

Electronic customs system planned for post-Brexit border

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PLANS are afoot for a post-Brexit electronic customs system that will enable vehicles to cross the border without having to stop.

The hi-tech system is seen as one way of addressing fears of a hard border between the north and south after the UK leaves the EU.

Customs staff in the Republic are already assessing potential technologies, such as traffic surveillance and computerised pre-authorisation of importers and exporters, according to Anthony Buckley, the Irish Customs deputy director-general.

He said the aim was to develop a system whereby a truck can drive from one end of the island to the other without stopping.

"Even if there's a free-trade agreement (between the UK and EU), we'll still need to know what is being traded, what's crossing the border," Mr Buckley told a Brexit briefing organised by the Irish Exporters' Association (IEA).

"Our design challenge, as I like to term it, is that a truck should be able to drive from Cork to Belfast or from Holyhead to Galway, without stopping. That would be the ideal, and we want to achieve that.

Mr Buckley said the system was likely to take three years to design and develop.

The aim is to ensure that information about a lorry's load could be inputted into a computer on the south side of the border and then be automatically conveyed to the authorities in the north.

The vehicle's movement would be monitored in a similar fashion to the automated toll booths operating on the M50 in Dublin.

Customs officials believe clearance facilities would be necessary but not necessarily at the border. However, they warned that some vehicle examination areas may be needed on the border, as would spot checks to combat smuggling.

At the same IEA Brexit event, Rory Montgomery from the taoiseach's department said that it was very likely that there would be a customs border between the Republic and Northern Ireland.

"Will there be a customs border? The answer is very probably yes there will be," he said.

"But to what extent will there be more significant trade restrictions and barriers, that will depend very much on the overall EU-UK relationship as it's worked out."