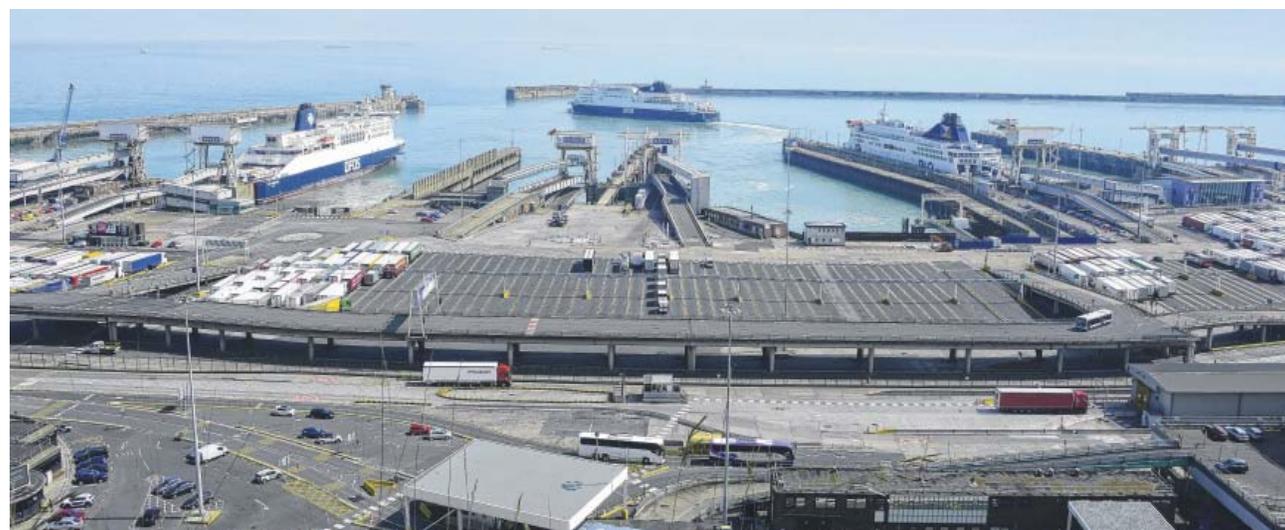


New report calls for early investment to avoid Docks shock



Dover's Eastern Docks: decisions at the border are set to rise from between 230%-360%

Picture: Paul Amos FM4785461

Alarm grows over port's ability to adapt to Brexit

by Paul Francis
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Auditors have warned that serious delays and disruption will occur at border entry points – such as the Port of Dover – if the government fails to prepare for the UK's departure from the EU.

A report by the National Auditor Office says border controls will need to change to take account of Brexit and expresses concern that arrangements may not be ready by 2019.

It says the Port of Dover could see significant delays after Brexit because of the need for more customs checks. It also predicts regular bottlenecks and congestion as the time needed to make checks increases.

Auditors estimated that immigration officials would need to make 230% more decisions a year if the existing regime for travellers from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) is extended to European arrivals.



Operation Stack on the M20

Picture: Gary Browne FM3945062

If customs declarations were needed for trade between the UK and EU, the total number could soar by 360%.

The report warns that Dover's port does not have enough capacity for increased checking of vehicles, and that it would be wrong to think that border controls can continue "doing more of the same."

It says: "In some circumstances the ability to scale up operations will be constrained by its infrastructure – physical

and otherwise. "For example, there are a limited number of inspection bays available and physical constraints on creating new ones. "Increased controls on roll-off services could limit the flow of goods and people, creating bottlenecks and substantially increased waiting times. Perishable goods could be damaged and supply chains interrupted.

"New border management activities may need to be

designed – and implemented in a compressed time frame."

MP Meg Hillier, who chairs the all-party public accounts select committee, said: "How the UK manages its borders has been a question of significant concern in this government's approach to Brexit. This report from the NAO underlines the sheer scale of the task ahead."

"Add to that the Home Office's poor track record with projects like e-borders... it's difficult to see how it will be able to deliver any of these huge changes in time."

A Government spokesperson said: "We are fully focused on making the UK's exit from the EU, and our new trading relationship with the world, a success.

"We have set out proposals for an ambitious future trade and customs relationship with the EU and will be setting out proposals for the future immigration system in due course.

"We will ensure we have the resources to continue running an effective customs, borders and immigration system.

'Deal or no deal – let's get ready'

Industry leaders want more certainty from the British government as they prepare for Brexit at the Channel ports.

Representatives from groups such as Eurotunnel and the Road Haulage Association took part in a panel discussion organised by Dover MP Charlie Elphicke last week.

Panellists called for the government to liaise more with businesses and invest more in upgrading the UK's border technology.

Mr Elphicke said: "We need better systems at the border – and greater certainty on preparations for Brexit.

"We need to prepare now to ensure we are ready on day one – deal or no deal."

A number of MPs also attended the packed meeting



Charlie Elphicke

in the House of Commons on Tuesday, October 17.

On the panel, chaired by Mr Elphicke, were Tony Smith, former Border Force director general, and John Keefe, Eurotunnel director of public affairs.

Richard Burnett, Road Haulage Association CEO, said: "I



John Keefe

don't think we've had enough of an open door with government," he said.

Kuehne + Nagel international forwarding director Mark Johnson warned of not being ready for a potentially huge increase in customs declarations.

The M20 and A2 would "absolutely not" be able to cope with a late failure of Brexit negotiations, he said.

Eurotunnel's Mr Keefe said: "Brexit could be a lever to help get some of the technology we need to move things forward as traffic grows."

Mr Smith highlighted the increased demands on immigration systems – potentially growing from the current 12.5 million to a further 25.5 million visitors after March 2019.

Britain could be ready in a no-deal scenario, he added, but "I hope we get the investment at the border that's urgently needed."

The panellists agreed that a top priority was an improved trusted trader system for haulage firms post-Brexit to ensure fewer customs checks.

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