



OFFICER REPORT TO TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE

FREIGHT TRANSPORT INITIATIVES JUNE 2008

KEY ISSUE/DECISION:

What policies should the County Council adopt for heavy goods vehicles using unsuitable minor roads?

BUSINESS CASE:

Introduction

The County Council needs to strike a balance between the economic benefits of HGVs and their impact on the environment. As a transport authority, the Council's has some limited powers to regulate HGV movements, but also has a role to manage freight through information and voluntary agreements.

This paper describes new proposals for dealing with the environmental and social nuisance caused by HGVs:

- A revised lorry routeing network
- Action to tackle satnav problems
- HGV reporting
- A dedicated freight officer within Transport for Surrey

This paper also provides background information on:

- environmental weight limits
- Freight quality partnerships
- The London low emission zone

Lorry routeing network

Like any other class of road user, HGVs have a general right to use all public roads. The County Council (and other stakeholders such as the Highways Agency) encourage HGV to use the highest category of road for the majority of their journeys and only use local roads for access to their destination.

In the mid 1990s, the Council developed the Surrey Distributor Road Network – a map which shows the hierarchy of Surrey’s most important roads, and which encourages travel on the highest category:

- Primary roads (mainly Motorways and Trunk roads),
- County Distributor (A Roads),
- District Distributor (B roads) and
- Local Distributors (C roads).

This lorry routing network is currently under review and will shortly be installed on the Council’s website. Officers will discuss with HGV operators whether they would also want to see the map printed in hard copy. Experience suggests that individual lorry drivers do not often use printed maps, but that haulage companies may do when developing core routes.

Recommended routes are being re-enforced on the ground with distinctive lorry route signing.

As a general rule, HGV operators prefer to use the main routes where they can. They are nearly always faster than smaller roads and involve fewer gear changes, which can have a significant effect on HGV costs.

Satellite Navigation (Satnav)

An increasing problem that some HGVs are being diverted onto minor roads by their satnav systems. This occurs when a simple satnav system calculates that a minor road offers either a shorter or faster route. It also happens with more sophisticated satnav systems which calculate routes to avoid congestion problems

There are currently no HGV-specific satnav systems on the market. All satnavs are based on the same Ordnance Survey (OS) maps which do not categorise roads by their suitability to accommodate larger vehicles.

The Ordnance Survey is aware of this problem and has taken steps to overcome it. The OS has recently added bridge height and weight restrictions to the current mapping and has invited local authorities to provide them with information on routes that are unsuitable for HGVs. These developments will make it possible to produce HGV specific satnav systems which filter out local routes which have suffered from inappropriate use from HGVs in the past. The OS is also using this information to produce bespoke routing and tracking systems for individual logistics company which will also help to reduce inappropriate use by HGVs.

The Council is developing an initiative to engage members, groups such as Parish Councils, the haulage industry and residents to identify the routes within the County that are unsuitable for HGVs. This will include a form (both web-based and paper) for residents to suggest unsuitable routes. The information will be collected centrally within Transport for Surrey, before being collated and sent to the OS. The routes put forward will be discussed with the relevant Local Highways Services to ensure that legitimate access is not compromised.

We are also examining the county road collision statistics in order to identify “HGV accident hotspots” and to identify any sites where vulnerable road users are particularly at risk from HGVs. These can also be flagged on HGV-specific satnav systems.

It will take a little time for the Surrey data to be incorporated into the OS maps and influence HGV routes. There will also be a delay whilst lorry operators buy the new units. In the meantime, we are able to influence lorry routes by the use of traffic signs and the lorry routing plan.

Reporting inappropriate HGV traffic

The County Council is developing a scheme for residents to report inappropriate HGV usage. This might include:

- Use of unsuitable minor roads
- Breaches of weight limits (see below)
- Unsafe driving and speeding
- Anti-social driving (including night-time hours)

On receipt of an HGV report, Transport for Surrey officers will be able to take up the complaint with HGV operators. In some instances, the police may need to be involved.

A pilot is being developed for this approach to help to assess the likely level of interest from the public and the reactions from the HGV industry and police.

Dedicated Freight Officer

In order to coordinate these initiatives, Transport for Surrey has designated Peter Hitchings as the Council's freight officer. Peter can be contacted on:

020 8541 8992
peter.hitchings@surreycc.gov.uk

Environmental Weight Limits

The County Council has powers to apply an environmental weight limit which would prevent lorries above a certain weight from using a road. Each application is considered on its merits. For any given application, we will assess whether the limit would divert lorries onto even less suitable roads. We will also assess whether some HGVs would need to be allowed an exception to the limit, for example to service local shops and businesses. An "except for access" clause can be imposed within the restriction but these arrangements can fall into disrepute because they are very difficult to enforce, as Police need to observe an offence taking place. For these reasons environmental restrictions are rarely used unless there is an acceptable diversionary route and there are no shops and businesses within the restricted area.

A change in legislation (from 2007) required Highway Authorities to change all existing 17 tonnes weight restrictions to 18 tonnes. Approval to change existing Traffic Regulation Orders was secured through Local Committees and the sign faces were changed by March 2008.

Many of these restrictions are in the north west of Surrey and will have some impact on lorry route choice through the area served by Walton Bridge. These routes will be reviewed in advance of a possible new Public Inquiry, anticipated to take place early in 2009.

If an environmental weight limit is not suitable for a given location, it may be possible to enter into a local voluntary agreement. For example, this may cover the routes that vehicles take and the times that they operate.

Members or residents who would like to have a route considered for a weight limit should contact Transport for Surrey through Peter Hitchings (contact details as above).

Freight Quality Partnerships

On a wider scale the County Council develops Freight Quality Partnerships (FQPs). These involve for example, working with local businesses or their representative bodies, freight operators and their trade organisations and District Councils to establish strategic routing and delivery strategies. The aim is to route HGVs on the most suitable routes and minimise their impact on sensitive local environments.

FQPs have already been established in Epsom and Ewell and Woking. A scoping study has been carried out in connection with Walton Bridge covering Elmbridge, Spelthorne and Runnymede. Further plans are proposed for north west Surrey, Guildford / Waverley and Reigate / Redhill.

London Low Emission Zone (LEZ)

The London Low Emission Zone (LEZ) imposes a daily charge on HGVs which do not meet defined emissions thresholds. The power to implement a LEZ is specific to London. Surrey County Council cannot follow suit. However, the need for the LEZ will reduce over time. By 2012 all HGVs will be required to meet the emission thresholds/

Early indications are that most lorry operators in London and the southeast have upgraded their fleets to meet the LEZ requirements, which should improve air quality over a much wider area than London alone, especially within the M25 cordon. Surrey's worst air quality areas lay within or around the M25 so should immediately benefit from the London scheme.

A number of concerns about the impact of the LEZ on lorry traffic using local roads have been raised in the Spelthorne and Runnymede areas. These movements are being monitored by Transport for London (TfL) as part of their overall monitoring programme. If, over time, the concerns are substantiated we will negotiate with TfL in order to secure appropriate remedial measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- That the Select Committee support the Service's proposals for lorry routing, HGV satnavs, HGV reporting and a dedicated freight officer.
- That the Committee notes the information on weight limits, Freight Quality Partnerships and the London Low Emission Zone

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

To achieve customer feedback on problems caused by lorries using inappropriate routes and to use this information to improve routing advice for drivers.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

Develop systems for receiving feedback on lorry routing problems, collate information and advise OS and satnav companies of routes to be omitted.

Lead/Contact Officer: Peter Hitchings, Assistant Engineer – Transport Strategy

Consulted: Iain Reeve, Head of Transport for Surrey
 Andrew Roberts: Strategic Director – Services for Communities
 Jenny Isaac: Head of Surrey Highways

Informed:

Sources/background papers:
