

Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Union Affairs Opening Statement – Glenn Carr, Director Commercial Business Units, Iarnród Éireann / Irish Rail – Port Authority for Rosslare Europort

Firstly, thank you Chairman and to the committee for the opportunity to discuss Rosslare Europort here today.

Rosslare Europort is the second busiest RoRo / Pax port and is a key strategic port for the country which has never been more demonstrated than over the last two years.

On average we now handle between 18-20% of the RoRo freight traffic in the country and nearly 600,000 passengers passed through the port in 2022.

Current customers and services at the port include –

1. Irish Ferries – who provide services from Rosslare to Pembroke, Wales.
2. Stena Line – who provide services from Rosslare to Fishguard and Cherbourg France
3. Brittany Ferries – who provide services from Rosslare to Bilbao, Cherbourg and Le Havre.
4. DFDS – who provide services from Rosslare Europort to Dunkirk.
5. Finnlines (Part of the Grimaldi Group) – who provide services from Rosslare to Zeebrugge.

Following the exit of the UK from the European Union at the end of 2020, Rosslare Europort has seen a very significant increase in shipping services and freight traffic through the port.

Weekly EU direct Ro-Ro services to and from Rosslare Europort have grown from six at the start of 2020 to thirty-six in 2023. This has resulted in EU freight growing +398% cumulatively in the last two years and positions Rosslare Europort as the number 1 port for direct EU Ro-Ro /Pax services in the country.

The growing of these services to mainland Europe has been essential to protect our exporters and importers supply lines and provide an alternative to the UK landbridge which had been the preferred route pre-Brexit.

The new routes and additional services also provide a key support to the new supply chains which have now been established directly with Europe and to which so many of our exporters and importers now rely on.

This year as we emerge from Covid and restricted travel that has affected tourism in the last few years, many of the new continental services will be offering passenger services. We expect to see substantial increases this summer in tourism traffic between Rosslare and the ports we are connected to in Spain and France. This of course further strengthens our links with our EU neighbours and brings about much positive economic, social and educational benefits for the towns and regions associated.

We are very confident that these direct services will be maintained and indeed we are in ongoing discussions and reviews to accommodate potential additional frequency and capacity to Europe as ongoing demand continues.

Despite the very positive increase in direct services and freight volumes to Europe from Rosslare, trade with the UK has been adversely affected by Brexit. Our UK Freight traffic is cumulatively down -36% over the past two years. While we are seeing a rebound in passenger UK traffic it is very evident after two years of post-Brexit trading that a substantial shift in the supply chain between Ireland and the UK has now occurred.

It will be important that all stakeholders work collectively to ensure sustainability in the longer term of these important services and links to the UK. It is positive that both current shipping operators continue with their scheduled services from Rosslare Europort to the ports of Fishguard and Pembroke respectively. From a passenger perspective there are opportunities and incentives with the advent of post Brexit duty free allowances and the lifting of restricted travel that had interrupted the ability to travel during covid over the past two years. It is our belief that freight UK volumes will remain behind pre covid levels given the shift in the supply landscape in Ireland, however over time this may change but in the interim will be challenging.

A lot of planning and preparation went into Rosslare Europort as we entered the post Brexit era. The temporary Border Inspection Post facility remains fully operational, and all state agencies are amalgamated on the one site. Rosslare Europort is in the unique position in that the BIP is located about one kilometre away from the berths and ensures that freight and passenger traffic moves freely to and from the ships and onto their onward journey. Additional resources were recruited both by the port, shipping lines and the key government agencies operating at the port to ensure a smooth transition of services in the post Brexit era.

Further significant investment is also committed with substantial infrastructure works commencing later this year. The Masterplan works for Rosslare Europort have commenced and an investment of circa €150million will be made into the port over the next number of years. Agreement has been reached regarding the permanent Border Control Post which is to be built inside of the port and construction of this facility will commence later this year. While the port will face significant challenges during the various construction phases of the Masterplan, we are confident that the detailed planning that is ongoing with all stakeholders will enable the port to operate safely and efficiently for all customers and colleagues who use and work at the port.

Equally it is critical that connectivity to Rosslare Europort and all major cities and industrial hubs throughout Ireland be further supported by improving infrastructure developments. As volumes through the port continue to grow it is essential that the Oilgate to Rosslare motorway and the new Port Access Road are completed so that the additional future traffic can be accommodated, and that Rosslare can be developed to its full potential to support the Irish Economy

We must not forget the traffic congestion problems that existed pre Covid and the over reliance on Dublin and the challenges that brings.

Rosslare Europort has proven in recent times how important a strategic asset it is and should be fully supported to deliver all the plans I outlined today.

Rosslare Europort has also completed an extensive review of the potential of the port being further developed as the Offshore Wind Hub for Ireland. As the committee will know significant Offshore Wind developments are planned in both the Irish and Celtic seas and Rosslare Europort is best positioned to be developed to meet the port infrastructure needs of this industry for the projects planned in the Irish and Celtic seas.

Significant work is underway regarding the design, planning, funding and the business case for the Rosslare Europort Offshore Wind Hub.

We believe that this proposal offers both the Offshore industry and the State the best investment and future required port infrastructure to ensure that Ireland maximises this opportunity. The extensive connectivity routes now established at Rosslare Europort with other European ports will also be very beneficial to this sector for the supply and transport of smaller components used by ORE industry as these projects commence. Our planned new ORE facility at the port will also be designed to be multi-modal in the future, this means that once the heavy ORE activity is completed for the various projects, the facility at the port will be easily transferable for additional Ro-Ro and Lo-Lo activity. This will be of strategic importance for the East coast especially given the future capacity problems that will face Dublin Port in the next decade.

Finally, I would like to thank the Ministers, Secretary Generals and their teams from the Department of Transport, Revenue Commissioners, Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and the Office of Public Works, TII, Wexford County Council and the elected representatives for Wexford and the wider Southeast for their continued support of Rosslare Europort and our ambitions and investment plans to ensure that the port remains the gateway from Ireland to Europe.

Thank you, Chairman and Committee Members.

Glenn Carr
Director, Commercial Business Units