 on Willington Street as part of the investigations undertaken on reducing the weight limit on the B2163 through Leeds. These surveys were conducted between 7am and 7pm and the information from these surveys can be used to help predict the likely impact in terms of traffic flows of implementing a restriction or positively signing Willington Street for traffic wishing to use M20.

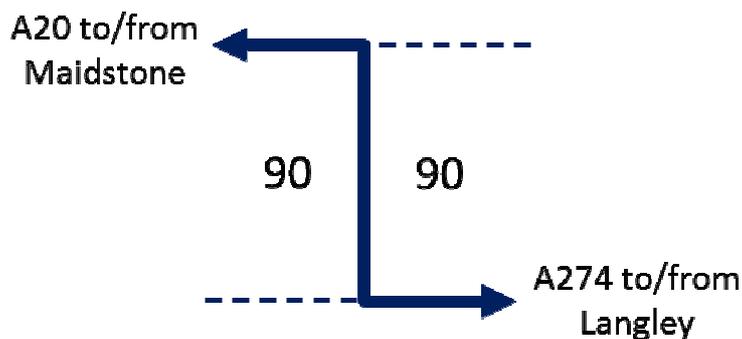
Weight Limit

3. Using the data from the 2014 surveys the following number of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV's), defined as any vehicle with a gross weight over 7.5t, were identified to be using Willington Street between 7am and 7pm.



Displacement

4. The request is to afford Willington Street the same protection from HGV's as the B2163 through Leeds meaning the implementation of an 18t HGV restriction on Willington Street. The total number of HGV's 18t or heavier recorded on Willington Street as part of the July 2014 survey was 214.
5. The survey was not an origin and destination survey so it is not possible to identify how many of the 214 HGV's were conducting legitimate business along Willington Street, although a survey conducted on the B2163 at the same time indicated that 85% of the HGV's surveyed between 3.5t and 18t were through traffic movements.
6. The main manoeuvre the majority of the surveyed HGV's were making, 180 of the 214, is shown below:-



7. If a weight restriction was implemented on Willington Street the data indicates that the most likely diversion route for the majority of displaced HGV's would be in and out of the town centre via the A229 Loose Road. If 85% of the 180 HGV's diverted on to the A229 Loose Road this would equate to a 25% rise in HGV's on Loose Road.
8. HGVs forced to re-route via the town centre would then have to move through the A229/A274 Wheatsheaf junction. The County Council has concerns regarding the effects of additional traffic on the road with congestion already prevalent on this part of the network. A decision to, in effect, displace HGV

movements onto this junction would worsen queuing and delays at this location.

Financial Cost of Implementing an 18t Weight Restriction on Willington Street

9. Based on the fees in the Member Information pack for the Combined Members Grant the total costs to investigate, design, consult and report to the JTB on a lower weight limit would be £3,500. The actual implementation costs would be of similar value as new illuminated weight limit signs and advance direction signs would be required. The County Council's main priority for investment in small schemes of this nature is to prevent road casualties. The recent road safety record along Willington Street does not indicate that its current use by HGV's has led to a personal injury crash problem. A scheme of this nature is therefore unlikely to be a high priority for funding from the County Councils budgets.

Enforcement

10. The effectiveness of any weight limit is dependent on robust enforcement from Kent Police which, due to other priorities and experiences in other locations such as the B2163 through Leeds, cannot be guaranteed.

Positively Signing Willington Street as the main route for Motorway Traffic

11. A request has also been received asking that Willington Street be positively signed for all traffic travelling towards the town centre on the A274 wishing to access the M20. It is general highway authority policy to direct traffic using the road classification system to ensure motorists use the most suitable routes for reaching their destination. For the M20 motorists are currently signed along the A274 & A229. If Willington Street was signed for M20 bound traffic this would divert traffic travelling towards the town centre from the A274 then A229 via Willington Street to the A20 then either direct to the A249 or via New Cut Road and Bearsted Road and then to the A249.
12. From the surveys conducted in 2014 5,430 vehicles continued straight on the A274 at the Willington Street junction. As the conducted surveys were not origin and destination surveys it is not possible to predict how much of this traffic would transfer onto Willington Street if this was positively signed for the M20. However if only a third of this traffic were to divert on to Willington Street this would increase overall traffic on Willington Street by 10% and could therefore potentially negatively impact capacity. Willington Street is currently a local distributor route rather than a strategic route for longer distance traffic and this increase in traffic will have potential negative impacts on local residents and there could also be similar negative impacts on New Cut Road, Ashford Road and Bearsted Road.
13. Notwithstanding the potential traffic impacts of re-routing M20 bound traffic along Willington Street the cost of implementing such a change would be several thousands of pounds as a number of large direction signs would need to be changed or replaced. As stated above the County Council's main priority for investment in small schemes of this nature is to prevent road casualties. There is no evidence to suggest that rerouting traffic on Willington Street will have any positive effect on road safety and is unlikely to be a high priority for funding from the County Councils budgets.

Conclusion

14. Restricting the use of Willington Street by Heavy Goods Vehicles over 18 tonnes or promoting it as a route for all traffic wishing to use the M20 could have significant negative impacts on the surrounding roads and local communities. Neither proposal should be considered without more detailed analysis of the likely impacts and would not currently be high priorities for highway funding. Any changes to the function of Willington Street should be considered as part of the overall transport strategy for Maidstone and not in isolation. It is therefore recommended that no such changes should be considered until the approval of the transport strategy.

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