PORT OF DOVER

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23 February 2023

BY EMAIL TO: appgsoutheast@secouncils.gov.uk

Sally-Ann Hart MP
Chair
All-Party Parliamentary Group for the South East

Dear Ms Hart,

The South East and Global Britain: what role for transport infrastructure in underpinning Britain's plan to trade and grow?

I am pleased to submit the Port of Dover's response to your APPG's call for evidence concerning the above topic.

Port of Dover and the role of the Short Straits

Port of Dover is the closest port to mainland Europe and the European Union – the UK's main single trading partner. Through this immutable geographic advantage, each year Dover handles £144 billion of trade in goods, 33% of all UK trade in goods with the EU, 59% of all UK-EU ferry journeys and 31% of the total number of HGVs transiting through the UK's major sea ports. Each day, up to 130 ferry movements carry up to 10,000 freight vehicles, supporting businesses and consumers across the UK.

Together with Eurotunnel, the Short Straits route manages almost 60% of all trade in goods with the EU, jointly facilitating around 12 crossings per hour. No other crossing can match this capacity and frequency, or the level of resilience that the system offers for critical just-in-time freight flows.

Neither Brexit nor Covid have changed the market preference for the Short Straits. When the system is operating normally, it is unrivalled. When the system comes under significant stress and there is disruption, it is still unrivalled. Freight operators have demonstrated time and time again that they would rather face significant queues to travel via the Short Straits than divert to a sub-optimal route where the journey time is considerably longer, the number of sailings considerably fewer and therefore the capacity simply doesn't exist. Furthermore, Dover is also building back its tourist volumes, which pre-Covid saw 11 million passengers and 2 million tourist vehicles travelling through East Kent each year. The Port must ensure both critical flows get through smoothly and do not impede each other.

The Short Straits still offers more resilience and more reliability for the freight flows that rely on it even on bad days. In fact, it has been calculated that the Port of Dover alone can clear a queue of lorries around 18 times faster than competitor ports. Time and time again, Dover has demonstrated this. For example, on the Friday of the very first weekend of the 2022 summer getaway, operations were hugely impeded by a desperate lack of French border officials, which dominated the national media. This quickly led to major queueing for customers and significant disruption for our community and more widely in Kent.

Once French border capacity was fully restored on the Saturday morning, the Port of Dover and its operational partners quickly cleared not only the large volume of waiting Dover-bound freight vehicles, but also the considerable backlog of Friday's summer tourist traffic and all of Saturday's holidaymakers as well. Such was the speed of recovery that by early Sunday morning the Port had processed more than 200 miles of tourist and freight traffic combined, with operations completely back to normal. That's the equivalent of a line of traffic from Dover to Birmingham.

While the example given was in relation to a disruption event, it shows just how good the Short Straits is when it has the right tools to support it.

National pressures on Kent's road system

Systemic approach to road investment

The road network supporting the vital Short Straits link between continental Europe and the UK is fragile, but some targeted investment could be transformative. The M20/A20 and M2/A2 routes act as one corridor, providing strategic network flexibility, capacity, and a limited degree of resilience. As part of the same corridor, the two routes should be seen as part of the same system. A systems approach is needed to improve network resilience, support local and national growth, and mitigate the negative impacts of any cross-Channel disruption on residents, visitors, businesses, and freight.

Currently, most of the Port's traffic uses the M20/A20 (the signed route to Dover), which benefits from a three-lane motorway for most of the way with a dual carriageway serving the last few miles into Dover. However, we know from previous experience that when the M20 has a problem, the freight traffic naturally diverts to the M2/A2, with around 70% of Dover's freight traffic using this route. The last few miles are single carriageway with no way of separating international freight from local traffic.

The Lower Thames Crossing will make the M2/A2 the preferred route for more drivers heading to Dover. National Highways modelling shows that 7 million vehicles will use the Lower Thames Crossing. Potentially, around half of the Port's traffic will rely on the A2 as a matter of routine due to the time/cost benefits of that route.

This makes investment in the existing pinch points of Brenley Corner and the sections of the A2 that remain single track (notably between Lydden and Dover) more critical than ever. With around half of the international freight traffic using Eurotunnel and Dover heading beyond London to support economic activity in the Midlands and North, these upgrades need to happen concurrently with the building of the new crossing to unleash the full potential of the Lower Thames Crossing. Otherwise, the investment will push a huge additional volume of freight onto a single-track road. Noting that the Port of Dover can handle up to 110 miles of HGV traffic on a busy day, such a surge in freight could create a severe bottleneck, blocking off East Kent in the process and undermining the resilience of a strategic international freight route.

Dualling the A2 would not only add more capacity, it would also enable the segregation of local and international traffic and provide a way of controlling international freight flows into the port on both routes via the Dover TAP (Traffic Access Protocol) system that already exists on the A20 to create a rolling queue of freight outside Dover and keep local communities clear. Disruption and congestion at the Port of Dover can gridlock Dover town, which means people can't get to doctors, shops have to shut and public transport can no longer continue to operate normally. With the dualling of the A2 and implementation of a second TAP, this could largely be mitigated keeping Dover clear and local traffic fluid.

The dual recognition of how providing the necessary infrastructure supports both the Dover and wider Kent community and economy as well as levelling up across the nation through the Port's facilitative economic role, has already been recognised by the Government. £45 million of Levelling Up funding was recently secured by Kent County Council to deliver our Outbound Controls Project, which will reconfigure the layout of the ferry terminal and enhance border control points to help secure traffic flow and capacity for the long term.

Inland Terminals

Operation Brock is a traffic management system on the M20 in Kent that seeks to keep vehicles moving when there is significant cross-Channel disruption. The use of Operation Brock significantly increased last year and disruption will worsen considerably if the new EU Entry Exit (border) System (EES) is implemented at the border itself as currently envisaged. Due to

juxtaposed controls, the French border exists at Folkestone and Dover. EES, involving a series of biometric checks and the creation of a digital file overseen by a French border official, will cause major queuing in Kent. Its launch having recently been postponed, EES is currently scheduled to enter into operation at the end of 2023.

As well as impacting local businesses and communities, cross-Channel disruption has an impact on business across the UK, with sensitive just-in-time supply chains (e.g. fresh food and manufacturing) especially impacted. International, national, and local media has widely covered disruption to our transport network. This damages our reputation as a place to invest as does direct experience of traffic disruption on this scale for businesses and customers.

Operation Brock was designed as a temporary mitigation for an acute issue, but we should be looking to a permanent offline solution with a wider footprint that is not only a better response to occasional disruption events, but also provides a shift change in international freight management on a day-to-day basis. These could be dedicated inland terminals on both routes to Dover whereby freight queuing and lorry parking capacity is provided along with proper lorry driver welfare facilities, clean fuel charging and digital solutions to help manage the queue and flow of traffic.

Green Shipping Corridor & Clean Energy

In May 2022, together with our sister ports of Calais and Dunkirk, ferry operators, local authority, and academic partners, we launched our ambitious target to become the world's first high volume 'green shipping corridor' between Britain and France across the Short Straits.

Green corridors are specific zero-emission maritime routes where both vessels and land-side infrastructure have been decarbonised. This includes using zero-emission vessels and alternative fuels, as well as providing recharging and refuelling infrastructure.

As the busiest maritime corridor in the world, there is a significant emissions footprint that can and must be addressed. Equally, there is a golden opportunity to eliminate a major part of the stubbornly high emissions from the UK supply chain in one hit whilst securing for the long term the intrinsic benefits that Dover provides today in terms of capacity, efficiency, frequency, and resilience.

Joined by industry partners, we created the Green Corridor Short Straits consortium to conduct an analysis of regulation and policy and assess the viability of energy options for both marine and land-side vessels and vehicles. Our feasibility work is supported by government funding from the Clean Maritime Demonstration Competition Round 2 (CMDC2), which is part of the UK Shipping Office for Reducing Emission (UK SHORE).

The outcome from the study will be a detailed business case and route map that will be used as a catalyst to encourage a scale-up of zero-emission vessels and land-side infrastructure. It will also be a tool to attract private sector investment and a blueprint for other ports to follow.

Importantly for the UK, achieving the first green corridor on the busiest maritime corridor in the world will display British-led global best practice, with others around the globe looking to learn from us.

The opportunity is big, but so is the investment requirement and there are significant challenges in terms of clean energy provision, notably the electricity requirements to power a clean port, clean shipping and clean landside vehicles. The energy requirement to power this would literally turn the lights out in East Kent. This again needs a system approach.

The ask

Fundamentally, Global Britain needs its core trading route to work whilst building trade with the rest of the world. That means, as the premier UK-EU gateway, it is time to give the Short Straits the tools it deserves to deliver the traffic fluidity and resilience on which the whole nation relies,

both on a day-to-day operational basis and to minimise the impact of occasional disruption events. It requires a system approach across multiple issues and infrastructural provisions. That way, it can be celebrated as the national asset it is, in the leading region for trade, supporting the local economy, and a global champion for net zero.

Richard Christian

Head of Corporate Affairs