Freight Management in Kent

Issues Paper

1. Introduction

1.1 Freight movement, particularly road haulage, is predominantly viewed in a negative way when considered as a purely transport issue. The reality is that the movement of freight is an integral part of the UK and Kent economy. The aspiration for economic growth brings with it an increase in the problems associated with freight movement but freight also provides major economic and employment benefits.

1.2 Because of its flexibility and relatively low cost base the majority of freight movement in the UK is handled by road haulage. This suits the needs and demands of modern business. Short sea shipping and, more importantly, rail freight can make a contribution but their impact on the road freight will at best only slow its growth.

1.3 Because of Kent's location the county forms the principal gateway between the UK and mainland Europe. As a result it suffers more that its share from the impact of freight movement particularly road based movements. This is likely to get worse with the expected growth in freight led by Ro-Ro and containerised freight movements. The high frequency and relative low cost of the short-sea crossings between Kent and mainland Europe (via the Kent ports and Eurotunnel's shuttles) also mean that it is difficult to attract road based freight to other ports in the UK.

1.4 The main issue for Kent is not so much how it can reduce the level of road freight but how it can manage current freight movements and meet the expected growth so that the negative impacts on Kent are reduced whilst the county benefits from the economic and employment opportunities.

1.5 Freight movement, particularly through Kent, is a cross-border issue and its management needs to be recognised as a priority for both the National and Regional transport agenda. Greater awareness of the key issue, a firm commitment to long-term solutions and engagement of the European, National and Regional governments are all necessary for the management of freight in Kent.

2. Overnight Lorry Parking

2.1 It is already acknowledged that there is an under provision of facilities for overnight lorry parking in the County. There is an estimated demand for 1,000-1,500 spaces but currently only around 450 appropriate spaces are provided at Ashford Truck Stop (some 300), Motorway Service Areas and a small number of private lorry park sites. European Directives on driver hours have a significant impact on where HGV's need to park but there is reluctance by many drivers and operators to use these sites because of their high charges.

2.2 The result is that HGV's can be found parked at numerous locations across the County where there are virtually no facilities for them. Often the presence of HGV's at these unsuitable locations causes considerable nuisance to local communities and have the potential to encourage illegal activities because they are difficult to police. The key issues for overnight lorry parking in Kent are:

- A number of sites need to be identified where formal overnight lorry parking can be accommodated that provide suitable facilities at a cost that the haulage industry would be prepared to pay.
- These sites ideally need to be sited around 45 minutes drive time from the Port of Dover and be well connected to the strategic road network.
- Existing lorry park sites should, wherever possible, be retained and consideration given to their expansion.

- Land values of lorry park sites mean that they can be more profitable for landowners to redevelop lorry parks for other uses. Public ownership of the sites should, therefore, be considered with the management of the sites operated by the private sector.

3. Operation Stack

3.1 Operation Stack is implemented when disruption to traffic flows at the Port of Dover and/or Channel Tunnel becomes significant and causes dangerous queues of traffic from the port or tunnel terminal. Cross-Channel lorries are parked on the coastbound carriageway of the M20 whilst all other traffic is diverted onto the adjacent A20. Phase 1 (stacking between Junctions 11-12) provides capacity for 800 vehicles and Phase 2 (between Junctions 11-12 and 8-9) provides capacity for 4,100 vehicles. Phase 3 which provides additional stacking on the London Bound carriageway between Junctions 8 and 9 has a total capacity for 7,400 vehicles, but has yet to be implemented.

3.2 The implementation of Operation Stack is a random event, caused mainly by extreme weather conditions, industrial action or equipment failure in the ports, on ferries or trains through the Tunnel. In one quarter in 2005, Operation Stack was initiated over 20 times, but following that, it was not used for 18 months. It usually does not last for more than a day, but earlier this year, Operation Stack was implemented almost continuously over a two week period.

3.3 Operation Stack causes widespread disruption to the road network across Kent not just along the A20/M20 corridor, especially when Phase 2 is initiated

3.4 Both the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel have limited capacity for lorry parking in the event of significant delays to services. With the expected growth in freight traffic there is the potential for Operation Stack to be implemented more regularly.

3.5 The Highways Agency will be utilising a Quickchange Movable Barrier (QMB) system for Operation Stack which will set up a contraflow system on the M20 London bound carriageway between M20 Junctions 10 and 11 from this summer. They are also looking at extending its use towards Junction 13 and Junction 10 to gain additional capacity. The key issue is how quickly the QMB can be implemented and its effectiveness will be crucial before its use is extended.
In the longer term, the use of the M20 as a temporary car park for HGV's is untenable and a more permanent solution is needed.

3.6 A site for an overnight lorry park off Church Lane, Aldington and adjacent to the Sellindge Converter Station has been identified and was announced in March 2008. This site was selected after consideration of several of alternatives adjacent to the M20, M2, A2 and A249 by representatives from the Police, Dover Harbour Board, Eurotunnel, Shepway District Council, the Channel Corridor Partnership, SEEDA and KCC. The site had previously been selected by the Highways Agency when it looked at the problem in 2000.

3.7 The site covers 70 acres and would have the capacity to hold 3,000 lorries with permanent overnight secure parking for 550 lorries. Essential facilities such as a canteen, cleaning and toilet facilities would also be provided.

3.8 The remaining key issues are: -

- Planning permission and land assembly for the site at Aldington to be progressed
- Funding for the site needs to be secured and access arrangements and operational requirements agreed with the Department for Transport, the Highways Agency and the Police
- As Operation Stack only requires occasional use, the site should incorporate Overnight Lorry Parking facilities.

4. Access to Kent Ports and Channel Tunnel

4.1 The principal concern in Kent is the access to the Port of Dover and the congestion that regularly occurs along A20 Townwall Street, leading to the Eastern Docks. Dover Harbour Board has considered the use of "Buffer Zones" near to the port to manage access to the port but a proposed rural site adjacent to the A20 would lie in an Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB). DHB currently considers that redevelopment of the Western Docks is a better way of providing for more growth.

4.2 DHB is also constructing a free flow exit slip road onto the A20 which should relieve congestion both within the port and for access to the port. DHB and Network Rail are investigating the feasibility of reconnecting the Western Docks to the rail network.

4.3 Road and rail access to the Channel Tunnel is very good.

4.4 Road Access to the Port of Ramsgate is generally good, apart from a section of the Thanet Way which should be dualled in the near future. Rail access to the port would not be feasible.

4.5 Road access to Sheerness Docks has been improved over the past few years with the Second Swale Crossing and other improvements to the A249. Sheerness mainly handles fresh and forest products and new vehicle imports and exports but currently handles no roll on/roll off traffic. Some goods at Sheerness are carried by rail, but the rail terminal in the port needs to be improved to increase modal share.

4.6 Road access to Thamesport has also been improved over the past few years, although the stretch leading to the docks needs some upgrading. Thamesport handles mainly deep sea containers with some general cargo, but no roll on/roll off traffic. Rail share at Thamesport is around 20% and could be improved further if a freight loop were to be installed on the single-track Hoo Branch Line.

4.7 The key issues relating to port access are:

- Road access to the proposed redevelopment of Dover Western Docks could relieve the centre of Dover depending on related regeneration development.
- Rail access to the Port of Dover may not provide the benefits that were previously envisaged because of gauge width restrictions on the rail network, the nature of the freight traffic using Dover and the aspirations for the redevelopment of Dover Western Docks.
- Rail access to Sheerness Docks and Thamesport (Isle of Grain) already exists but needs to be improved if it is to play a greater role in freight movements associated with these ports.

5. Strategic Road Network

5.1 The two principal routes through Kent giving access to Kent's ports are the M20/A20 and the M2/A2. The first of these forms part of the national strategic road network and has been adopted by the Highways Agency for its routing strategy to/from Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover. The M2/A2 corridor is designated as a route of regional significance. In 2006, the split of lorry traffic at Dover Eastern Docks using the M20/A20 and M2/A2 corridors was 72% and 28% respectively but the split from the M25 is 85% and 15% respectively.

5.2 Distance and driving time between Dover Eastern Docks and Dartford Crossing using either of these routes is very similar but the M20/A20 appears to be the preferred as it provides a more fuel-efficient route and is free-flow until Dover is reached.

5.3 On each of these routes there are a number of locations where there are capacity issues and urgent action is required (see Figure 1). The key issues are: -

- The Highways Agency's focus on the M20/A20 as the main strategic route to Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover does not recognise the level of freight traffic still using the M2/A2 and does not give consideration to an alternative route in the event of a major incident closing the M20/A20;
- To promote the M2/A2 as an alternative route for freight traffic to the M20/A20, it needs to be brought up to a higher standard. This would involve improvements to the A2 Lydden to Dover single-carriageway section and the M2 Junction 7 at Brenley Corner. M2 Junction 5 also needs to be improved to give better access to Sheerness Docks at peak traffic periods;
- Improvements to the A2 currently under construction and the recently completed M25/A2/A282 Interchange in North Kent will provide additional capacity. However, in the long term the Dartford Crossing will become an increasing constraint on the network. Identifying the location for a Lower Thames Crossing and bringing this forward would provide relief for the Dartford Crossing as well as other benefits to the Thames Gateway.
- Further improvements to the national strategic road network in Kent to provide additional capacity and relieve points of congestion to freight traffic are required on M20 Junctions 3 to 5 and M25 Junctions 5 to 7.

6. County Road Network

6.1 Freight traffic on the County road network (ie non-Motorway and trunk roads) needs to be directed along the most appropriate routes that give access to the strategic road network. This can be done principally in three ways:

- through development control to ensure that development proposals that generate significant volumes of freight traffic are located near the most appropriate routes. In terms of road hierarchy this would be the national road network followed by the County's principal road network (A class road).
- traffic management to discourage or prohibit HGV's from using inappropriate routes – this needs to be carefully considered to prevent merely diverting lorries onto equally unsuitable roads
- by providing the right level of information to drivers and freight hauliers to enable them to use the most appropriate routes for their journeys.

6.2 The key issues regarding the supply of information are:

- revising and promoting the Lorry Route Map for Kent via the internet as well as in hard copy
- expanding the provision of Variable Message Signs on the national road network both within and outside Kent so that appropriate information can be provided to drivers well in advance.
- utilising information technology (e.g. satellite navigation systems) to provide accurate information to freight hauliers and drivers so that they use the right roads.

7. Potential Funding Mechanisms

7.1 Due to its Gateway position between the rest of the UK and mainland Europe, Kent suffers from significant adverse impacts due to the movement of freight vehicles. Foreign-registered lorries have an unfair advantage over UK hauliers as fuel costs in other countries are significantly below those charged in the UK and there are concerns that they are more likely to be involved in crashes than UK-owned lorries.

7.2 The County Council considers that foreign lorries should be charged for using the roads in this county to recoup some of the costs they impose and to level the playing field in competition with UK lorry drivers. Additionally a good data base is required to enforce penalties imposed on

foreign lorry drivers and operators and the County Council considers that a vignette system should be introduced to produce revenue which can be spent on parking facilities for lorries and other transport improvements in Kent.

7.3 There is additional revenue raised from the toll at the Dartford Crossing amounting to some £50 million per annum. Kent has in the past received funding (£1 million) from the Dartford Tolls revenue but the latest Government proposals is to withdraw even this relatively small amount after a local toll discount scheme in introduced later this year. The County Council considers that more of this revenue stream should be used to improve transport facilities in Kent, including a Lower Thames Crossing.

7.4 The County Council should also work with Nord Pas de Calais and other bodies to access European funding for freight-related projects.

7.5 The key issues are:

- Work with Government, Kent's port operators and the freight industry to find a mechanism for raising revenue that could be used to fund improvements aimed at reducing the impact of road freight in Kent
- Seek a significant proportion of the revenue raised at the Dartford Crossing to put towards improvements that would reduce the impact of road freight in Kent.
- Investigate, in conjunction with the Nord Pas de Calais region, European funding streams that could be used for infrastructure improvements for freight traffic.

8. Rail Freight

8.1 The amount of freight taken by rail through the Channel Tunnel has been very disappointing since opening in 1994, with volumes well below forecasts and a decline since 1998 due to illegal immigration, poor service quality and relatively high costs. Currently barely over 1 million tonnes of freight was carried through the Tunnel by rail in 2007, but with charges through the Tunnel significantly reduced and new services starting this year, it is hoped that the decline in volumes can be reversed. The two freight routes leading to the Tunnel (Swanley-Maidstone-Ashford and Redhill-Tonbridge-Ashford) have a W9 loading gauge but this still imposes limits on the type of freight that can be transported and reduces the cost-effectiveness of rail versus road.

8.2 The CTRL has a UIC loading gauge, unique in the UK, and is capable of taking freight trains, with purpose-built freight loops to allow freight trains to get out of the way of Eurostars and CTRL Domestic services (from December 2009). Gradients on the CTRL limit the weight of freight trains that can operate in the day time, but there is capacity over the night time period. The crucial factor governing how much the CTRL will be used for freight will be the track access charges which have yet to be fixed.

8.3 The key issues for improving the level of freight transported by rail are: -

- The competitiveness of rail freight on cost and level of service needs to be improved.
- The two existing freight routes to the Channel Tunnel should be improved to W10 loading gauge to link to the West Coast Main Line, giving greater access for rail freight from Europe to the UK.
- Track Access charges on the CTRL need to be set at a realistic level to ensure that railfreight can take advantage on its large loading gauge.
- Current EU policy on rail freight is aimed at opening up the market to more competition and integrating the rail freight infrastructure but service levels, particularly in France need to be enhanced and competition will assist in this aim.

- A network of road/rail terminals across the UK and Europe needs to be established that has good accessibility to the strategic road network and major conurbations for onward distribution by road.

9. Road-to-Rail Interchanges

9.1 If located in the right place, road/rail interchanges offer the prospect of removing freight traffic from Kent's roads. However, an interchange located in the wrong place or with the wrong type of operation could have the opposite effect. There is a policy vacuum at the national and regional level regarding where strategic terminals should be located – particularly around London. A proposal for such a terminal at Howbury Park on the Kent/Bexley border, with good access to the M25 and close proximity for London was granted planning consent last December (see Figure 2). The County Council also supports the location of terminals at the ports themselves and the modal share for rail at Thamesport illustrates the effectiveness of placing the terminal adjacent to where the ships arrive and depart.

9.2 The submission of the planning application for Kent International Gateway near Junction 8 of the M20 at Hollingbourne is being opposed by KCC as it is located in the centre of the County and the fear is that it will generate significantly additional lorry movements.

9.3 The key issue for road-to-rail interchanges is:

- Identifying locations where sites for road-to-rail interchanges would be supported. This should be based on the benefit they would provide to Kent in terms removing freight traffic from Kent's roads and how this would relate to a network of rail terminals across the UK and Europe.

10. Air Freight

10.1 Infratil, the new owner of Kent International Airport (KIA at Manston), has steadily increased the volume of freight handled by the airport over the last two years. Aviation freight is largely inter-continental and as such is separate from the bulk of freight currently handled through Kent's ports although some 'airfreight' is actually carried by lorries via ports. In reality the volume of freight handled by air is relatively low and would have only a marginal impact on freight movements through Kent, but there could be local impacts if it is not managed properly. It is most unlikely that London Ashford Airport (at Lydd) would handle any appreciable volume of freight in the foreseeable future

10.2 The key issue is:

- To ensure that KIA is well located to the strategic road network so that any associated freight traffic can be accommodated with the least impact on the local area.

Figure 1

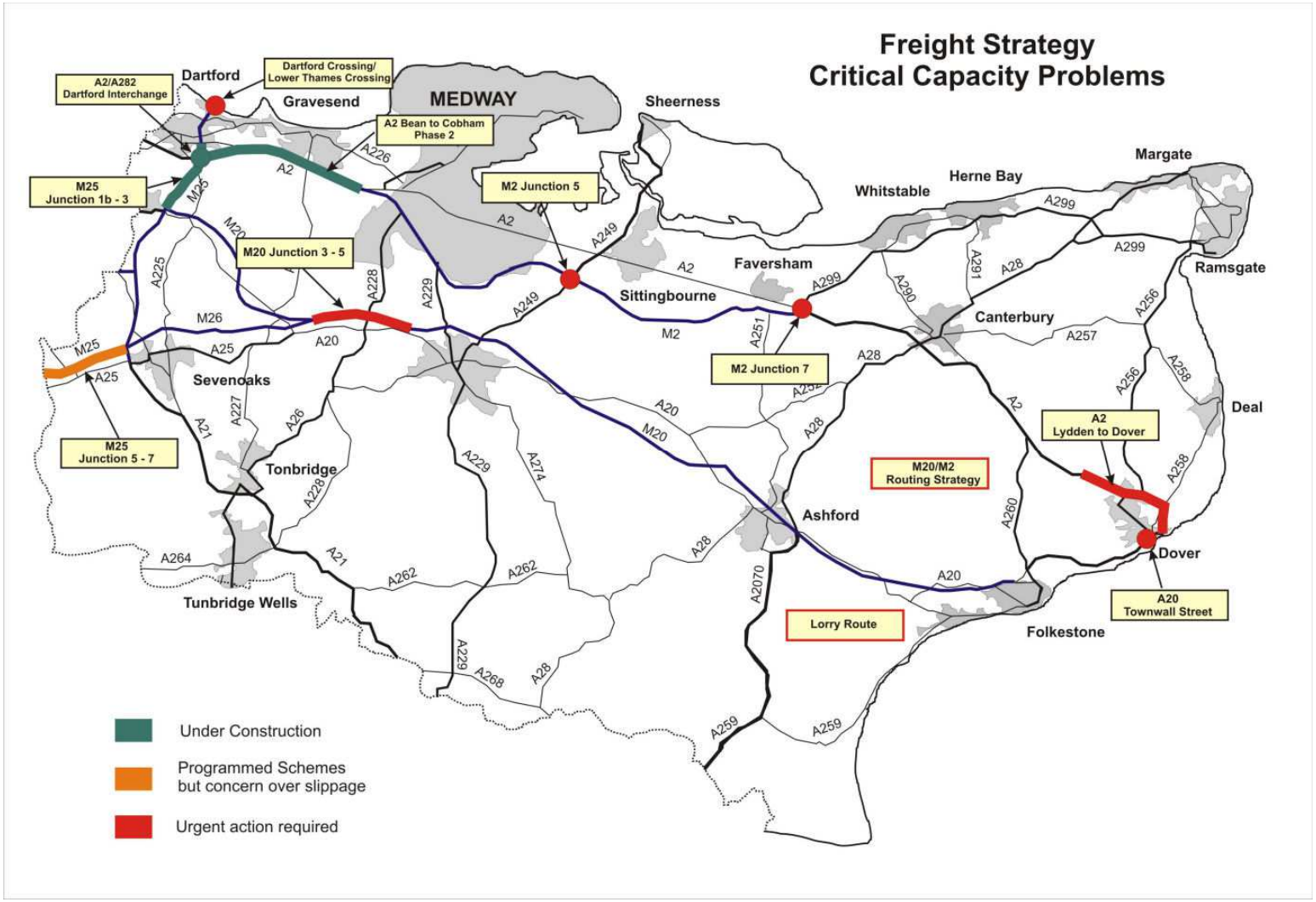
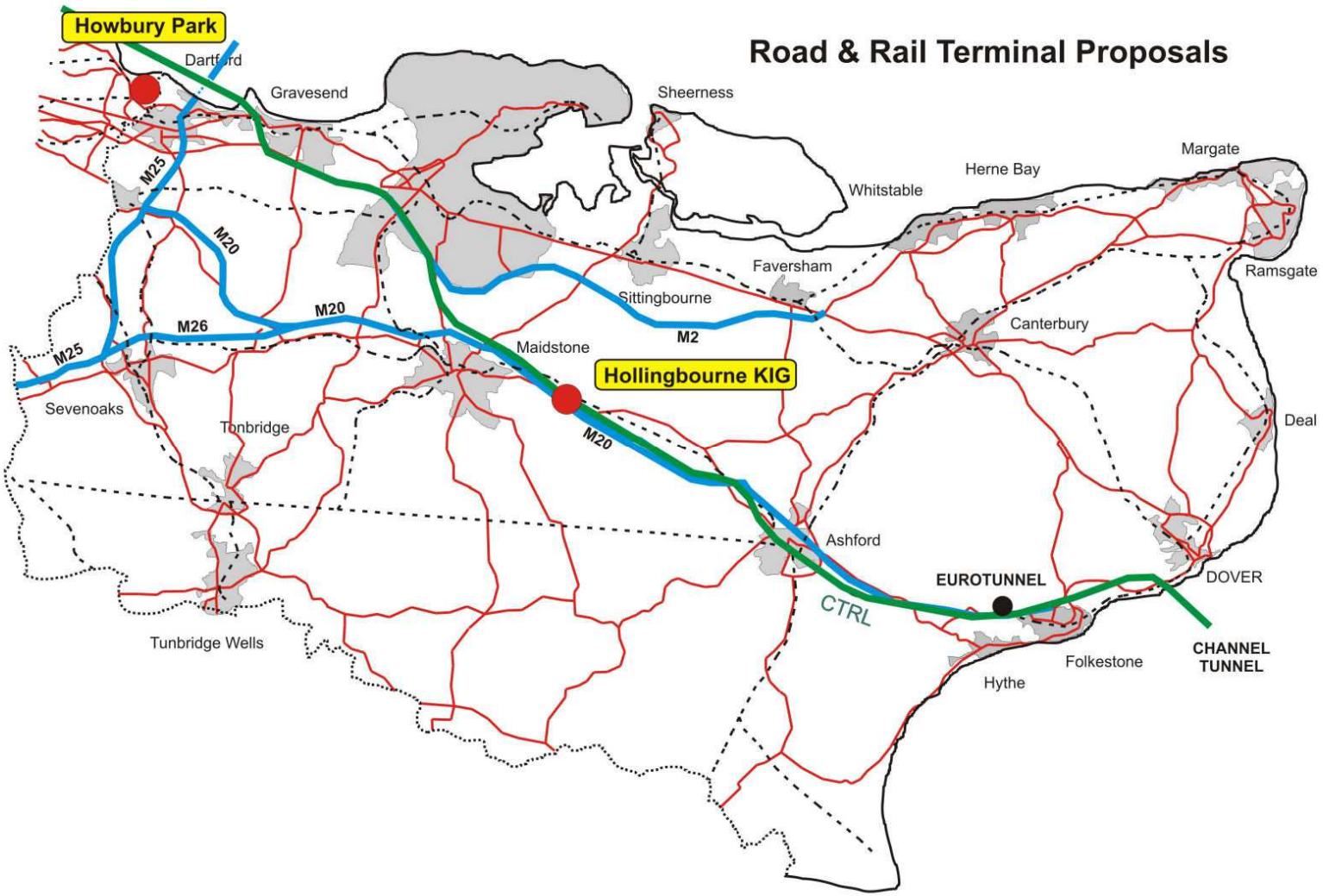

Freight Strategy
Critical Capacity Problems
A2/A282
Dartford Interchange
Dartford
Dartford Crossing/
Lower Thames Crossing
Gravesend
MEDWAY
A2 Bean to Cobham
Phase 2
Sheerness
M25
Junction 1b - 3
M2 Junction 5
Whitstable
Herne Bay
Margate
Ramsgate
M20 Junction 3 - 5
Faversham
Sittingbourne
Canterbury
Deal
Sevenoaks
M2 Junction 7
A2
Lydden to Dover
M25
Junction 5 - 7
Tonbridge
M20/M2
Routing Strategy
Ashford
Dover
Tunbridge Wells
A20
Townwall Street
Lorry Route
Folkestone
Under Construction
Programmed Schemes
but concern over slippage
Urgent action required

Figure 2


Road & Rail Terminal Proposals
Howbury Park
Dartford
Gravesend
Sheerness
Whitstable
Herne Bay
Margate
Ramsgate
Deal
Faversham
Sittingbourne
Canterbury
Maidstone
Hollingbourne KIG
Sevenoaks
Tonbridge
Tunbridge Wells
Ashford
EUROTUNNEL
DOVER
CHANNEL TUNNEL
Folkestone
Hythe
CTRL
M25
M20
M26
M2