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Mr RT Davies MS  
Economy, Trade, and  
Rural Affairs Committee,  
Welsh Parliament,  
Cardiff Bay,  
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**By email:** [SeneddEconomy@senedd.wales](mailto:SeneddEconomy@senedd.wales)

10th of March 2025

Dear Mr. RT Davies MS,

I wish to acknowledge your letter of 4 February 2025 in relation to the proposed Welsh Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee short inquiry into the recent storm damage and related closure of Holyhead Port.

In light of the severe impacts that the disruption to services at Holyhead had on the Irish supply chain to Wales and the UK, I welcome your request for feedback from an Irish perspective.

I will begin with setting out the impact of the disruption, which in effect closed one of the most important sea routes out of Ireland to the UK. This route is especially important in terms of freight Roll-On\Roll-Off (RoRo) traffic both accompanied with driver and



unaccompanied loads and is a vital sea route for car and foot passenger traffic. The timing of the disruption coincided with one of the busiest times of the year.

In terms of volumes of trade, up to 10,000 units would cross the Irish Sea and in the region of up to 100,000 car passengers use the route per week on average in the weeks up to Christmas. Prior to the disruption this most strategic route had over a hundred sailings (average of 52 departures/52 arrivals) each week. The Dublin - Holyhead route comprises 34% of RoRo freight traffic moving between Ireland and Great Britain over the calendar year and approximately 23% all containerised/unitised freight coming through Irish ports.

The direct impacts were immediately evident to the ferry companies and to the road haulage sector. The ferry companies had to adjust to redeploying vessels onto existing alternative routes and also exploring possible new routes as temporary solutions. For example, Irish Ferries introduced temporary services between Dublin to Fishguard and Dublin to Pembroke with capacity for car passengers as well as freight.

The haulage sector in Ireland was faced with longer journey times, indeed on both sides of the Irish Sea, with significant numbers diverting away from Dublin to other ports such as Rosslare and also Belfast port. In response to the issues faced by the haulage sector the Department of Transport in consultation with the Road Safety Authority, applied a temporary derogation and limited relaxation of drivers' hours rules which applied from 14 December 2024 until 12 January 2025. The UK's temporary relaxation of drivers' hours was also relevant.

For the most part the steps taken within the freight system were appropriate, the extent of which were determined largely by the capacity of individual ports on both sides of the Irish Sea and linked with the capacity of the shipping companies to re-deploy vessels or provide extra sailings on alternate routes.

**Oifig an Aire Iompair**

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While the additional capacity put in place was sufficient for a short-term disruption, it was apparent that other routes were then utilised to their maximum capacity. This very high level of capacity utilisation is not sustainable and does not provide for a resilient system in case other disruptive events were to occur. It is also not sustainable from a cost perspective for the supply chain actors since the high demand led to price increases in ferry costs. It is therefore extremely important from the Irish perspective that measures are implemented to ensure that full Holyhead capacity is restored and that the infrastructure is resilient into the future.

In considering measures to enhance resilience into the future it should be noted that there is an increasing trend, in Ireland at least, for RoRo freight to travel unaccompanied on maritime routes. It is much more difficult for this type of freight to be diverted when disruption occurs given the additional labour requirement for providing drivers and for shunting services at the origin and destination ports. Consideration should be given as to the balance between accommodating accompanied and unaccompanied Ro-Ro freight at ports for better resilience in the longer term.

In terms of communication, the uncertainty in the first few days following the storm as to the extent of the damage and likely period of disruption, as communicated by the port operator, did initially hamper the discussion of, exploration and implementation of meaningful and suitable responses.

The efforts of the Irish, Welsh and UK Governments and officials through the various channels opened with each other and with stakeholders for the duration of the disruption were very effective in providing the platform for more open communications. This was certainly true of the Welsh Government's interactions with the port operator at Holyhead and with other Welsh ports in exploring options for increased services to those ports.



I would suggest that these relationships should continue and be strengthened. Consideration could be given to the designation of transport and supply chain coordinators on both sides of the Irish Sea, which could operate in a similar fashion to the network of “EU Green Lanes” coordinators which is activated in emergency circumstances to keep transport links and supply chains moving. I believe that consideration should also be given to how best to provide adequately for drivers’ welfare such as food, toilets and accommodation in such events. The provision and dissemination of information on traffic management from official sources would also be of benefit.

The Department of Transport does not hold any information on the contributing factors to the severity of the damage to the port and therefore cannot provide a viewpoint on the causes.

Finally, the Department of Transport in conjunction with the Irish Maritime Development Office is in the process of conducting a lessons learnt exercise from the Irish perspective. The early analysis has highlighted the issues addressed in this response and will provide further insights once completed. The Department looks forward to the opportunity to input to the proposed Task Force on the future of Holyhead as announced by Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales, Ken Skates.

I wish the Committee every success with the enquiry.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. O'Brien', is written over a horizontal line.

Darragh O’Brien T.D  
Minister for Transport