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MP wants key routes widened and new lorry park to be built

Call for action to prevent repeat of chaos on roads

by Sam Lennon
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Action is needed now to improve the roads into Dover after the weekend's traffic chaos, says the town's MP, Charlie Elphicke. Motorists suffered delays of up to three-and-a-half hours on Saturday after a combination of bad weather and a ferry breakdown. It comes just after the first anniversary of Black Saturday, on July 23 last year.

That was when up to 250,000 motorists had delays of as long as 12 hours because of too few French border control staff at Dover filtering traffic through.

Mr Elphicke said "Year after year it is the same. "Last summer the traffic chaos was caused by French border officers failing to turn up for duty. This weekend adverse weather conditions and a P&O ferry breaking down led to the tailbacks.

"It happens all too easily and all too often – and shows that our infrastructure is too finely balanced to cope properly.

"The people of Dover suffer every time – and so does the nation as delays at the port costs our national economy dear."



Charlie Elphicke MP

This time the A20 had queues back to the Roundhill Tunnel near Folkestone, and on the A2 traffic jams stretched back to Lydden.

Cars and lorries started to pile through Capel-le-Ferne and the Folkestone Road on the B2011.

Mr Elphicke said: "Action is needed now. We need more investment in the roads to the Channel ports."

'At the moment the government is not doing enough to be prepared'



Dover's Eastern Docks

He says that the A2 needs to be dualled, the M20/A20 has to be expanded and a planned lorry park near that route, at Stanford near Hythe, has to be delivered on time. Mr Elphicke also remarked: "The government needs to be better prepared for French strikes, bad weather or ferries conking out."

He says that he and colleagues have been pressing the Depart-

ment for Transport to invest more in roads.

He stressed that Dover is on the frontline of Brexit and he has compiled a detailed report with industry experts and business leaders on the action needed so Britain is ready for leaving the EU in March 2019.

Mr Elphicke said: "Stories in the national press this week warned that we will be hit by huge border delays and suffer more than £1 billion a year in economic damage when we leave the European Union.

"The truth is that Brexit can be a huge success for Britain and for

P&O APOLOGY

P&O Ferries said on Saturday that all Dover to Calais sailings were delayed by three-and-a-half hours due to adverse weather and technical difficulties.

According to the company's Twitter account, queues were taking about three hours to clear, but delays were later reduced to two hours.

The traffic across the town was delayed on the approach to Dover, with many motorists reporting traffic at a standstill on the motorways.

Travellers arriving at the port were told to check in as usual and they would be put on the next available sailing at no extra cost.

A P&O Ferries spokesman said: "We would like to apologise sincerely to every customer who has been inconvenienced by the delays at the port.

"It was been caused by one of our ships going out of service because of a technical fault.

"Police were brought in to manage the volume of traffic."

Meanwhile, DFDS reported its traffic was free-flowing at both the ports of Calais and Dunkirk.

Dover – but only if we are prepared. At the moment the government is not doing enough to be prepared. So I am pressing them to get a grip and do better."

Mr Elphicke says that solutions include speeding up investment in technology and infrastructure to keep trade flowing freely through our ports.

£1bn Brexit cost estimate 'conservative'

by Paul Francis
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Kent's ports and roads could be hit by chronic delays and traffic congestion after Brexit because of the need to introduce new customs checks.

A report says that the cost to the UK could be in the region of £1 billion a year – and that could be a conservative forecast.

It warns that there could be almost permanent instigation of

Operation Stack along the M20 and cites delays in opening new lorry parks as a major factor.

The report comes from consultancy Oxera, which sets out a bleak scenario after Brexit because of the need by customs officials to conduct separate checks.

It has based its findings partly on the length of time it currently takes to carry out checks on non-EU HGVs entering the UK, which take an average of 45 minutes.

Under current arrangements agreed when the single market

was established, no checks are made on goods leaving the UK for the EU and vice versa.

The report suggests that the need for separate checks after Brexit will be severe: "Extensive regulation of products, combined with increased levels of enforcement, will lead to a significant increase in the requirements at borders."

On the potential costs it says: "We estimate the impact of such a scenario to be at least £1 billion per year.

"This is an extremely conservative estimate – it does not

account for the economic costs of the uncertainty involved, the extra staff needed for hauliers, ports and customs officials, the congestion associated with calling Operation Stack, the land required for the additional customs checks in the form of lorry parks, or of the wider economic impacts of jobs moving overseas due to uncertainty over the operation of just-in-time logistics.

"The full cost is likely to be much higher."

Plans for a huge lorry park off the M20 near Folkestone are currently in limbo because of a

legal case which is scheduled to be heard in December.

Tim Waggott, chief executive of the Port of Dover, said that issues around a new set of customs clearance and border control procedures "are acute".

He added: "In 2016, almost 2.6 million freight units and over 12 million passengers transited the port.

"Maintaining fluidity at the Dover Straits to protect and promote UK-European land-based trade flows must be one of the key imperatives during the Brexit talks."

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