

Closure of Holyhead **Road Haulage Association (RHA)**

About the RHA

1. The RHA is the leading trade association representing over 8,500 road haulage, van, and coach companies across the UK, 85% of whom are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Our members are operators of vehicles who, between them, operate around 250,000 HGVs (half of the UK fleet) out of 10,000 operating centres and range from a single-truck company to those with thousands of vehicles. Our growing coach membership of around 150 operators run mostly non-scheduled passenger services. 81% percent of all freight movements are by road and road freight is directly involved in the transportation of 98% of agricultural products.

Opening comments

2. The RHA welcomes the opportunity to provide a written response to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee ahead of giving oral evidence remotely on Thursday 6th of March.

The Closure of Holyhead Port

3. The closure of Holyhead Port caused significant disruption of supply chains from the island of Ireland to mainland England, the effects of which are still being felt in some cases.

Martin Reid, Policy Director for Scotland, Wales, and Ni was initially contacted by Transport Scotland on the evening of the 11th of December to let us know that Holyhead had shut, and Operation Overflow would be in place at Castle Kennedy. Hauliers had to make the choice to go north to Cairnryan and Stranraer or south to Fishguard and Pembroke, particularly as Liverpool made it clear that they were fully booked until they got an additional vessel on the following week. This meant that significant numbers made their way to the other ports without bookings hoping to pick up standby slots.

RHA were invited on to the partnership calls with Transport Scotland, Police Scotland, Dumfries and Galloway Council and other key stakeholders at 9.30am on the 12th of December and almost every day after that in the run up to Christmas.

Hauliers therefore faced the additional cost of driving to the new port, the additional cost of another booking but perhaps the biggest problem faced was around the additional driving time required. HGV drivers have to work to two clocks, the Working time Directive, and EU Drivers Hours regulations. The closure of Holyhead meant that trucks, trailers, and drivers were no longer

going to be back at base when their mandated weekly rest needed to be taken.

Drivers are required to take a weekly rest of 45 hours. This can be reduced to 24 hours provided at least one full rest (45hrs) is taken every fortnight. Regardless of whether a haulier chose to go south or north following the closure then there was another day driving required, this meant that the truck, trailer, and driver were now 24 hours away or 45 hours away depending on where they were in the rest cycle. This meant that tomorrow's load had to stay in the depot and in some cases, they day after's loads too. Although the additional costs the industry had to face were incredibly unwelcome, the displaced hardware and people was more of a cost and concern.

By liaising with DfT over the weekend from the 13th of December RHA was able to secure a relaxation of drivers hours which would allow a driver to work an additional day before taking their weekly rest. This allowed more rest periods to be taken back at base, so the trucks and trailers were where they needed to be in the run up to Christmas. The relaxation ran from 00:01 Sunday 15 December 2024 until 23:59 on Friday 20 December 2024 and was subsequently extended to 23.59 on Monday 23 December.

Throughout this period, we were kept informed of movements through the Scottish ports with regular calls with Transport Scotland around the overflow parking, Police Scotland, P & O and Stena line regarding capacity at the ports all of which I could disseminate to the members in NI.

For context, for the four days from the 11th of December to Saturday the 14th there was a 25% increase in HGV traffic using the A75 and 486 HGV's were sent to Kennedy during Operation Overflow. The usage peaked on the 13th of December when 163 HGV's were parked at Castle Kennedy. This number reduced to 37 a week later as by that time there were additional sailings at Liverpool and the southern ports, in addition to the relaxation of driving hours previously mentioned in this submission.

Unfortunately, we do not have any similar data for port usage at Pembroke or Fishguard as the first time the Welsh civil service contacted RHA was on the 24th of December which was long after the worst had passed, and the relaxation of drivers hours had ended.

There are many individual and anecdotal examples of how the closure affected companies which we would be happy to discuss in the oral evidence session along with any other questions the committee may have for us.

RHA

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Date 18th February 2025