

Seanad Select Committee on Brexit
Opening Statement – Glenn Carr, General Manager, 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 in the country and is now the foremost RoRo port in the country for direct services to Europe. It has been a truly transformative number of weeks as – together with our shipping operators – we have brought new and expanded direct services between Rosslare Europort and the Continent of Europe

Direct sailings to Europe have gone from 3 to now 16 each way per week, offering 32 services between Rosslare and Europe. These services have played a vital role ensuring continuity of the country's supply chain, which has been facing the twin challenges of Brexit and COVID-19.

Our current shipping operations are now:

1. Irish Ferries – who provide a twice daily service from Rosslare to Pembroke, Wales.
2. Stena Line – who provide a twice daily service from Rosslare to Fishguard, Wales and six sailings a week to Cherbourg, France, up from three at the start of the year.
3. Brittany Ferries – who provide a twice weekly service from Rosslare to Bilbao, Spain with a third service to Cherbourg and most recently the introduction of a new weekly service to St Malo/Roscoff.
4. DFDS – A new 6 times weekly direct service from Rosslare Europort to Dunkirk, France commencing from the 2nd January 2021.
5. Neptune Lines – whom provide a trade car carrier service from Zeebrugge to Rosslare every 4-8 weeks.

Increasing connectivity, frequency of shipping services, along with developing Rosslare Europort as the Offshore Wind Hub for Ireland are the key objectives in growing the port and maximising its potential for the benefit of the region and country.

Our figures for the month of January 2021 clearly show the demand that these new services have attracted with the key highlights of January 2021 v January 2020 as follows;

- Rosslare Europort now Ireland's Number 1 port for direct RoRo services to Europe - ship visits were up 37%
- Combined Freight Traffic UK & Europe +43% (Jan 21 v Jan20)
- Continental Freight +447%
- UK Freight -49%

The growing of these services to mainland Europe has been essential to protect our exporters and importers supply lines to avoid the disruptions that the UK landbridge now brings post Brexit and support the new supply chains now created directly with Europe. 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 such is the ongoing demand for these services.

Despite the very positive increase in direct services and freight volumes to Europe from Rosslare, trade with the UK and our passenger business continue to be severely affected by both Covid and Brexit and will have a very negative impact on our balance sheet. Our UK Freight traffic is down 49% and passenger traffic is restricted to essential purposes only. It will be important that both of these issues are resolved to a level to ensure sustainability in the longer term of services to both the UK and Europe.

While pre Brexit planning at Rosslare by all stakeholders was put in place to ensure the smooth transition on our services with the UK, the reality of the reduction of trade volumes to the UK is clear, and it will take a number of months to fully understand what levels are likely to return directly from the UK and the use of the landbridge as a route to and from Europe. It should also be noted that further significant disruption is expected from July when the UK intend to implement their customs procedures and checks.

Extensive planning and works have gone into the port and significant investment in both infrastructure and resources has gone into Rosslare Europort from all of the government agencies and Iarnród Éireann as Port Authority, so that Rosslare Europort was well prepared for Brexit. 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 for their enormous support and guidance in our preparation.

The temporary Border Inspection Post facility is fully completed and 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.

No major congestion issues have arose or are envisaged and consultation has taken place with Wexford County Council and the An Garda Síochána, with an agreed traffic management plan in place for both the port and the surrounding area.

Longer term, the Masterplan works for Rosslare Europort have commenced and an investment of circa €35million will be made into the port over the next number of years as the four phases of the plan are completed to support future RoRo Freight and Passenger services.

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.

A detailed plan, design and business case for Rosslare Europort Offshore Wind development has been submitted and we believe that this proposal offers both the Offshore industry and the State the best investment and future required infrastructure to ensure that Ireland maximises this opportunity to address climate action needs and also that these projects generate and secure the benefits available for future regional development through investment and jobs.

Equally it is critical that connectivity to Rosslare Europort and all major cities and industrial hubs throughout Ireland be further supported by improving road developments. As volumes through the port 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 brought. Rosslare Europort has proven in recent times how important a strategic asset it is and should be fully supported to deliver all of the plans I have outlined today.

Thank you Chairman and Committee members.