

## Cork Port holds talks over routes to bypass the UK due to Brexit

By Colm Kelpie

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Cork looking at direct routes to the continent for exporters

Cork Port has ramped up talks with continental ferry companies about providing more direct freight routes between Ireland and mainland Europe due to Brexit, its chairman has said.

John Mullins said fresh food exporters in particular cannot afford the time to ship their produce to Europe via Britain if border restrictions are going to be imposed.

"If you're a mussel producer in west Cork and you need to get to the Paris market on Monday, and you're harvesting on a Friday, you cannot afford the time with fresh mussels, waiting in Holyhead, and then waiting again in Dover as you go over the landbridge," Mr Mullins said, at a recent Brexit event at UCD.

"It's not going to work. Most recently we've been speaking to continental ferry providers about actually having more direct ferry routes into continental Europe out of Cork, and out of Rosslare," he said.

"You will see a reorientation of logistics."

Mr Mullins later told the Irish Independent that one of the options the port has long been looking at is trying to get direct access to Spain.

Although he didn't get into specifics, he said the port was in talks with both new operators and was also potentially looking at changing routes.

A survey published this week by the Irish Exporters Association found that two thirds of exporters go through Britain to get their produce to Europe and further afield.

At an event earlier this week marking the potential impact of Brexit on the tourism industry, Nick Mottram of Irish Ferries described the economic impact of a customs border as "massive", adding: "At the moment, any night, there would be about 400 trucks coming off ferries into Holyhead.

"If there's a 30-second delay for customs, that would be about three hours and 20 minutes. That's seven kilometres of trucks.

"They would be backed up in the ferry and the ferry wouldn't be able to discharge. It would be a complete bottleneck."

And he said there was a huge impact for businesses. "At the moment, the likes of M&S have sandwiches delivered in the morning, they come in our ferry, they're on the shelves, they're sold at lunchtime, the trucks go back out at lunchtime, and it's just in time.

"But if you start to have a three or four hour delay at the border, that kind of distribution doesn't work," he said.

Meanwhile, Luxembourg foreign minister Jean Asselborn said yesterday that "sensitivity" needed to be shown around the border issue in the Brexit talks as nobody wanted to destroy what had been gained in terms of the peace process.

"The European Union is a peace project and if a country leaves the European Union, this cannot mean that peace in Europe is no more protected," Mr Asselborn said on a visit to Ireland.

"Therefore I am very interested to see the border and I am aware that we need a lot of sensitivity and feelings that this can be destroyed and should not be destroyed."

Mr Asselborn said a solution to the border could be found, but that creativity was needed. The minister also travelled to visit the border.

"It is not an ordinary border, it is an historic border, and Europe has a lot of interest to keep the specificity of this border in its mind."