

Normandy political, business leaders discuss post-Brexit plans in Dublin

Idea of cargo ships travelling directly to French ports to bypass the UK floated

Political and business leaders from Normandy visited Dublin last week to discuss contingency plans for Brexit including cargo ships travelling directly to French ports to bypass the UK “landbridge” to the EU.

Hervé Morin, the president of Normandy, outlined to business figures the increased numbers of customs officials and border inspection controls for animal and food health checks planned for the ports of Cherbourg, Dieppe and Caen-Ouistreham in order to be prepared for the UK’s departure from the EU on March 29th.

The three ports, which handle two million passengers and 200,000 heavy goods vehicles every year, are looking to maintain existing traffic with the UK post-Brexit.

Normandy officials were in Dublin to attract new business by selling the attractiveness of direct traffic to French ports should customs checks congest the landbridge route.

Mr Morin assured Irish business figures and officials on his visit that the French ports would be ready for a hard Brexit as a result of a €30 million investment for checkpoints at the three ports.

He said that Cherbourg, an Irish Ferries route from Dublin, had taken measures to account for the configuration of traffic at the port, including the handling of Irish and English traffic driving off ferries.

Simplified procedures

The three ports are also looking at the possibility of simplified regulatory procedures post-Brexit to avoid road blockages.

The French government has indicated it will recruit more customs officials and border inspectors to cope with the increased bureaucracy post-Brexit.

Normandy’s president was joined on his trade mission to Dublin by Sophie Gaugain, an official in charge of economic development for the region, and Normandy’s development agency along with key commercial maritime players including Normandy Ports, Normandy Logistics and Brittany Ferries.

The visit follows the signing of an agreement between the Irish and French ports’ association in Dublin in November to look at increasing capacity on existing sea routes between Ireland and France and consider new routes if there were restrictions on the UK landbridge after Brexit.

The vast majority of lorries heading to continental Europe use the landbridge travelling through the ports of Holyhead and Liverpool on the west coast and Dover on the south coast of the Britain.

Longer journey times

Lorries can reach continental Europe destinations in less than 20 hours by travelling the landbridge compared with up to 40 hours via slower direct sea routes to France, making the UK transit route more effective in terms of cost and transport times, particularly for “just-in-time” products.

The Government and State agencies including the Revenue Commissioners have warned that customs delays and tariff barriers at British ports could create serious delays for Irish hauliers transporting goods, particularly fresh food and other perishable products, entering and leaving the UK.

The majority of Irish imports and exports move directly between Ireland and Europe primarily on containers, but the bulk of Irish “roll-on, roll-off” lorry and road freight traffic uses the landbridge.

Two-thirds of Irish goods exporters use the landbridge, connecting Ireland and Europe through UK ports such as Holyhead and Dover, according to the Irish Exporters Association.

Some 53 per cent of Irish goods exports with the rest of the world, excluding Britain, pass through the UK in terms of weight, according to the Economic Social and Research Institute.