



HOUSE OF COMMONS

# European Scrutiny Committee

## Oral evidence: EU Entry/Exit and the UK border, HC 1741

Wednesday 19 July 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 19 July 2023.

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European Scrutiny Committee members present: Sir William Cash (Chair); Richard Drax; Margaret Ferrier; Mr Marcus Fysh; Mr David Jones; Craig Mackinlay; Gavin Robinson; Greg Smith.

Transport Committee member present: Iain Stewart.

Questions 1-58

### Witnesses

I: Doug Bannister, Chief Executive Officer, Port of Dover; John Keefe, Chief Corporate and Public Affairs Officer, Getlink; and Renaud Thillaye, Head of Public Affairs, Eurostar.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Doug Bannister, John Keefe and Renaud Thillaye.

**Chair:** Good afternoon. Thank you all for appearing to give evidence today. On behalf of the Committee, I welcome you to the House of Commons. I also welcome the Chair of the Transport Committee, Mr Iain Stewart, who is with us today.

I thank Mr John Keefe for having us down the other day and giving us such an informative afternoon. Today, we are looking at the plans for the introduction of the EES—the EU’s entry/exit system—and the effect it may have on the UK border. Before we start, and for those watching at home, perhaps you would be kind enough to briefly introduce yourselves.

**Doug Bannister:** I am Doug Bannister, chief executive of the Port of Dover.

**John Keefe:** I am John Keefe, the chief corporate officer for Getlink group.

**Renaud Thillaye:** I am Renaud Thillaye, head of public affairs at Eurostar. I work closely with our CEO and executive committee on transport policy and borders.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to a UK Select Committee. It is very nice to see you.

My first question relates to something that we discovered when we were down there a few days ago with John Keefe: the issue of the tunnels between Folkestone and Wembley, if I have got this right, and the gauge and the other matters related to it. It came as a very considerable surprise to us that the container movements could be vastly increased—to the great benefit of our national interest and to the entire operations of the Eurotunnel—if a mere 2 inches or so of brick were removed from each of those tunnels. That would give you proper opportunities to get the bigger containers that are now in operation up and down the track.

In that context, I would like to ask you, first, to give a brief description of the problem as you see it, and secondly to explain why you cannot get the financial arrangements in place to enable this to be done. Just to put it in context, how much more traffic in terms of capacity would you be able to generate if this was done? It appears to be a relatively small amount of money; I think it is something in the order of £50 million, which is not actually a great deal of money in this context.

I would be grateful if you could give us an overview of the situation, because I think a lot of people will be astonished, in consideration of the levelling-up programme and all that goes with it, that the volume of traffic is being inhibited, if not obstructed, by a failure of decision making at some point. I would be really grateful if you could be quite blunt about this and explain it to the listeners and to the people watching this session.



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**John Keefe:** Thank you, Chairman. That was a wonderful synopsis. To put a little bit more flesh on the bones of that, the channel tunnel has capacity for something in the region of 8,000 railway freight trains a year, but it operates at a level of about 2,000, so there is a significant opportunity to expand the level of traffic that goes through the tunnel. The tunnel is built to a similar loading gauge—height and width—to the largest European standards. That standard operates between the tunnel and St Pancras, so Eurostar operates High Speed 1 in the same conditions as trains operating on the networks in France and the rest of Europe.

Rail freight uses High Speed 1 in only very low quantities, because there is another line that runs to the channel tunnel from Wembley that would be able to carry large quantities of railway freight, but the loading gauge—the height of the bridges and tunnels and the width of the platforms going through various stations—does not permit the largest-scale wagons to be carried. A railway freight train running on the UK portion of track to and from the channel tunnel is less productive than a railway freight train running on the tracks to the south and east of Europe.

Anybody transporting goods across very large distances can use a large-scale train on the continental side. They then have to either change to a smaller-sized wagon, which involves manual handling and a stop in a depot, or unload on to trucks, which means that the railway freight benefit is felt on the continent but the goods coming into the UK come by truck. We all know that the number of trucks using our road infrastructure in the south-east of the country—particularly the M20, the M25 and the Dartford crossing—is significant, to the extent that the Dartford crossing is regularly at capacity.

For those who follow these affairs closely, the Kent resilience forum has taken preventive measures this summer on the M20 to make sure traffic will flow smoothly, although at a reduced speed. If we could reduce the amount of truck traffic on our roads, we could have that traffic moving more efficiently. If we used the railways to move more of those goods, we would be using additional capacity and we would be able to create new business. One piece of research that we did find that that would lead to a 50% reduction in congestion, and would have a £3 billion per year cost saving for the freight industry.

We are talking about a railway development with an estimated cost in the region of £40 million to £50 million. Let me just put those two figures side by side: a £3 billion cost saving, and a £40 million to £50 million one-off investment to increase the gauge to what is known technically as W12. That enables boxes of 9 feet 6 inches—the containers that travel on ships—to be brought up the channel tunnel and up the line to Wembley, where they can access the east and west coast main lines. Currently, the only route in for that size of box on the railway is to come in through a container port such as Felixstowe or Southampton, which already has that gauge clearance. There is a disparity in the opportunity to bring those goods in, according to different routes.



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The ask is a simple one: let's increase the gauge on the route from Dollands Moor, the railway freight yard just north of the channel tunnel, all the way to Wembley, spending something like £40 million or £50 million.

Q2 **Chair:** Does that just involve shaving off some element of the brickwork that is already in the two tunnels? Is it nothing more than that?

**John Keefe:** In very simple terms. There may be one or two that need to be raised slightly rather than shaved, but it is a matter of inches on the width and height needing to be improved. The reports that we have done show that this can be done with a relatively small investment. We want the Government to work with industry to find a way to finance such a project. We understand that Government finances are tight at the moment. There is some money available for an enhancement, but it does not go far enough. We are looking for a conversation.

Q3 **Chair:** But this money, relatively, is peanuts compared with a lot of other projects such as HS2. I know it sounds like a lot of money, but in practical terms the benefits that you receive from making this modest change in the structure are massive, in terms of the input and output of the conveyance of goods.

**John Keefe:** Absolutely. There is a direct return from a very small investment.

Q4 **Chair:** So who is at fault?

**John Keefe:** The fault is that it hasn't been delivered yet. In the current circumstances, that is a DfT, Network Rail and GBRTT discussion, but the discussion is stalled.

Q5 **Chair:** Have you had discussions with the Secretary of State for Transport about this?

**John Keefe:** Yes, we have.

Q6 **Chair:** What was the response?

**John Keefe:** The response was that he was very interested, but we have not had a follow-up to take that into the brass tacks.

**Chair:** Fortunately, we have the Chairman of the Transport Committee, Iain Stewart, here today. I am absolutely clear in my mind, and I am sure that he is too, that this is well worth following up, is it not?

**Iain Stewart:** I have a good question to ask the next time the Secretary of State is in front of us.

**Chair:** That was very helpful as a starter, thank you. Could you give any further information you have on the subject in written form? I think there is something called the Volterra report.

**John Keefe:** There is.

Q7 **Chair:** If you could amplify that or bring it up to date and give it both to Mr Iain Stewart and myself, that would be enormously appreciated. That



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is the starter for one.

The next question I want to ask is as follows. Your operations will be particularly impacted by the EU's entry/exit system, as you facilitate the UK and France's juxtaposed border controls. Could you outline briefly what EES actually is, when it is expected to begin and why it will be felt so acutely at your sites versus, for example, Heathrow airport?

**John Keefe:** EES is the European entry and exit system. It will be applied to all third-country citizens seeking to enter the Schengen area. It requires the capture of biometric data, facial scans and fingerprints, alongside a series of biographical data, to properly identify each person coming into the EU.

The critical element is that the data enrolment into the system happens on the first entry into the zone once the scheme comes into effect. The scheme has been due to come into effect for several years; it has been pushed back on a number of occasions because the systems have not been ready to cope with the amount of data from all the countries in the rest of the world. Also, the process by which that data will be captured, using tablets, kiosks, smartphones and face-to-face interaction with border officers, is not yet fully determined.

As operators of the channel tunnel, we have juxtaposed border controls, which means that you pass through both the exit from the UK and the entry into the EU on our terminal in Folkestone. The capture of the data required for enrolment happens in the UK. Capturing all that data, on top of the passport control at the border, could multiply the time required to go through the border by anything from two to four. If that is unresolved, it could result in significant queuing for passengers in cars, particularly in trying to get through the enrolment process.

The difference with somewhere like Heathrow is twofold. First, Heathrow does not have juxtaposed border controls, so the enrolment would not happen in Heathrow but at the destination airport on continental soil. Secondly, Heathrow deals with individual airline passengers one at a time, whereas as operators of the channel tunnel, we have all our shuttle passengers travelling in cars in groups. Those groups can be anything from one or two people in the front seats of a car, or four or five with children or grandparents in the back, to 60 people at a time on a coach. Each one of those people would be required to enrol their data on UK soil before entering the EU. That is where the risk lies.

Q8 **Chair:** What is the reason why this is happening in a manner that you regard, rightly, as unsatisfactory? How could it be speeded up?

**John Keefe:** I don't think any of us would argue with the principle behind the EES, which is to enhance border security. The process by which that is being developed has been slightly piecemeal, because the principle was established and then the processes and the systems have been developed subsequently. That systems development by the EU agencies that are responsible is taking longer than expected, and new elements are being added into it, like the capture of data using a mobile application in



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advance, at home or en route, that are welcome but not yet fully developed. So the scheme is put back once again—until after the Olympic games in Paris in 2024, we understand, but we still do not have the confirmed date or the absolutely final specification of the process.

**Q9 Chair:** Is this a failure of technology, a failure of will, a failure of money or a mixture?

**John Keefe:** I don't think it is a failure at this stage. As the scheme has evolved, new technology has developed alongside it, and the new technology is being promoted as part of it. It is not a cut and dried scheme, introduced "as is". As with many large-scale technological developments, it is iterative. But we need to know what the final goal is in terms of the data required and the form that it has to be captured in, and we need to know what the permissible technological solutions will be; and those are the elements that we have not yet got.

**Q10 Chair:** Whom do you point to as the logjam on this?

**John Keefe:** This is an EU scheme, but it is applied to all countries—the rest of the world—including, now, the UK, so there is a discussion between Governments as to how it should be applied. As operators, we need a spec. Once we have a spec, we can put the technology in place, put the infrastructure in place and manage the traffic flows. The absence of the definitive spec—that is what is lacking at present.

**Q11 Mr Jones:** I would be interested to hear from all three witnesses on this. What I am finding difficult to understand is why the enrolment has to be done at the border. Why could there not be, for example, an office or offices set up around the country where people could go to enrol? It could be supervised by a Frontex official, and it would mean that you would not have the congestion at the border. Am I missing something?

**Doug Bannister:** I will take the first go at that, if I may. Really, it comes down to how the regulation is currently written within European law. As it is currently written, the initial enrolment process needs to take place at the border, in front of an immigration officer—in our case, Police Aux Frontières. One of the things that we have been pushing very hard for is so-called remote registration. That would enable things to be done even at home, or certainly in advance of the traffic reaching the port or the tunnel. That is the important thing—

**Q12 Mr Jones:** If I may just interrupt you there, that would not actually deal with all the process of enrolment, would it?

**Doug Bannister:** The app, as it is designed right now, will be able to capture the passport details as well as the facial image, but it does not do so well on the fingerprint, so one piece of information is missing. That said, if it captures most of it, that is going to alleviate a lot of problems.

The next thing is to be able to have the possibility of taking the rest of the biometric information, alongside that, at a site that—certainly for the Port of Dover—is remote from the port. It might be able to be nearby. But as the regulation is written right now, it has to be done at the port.



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Q13 **Mr Jones:** So the issue is bureaucracy, really. If there were a change in the regulation to allow for enrolment at some remote location, that would significantly mitigate—if not totally solve—the problem, would it not?

**Doug Bannister:** I suppose there are two components to that. One is that the regulation needs to change—you are right—and secondly, the staffing of that process would need to be worked out.

Q14 **Mr Jones:** Yes, but the Governments could come to arrangements as to—

**Doug Bannister:** I would think so.

**Renaud Thillaye:** I share the analysis and understanding of my colleagues of how the system works. I confirm that, in the regulation, it is explicitly written that any data has to be captured under the supervision of the border officer. If that is captured ahead of the border line, it needs to be verified on the border line by a border officer. That is what makes it difficult.

Q15 **Mr Jones:** If the remote enrolment were supervised by an officer, that would have solved the problem.

**Renaud Thillaye:** To some extent, because the regulation specifies that any data captured remotely needs to be verified when the person crosses the border.

Q16 **Mr Jones:** Yes, that is why the regulation needs to be changed or amended.

**Doug Bannister:** Another element is that, for border security, the ideal thing would be that they could witness the face match with the passport and the fingerprints. That can also be done remotely through the use of video cameras, or in particular halls, and that sort of stuff, so the fidelity of the information capture is maintained. In other words, there would be solutions once the regulation gets unlocked.

Q17 **Chair:** This is very interesting. Frankly, it sounds to me as if a few words in the regulation need to be changed and other mechanisms introduced. What international comparisons can you give to demonstrate the question? For example, there is the border between Canada and the United States, or any other country that has borders with another country. With modern technology the way it is at the moment, and the speed of change, I thought that someone would have come up with an answer along the lines that Mr Jones has been suggesting. You seem to have confirmed that it can be done, so the question again is, why is it not being done? Who would you point to, if you wanted to make an international comparison with something that is being done properly somewhere else in the world?

**Doug Bannister:** Probably one of the best borders to take a look at for high-volume activity in a constrained space that happens very well is between the USA and Mexico. From memory, I think it is down near Laredo. They have the whole process. The thing that strikes me is that,





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today, it is a very manual process: you need to hand your passport over, an officer needs to look through it and they might ask a question—“Have you been in in 90 out of the past 180 days?”, “What is the purpose of your trip?”, and all that sort of stuff. But we are talking about going to a digital process; that should make it easier, faster and simpler, but we need to unlock the ability to respond to that electronic process by making certain that the regulation allows for that innovation to take place.

**John Keefe:** I think there is another part of it that is unique to this route through the short straits. I include Renaud and Eurostar in this; we all move people across the short straits, either through the tunnel or by ferry across the channel. The juxtaposed border in the case of the port and the channel tunnel, and the vehicle-based approach to travel, are unique. No other country has that juxtaposed border with the EU.

This system, this scheme, was designed for airports, quite simply, without any consideration for the nature of transport that happens across the channel. For a one-ticket, one-seat, one-person approach in a large indoor environment, where there is space to put kiosks for the data capture and additional space for border officials, it is easy.

Where it struggles is when cars drive through large open spaces—car parks—in all weathers, in all lights and at all times of the day or night. The data capture has to look at individuals who are deep inside a vehicle. That becomes very complicated. So the scheme is not designed for the purpose it is being addressed to; it is designed for airports, and it is designed for comfortable airports in EU territory. By the nature of the border that we have with the EU, it is being addressed to a vehicle system and to a juxtaposed control which happens in the UK.

That is what makes it so different. Even looking at the border that Doug is referring to, in San Ysidro, those volumes are similar to what we move, but we do not have the people getting out of vehicles; we do not have the juxtaposed control to manage.

Q18 **Mr Fysh:** I have a very quick technical question. Is it in regulation that there has to be facial recognition at the border, or could some other sort of proof of identity be provided in a digital way? I must declare an interest: I am the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on digital identity. We have been looking into some of the potentials of different technologies, and I just wondered if there was a statutory reason why that—

**John Keefe:** As both my colleagues have said, the statutory requirement is for all of the data captured to be verified at the border. So even if it is captured in advance, it still has to be presented in a package to the border officer at the point of crossing.

Q19 **Mr Fysh:** But it could actually be done by means of a zero-knowledge proof of identity that was recognised in a transaction, like a blockchain app order, which was—





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**John Keefe:** A lot of the work that we have been doing is looking into the possibilities of that happening. The current resistance is at this border point of control. Renaud, you may have additions.

**Renaud Thillaye:** If I may add to this, I think it is a really interesting point, because the EU is right now starting to draft legislation on what we call the digital travel credential, which is in fact using e-identity for travel purposes. We hope that, at some point, there would be a convergence between this legislation and EES, making it possible for people's identity to be verified in advance and for people to come forward to the border, just show their face and, with a single recognition check, cross the border.

It is not yet possible, so we have been talking to the Commission—to DG Home—about this for years, and we fear that the legislative process will take a few more years. But it is definitely the direction of travel and, yes, we would encourage the UK Government to look in this direction.

I should add to this that, on the UK side of the border, we at Eurostar have been successfully trialling such a mobile application. In fact, it is a sort of digital travel credential. It is, today, possible for some of our travellers at Eurostar to use a mobile application, scan their passport and scan their face. There is a reconciliation between the passport chip and the facial image, and the person comes to the border and can exit the UK with a single facial recognition check. Ideally, we would do this also with our Schengen partners with EES, but today the regulation is such that it is not possible.

**Chair:** Okay. I think we will move on now. Iain Stewart first, and then Richard Drax.

Q20 **Iain Stewart:** In one of your earlier answers, you referenced that much of the detail of the scheme has not been finalised. Do you have a sense of when that will happen, and what bits of information and detail do you require? From that point, what lead-in time do you need to make the necessary changes at each of your ports and stations?

**John Keefe:** What is missing is the final spec—what is actually required of the operator and how the data can be captured. Will we have an application on a mobile phone that will enable the capture? Will it enable facial recognition? Will it just be for the biographical details? How will that be integrated at the terminal with the fingerprint capture, and how will the final validation by the border officer be done? As we are all saying, that is the crux of it.

The timing, as we understand it at the current moment, is post Paris Olympics, but we do not have any more precision than that. We also understand that there will be a test phase, probably pre the Paris Olympics, but we have no confirmation of the state of advancement of the systems that will be tested, nor when that phase might start before the Olympics. That puts us in the invidious position of having to prepare for something that will require significant infrastructure remodelling without having a final spec to go to.



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In our case, for example, we have started the groundworks that could result in us having to put a whole new building in place—a covered space—where we could manage vehicle passenger data capture out of the weather. That requires us to re-route our whole passenger terminal on both the UK and the French side—new cabling, new infrastructure, new technology, new offices, new space for border officers. We have a year or a year and a bit to prepare if that comes into force in autumn 2024. That is not a lot of time to build that scale of infrastructure, costing tens of millions of pounds, while also operating the everyday service that we run at the moment. The whole piece is yet to be finalised.

**Q21 Iain Stewart:** Before the other witnesses answer, can I clarify something? When you say it is not due to be determined until after the Paris Olympics, is that the decision on what the final spec will be, or will that come before the Paris Olympics and be introduced after?

**John Keefe:** We don't know. We have been waiting for the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Brussels to make a decision on this. We had thought it would be in June. It was postponed until October, so we are waiting until October to see what the decision is on the spec and then on the delivery.

**Doug Bannister:** If I may, I will take one step back. Why are we here? Through the Port of Dover every year £144 billion of trade happens—up to 10,000 trucks in a day. We have 130 ferry crossings. Each of our ferries does up to five round voyages in a day. It is a hugely productive asset. One third of all trade between the European Union and the United Kingdom comes through the Port of Dover. Combined with Eurotunnel, 60% of all trade between the European Union and the United Kingdom comes through the short straits. We do 10 million passengers in a year. It is a significant bit of business that goes through what is, in effect, between our two terminals, a very short, small place. We do not look at capacity as a geographic footprint. We can't do that. In our business, we look at capacity as traffic velocity. How quickly can we get things through? Our ops teams are always looking at shaving seconds off of every transaction.

We are here today because this point around the introduction of the system is so critical. It is not about a commercial thing for us; the health of the nation is at stake here. Half of our freight traffic is destined north of London. It is impossible to imagine levelling up the country if the short straits is not working well. This new regulation that is coming in has got a potential large strategic impact on the health and prosperity of the nation. That is why we feel it is so important. I just wanted to put that into context.

This has been an issue that we have been talking about with the European Union, the French and the UK Government for the four or five years that we have known that it is coming. I would say that, in the last six months, though, we have seen some demonstrable progress. Officials from our Government, and the willingness to engage with both France and the Commission side, have been excellent in the last six months. We have also seen as a nation that we have become much closer to our European allies.



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A good illustration of that is the Windsor agreement, where we are starting to come together a little bit more and be more open to finding where these improvements are.

Having said that, while I feel that we have really good attention and traction now, we need to know two things. We need to know that the app is coming in, and what it is going to entail, and we need to be given the time to test that. Sorry, maybe there is a third thing, which is to ensure that we can register people remotely. So the app, what it does, and registering people remotely.

On the when, we need to know about now because, as John said, if we are going to make any infrastructure interventions, we are already running out of time, presuming that it is still sort of October or November next year. It is an urgent issue—being able to adequately respond once those answers have been given—but, primarily, we need those answers.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. Iain, did you want to ask Doug a question?

**Iain Stewart:** No, that's fine.

Q22 **Richard Drax:** Mr Bannister, you rightly say that the port and the straits are most significant for the future UK economy, for all of the reasons that you have just expressed. This entry/exit system was first suggested 15 years ago. I am just curious as to why there is a sudden panic now. Is that because the technology is always emerging and you can never quite make a decision as to exactly how you are going to cope with this issue, which, as you both say—and all of you, I am sure, agree—is so crucial?

The second part of my question is about the UK Government activity, which you have just answered in part, saying that, for the past six months, there have been good talks between the UK and the EU. However, that is in the past six months, when, as we know, this has been going on for 15 years. You might have thought that, with this being so important, it would have been discussed for some time. Can you help us as to why we are where we are?

**Doug Bannister:** Where this really came home was probably—I think it was 2016—when the law was passed in the European Union. That was when we were a part of the European Union. From my perspective, there are three big buckets of challenge to make certain that Brexit works in the best possible way.

We entered the European Union in 1973 and, since then, we have had the Good Friday agreement. That was in 1998, after we had been in the EU. So, first, we need to do something to sort out Northern Ireland—the Windsor protocol seems to be working. Secondly, the border opened up between Gibraltar and Spain in 1986—after we entered the EU—and now I feel we are getting some high attention and some high support from the Government to make certain that that works okay. Thirdly, the juxtaposed controls that were introduced in the short straits in 2003 by virtue of the Le Touquet treaty, again, came in after we were in the European Union.



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So there are three significant buckets. This is the last one, and I personally do not think that it is the most difficult one. I think that the first two were probably more politically charged. We just now need to get the attention on this to get it over the line.

**Richard Drax:** Mr Keefe, do you want to add anything to that?

**John Keefe:** Just in terms of the juxtaposed controls, the channel tunnel has been in operation since 1994, so this is not a new issue. But it has become a new issue because of the changed relationship between the UK and the EU. I think that Government attention has only really focused on that difference in very recent months. We work through—

Q23 **Richard Drax:** May I interrupt you? I do apologise. Is the Government aware—you can reassure us; I am assuming you have met Ministers—how serious this actually is?

**John Keefe:** As Doug said, I think they have become aware in the last six months. Leading up until then, I think the concentration was much more on trading arrangements than on passenger arrangements.

I also think that, in this instance, covid gave cover to the issue because there was no travel of any nature during 2020 and 2021. Travel started again in the middle of 2022, so we are only coming to the first real summer of normal traffic after covid. That means that the public are only just coming to terms with the changed existing border requirements between the UK and the EU, where there is already an enhanced level of control—passport control, the wet stamping of passports and the verification of not overstaying 90 days in 180, which is a question asked to every passenger going through. That change in relationship is now becoming apparent, and this is in addition to that.

I think the Home Office has woken up to that fact since seeing that change and what was happening at the border post covid. I think it has become more interested since then as a result of that change. We have been looking at this for many years, and we have known it was coming. We knew that, once the relationship between the UK and the EU changed, as third-country citizens, it would be applied to UK citizens. Let us also be clear that it will work in the other direction too, when the British Government introduce the electronic travel authorisation—ETA—which is essentially the same digitised immigration security system but simplified and with much more upstream data capture.

We are sitting looking at two schemes that do the same thing across the same space with our unique juxtaposed border controls. To a simple operator, that begs the question, “Why aren’t we pooling resources to make this data capture work for both sides and then simplifying the systems to make them interoperable?” as we have done with freight. We have already invested in the truck freight business so that we can capture all the customs declarations in advance of the truck arriving. This is controlling the goods for revenue purposes and making sure that the right taxes are paid and the right standards are met.



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We capture that data. We share the same data with both the UK and the French authorities. A truck rolling through the channel tunnel today goes through at the same speed as it did pre-2019, which was the peak of the trade in the number of truck movements. We should be able to do that with people. If we can do it with goods, biosecurity and customs, we should be able to have the same level of confidence about doing it with immigration processing.

Q24 **Richard Drax:** Briefly, can you reassure us that the EU is being receptive to this—that there is no pushback on this?

**John Keefe:** On the truck side, the EU are highly receptive to this, as is the UK. It works on both sides. On the people side—

Q25 **Richard Drax:** On the issue that we are discussing now, are they being receptive to the problems you are trying to resolve?

**John Keefe:** They certainly listen to the problems we are trying to resolve, but the speed of change is the concern, because we have to deliver this, we believe, by autumn 2024. As I said at the beginning, we still do not have that final spec to be able to design it.

Q26 **Richard Drax:** Mr Thillaye, would you like to add any comment?

**Renaud Thillaye:** I would seek to add a few words with the Eurostar's perspective. As my colleague said, the borders have been a really important dimension in the performance of our operations. That is not new—it is not since the UK left the EU. It was already the case before when Schengen countries reinforced the border controls in 2015-16, but it has become ever more visible since the post-covid ramp-up. That was really when the slower border checks on UK passport holders became visible, and we have really seen the impact of this.

If I can speak for Eurostar, what we call our throughput in stations—basically, our ability to process numbers of people per hour—has been reduced by about a third since then. We have been engaging, of course, with the French border police. We are working to improve the reliability of our e-gates. We are looking to invest in increased capacity, but clearly EES is a challenge of another level because it will make border queues more complex. We will have to separate queues between EU and non-EU passport holders.

We need more capacity. One of the challenges is that we will have to install pre-registration kiosks somewhere in the station, so in St Pancras station. That uses space. You all know St Pancras station; it is not like there is extensive space. The UK Government, the Home Office and DfT's International Trade team have been extremely supportive, particularly as my colleagues said, over the last six months to a year. We get the impression that the UK Government understand the challenges and really engage with the EU and French sides. Of course, we also realise that it is not possible to change the legislation and that the same requirements will apply to UK passport holders as to other nationalities that might present



more of a migration risk or a risk to EU security. But that is the way things are.

**Doug Bannister:** May I add one thing? Although the issue has been well known—certainly since 2016—I think that if there was a point of clarity there and a business could see what it needed to do, we would have invested by now. The problem would have been solved. We would have created the technology, we would have brought in the resource and we would have trained the people. Because border control is a Government function and because the juxtaposed controls are an agreement between two nations, it comes down to our Governments in the UK and France coming together and reaching an agreement. Although we can highlight the issue, its impact and the solutions that we can see would be appropriate given our operations, it comes down to the UK and French Governments and the European Union coming together and realising the solution.

Q27 **Mr Jones:** You have indicated that you believe that the Home Office has woken up to the severity of this problem, but I am wondering whether that is something that has impacted across Government. The reason I raise this is that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs wrote to the EFRA Committee some time ago, saying: “At busy times for cars and coaches, EES is likely to increase the risk of passenger disruption at the short straits. This would have knock-on impacts for freight but we do not believe these would be significant.” It is fairly clear to me from the evidence you have given this afternoon and previously that you think it is very significant indeed. Do you believe that the whole of Government has woken up to this problem?

**Doug Bannister:** We have been asking which Minister is responsible for this for a few years. It was only recently—probably within the last year—that that was determined. It was really unclear who was taking accountability to solve this and could pull the right people across Government together. That only happened recently. We have seen the benefits of that since it has happened.

Q28 **Mr Jones:** Who is the Minister?

**Doug Bannister:** It’s Home Affairs. That is where the borders are being done.

In terms of potential impact, from my perspective, when we have had times of significant disruption in the Port of Dover and the roads around the port have become congested for a period of time, that has had a really significant impact on trade flows for that period of time. The trucks are held up on the A20 and, if it is a significant event, on the M20 as well. They will be held there for several hours.

Some of the product that we have going through the short straits is high-value and highly perishable. Every hour that passes, the value of that product degrades. I am certain that DEFRA would have statistics on what sort of commodities are transiting, for the short straits in particular but across the nation as well. It would be able to determine a monetary





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impact—so how many of hours of disruption that would take and, therefore, how much is the value of that disruption. I think it would be a bit more significant than that.

**John Keefe:** To add to that, Logistics UK did a calculation that said that a day of congestion—Operation Brock in Kent—equates to £250 million a day lost to the UK economy. From that perspective, there is a significant risk. Just to take a slightly different approach to the context that you are citing, the impact on truck drivers is expected to be less. I think everybody here will be aware that there is a significant shortage of truck drivers in the UK and across the rest of Europe, but there are more continental European truck drivers bringing freight backwards and forwards across the short straits. The wages are lower, so there is a natural economic interest in doing that.

The reverse benefit of that, if you like, is that of course those people are EU passport holders, so fewer of them will need to be enrolled in the scheme to keep freight moving. So the freight issue in itself is less of a risk, provided we can keep it moving. The risk is that congestion affects freight movement, and then the Logistics UK number stands for itself.

**Renaud Thillaye:** I should add that, by contrast, the Eurostar customer base is overwhelmingly non-EU, so the UK is clearly our first market. The US and the rest of the world are growing very fast and are our third market. You can imagine that a lot of US tourists will come to London to spend a few days and then travel on to Europe. They will go through St Pancras and will need to register into EES. For us, it is a big concern. The demographic is not quite the same.

I would like to emphasise what John said a few minutes ago. A lot of attention has been paid by Government to freight, and a lot of attention has been paid to tackling illegal migration. Now, it is probably time to focus on legal migration—on making sure legal migration between the UK and Europe is as smooth as possible and on what flexibilities or regime could be put in place so that UK passport holders do not suffer too many requirements.

Q29 **Mr Jones:** Are you assisting the Government in their engagement with the European Union over this?

**John Keefe:** Very much so. We have tried to shuttle backwards and forwards, with a foot on either side of the channel. We are talking to the French Government and the UK Government on a regular basis.

Q30 **Mr Jones:** Are you participating in meetings between the two Governments?

**John Keefe:** We have participated in a number of meetings between the two Governments. We think we also helped to broker a number of those meetings in the early stages. We are now seeing trilateral meetings happening between the three main state bodies, and we are being briefed after them.





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Q31 **Mr Jones:** You made the very important point earlier that this was a system that had been designed for airports, not seaports. Has it dawned on the European Union yet that this particular system is not going to work so well for seaports?

**John Keefe:** I'm not sure I would say "dawned," but it has been made very clear to them. We have spent a lot of time explaining the significant differences between an airport transaction and a vehicle-based transaction and the impacts that those extended transaction times have. In an airport, the environment is comfortable and warm, there is plenty to eat and drink, and there is entertainment. The environment in queuing traffic on a motorway is much more hostile, and that is something that needs to be taken into account.

Q32 **Mr Jones:** Are you satisfied that the EU is addressing that? Mr Thillaye?

**Renaud Thillaye:** Just to add, it is not just the difference between airports and seaports, but the juxtaposed controls model and the fact that controls take place before departure. That adds an element of stress, perhaps, for the passenger as well, because the passenger has a train or boat to take. In the case of St Pancras, it is a rail station in the city centre. It is not an airport.

Q33 **Mr Jones:** Yes, and of course that is pretty well unique to the United Kingdom, but I guess that there must be a number of other seaports.

**John Keefe:** Not with juxtaposed controls.

Q34 **Mr Jones:** I appreciate that, but I suppose to a certain extent those ports are going to have similar experiences.

**Doug Bannister:** Greece in particular is flagging some issues now for its north African trade and the ferries that come across there. There is also a really significant road border along the eastern frontier of the European Union, which would need to have a similar thing. As John said, we do some foot passengers, but it is mostly not foot passengers. It is cars, caravans, coaches, motorcycles and horse boxes—they are all coming through. It is a unique bit of business.

Q35 **Mr Jones:** Are you hopeful that the EU is going to be reconsidering this regulation to cater for non-airports?

**Doug Bannister:** In my opinion, if we get the remote registration, which could be done for airports too, and we get the app and know what that does, that is a good chunk of the battle won.

Q36 **Mr Jones:** But there is some way to go.

**John Keefe:** We are slightly dismissing airports in this conversation, but airport passengers will go through the same process and suffer the same delays, just in a different location. Flying out of Heathrow, there will be nothing particularly to see, but when they arrive at the other end, into a small regional airport somewhere in continental Europe, there will be similar challenges. Those airports will have to provide the infrastructure, the systems and people to do the enrolment at the point of entry. We are



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talking about the impact being seen on British soil because of the increased transaction times, but an individual member of the travelling public will experience that delay in whatever form of travel they prefer, just in a different location.

Q37 **Mr Jones:** Yes, and arguably more safely and a bit more comfortably.

**John Keefe:** Possibly, although some small regional airports in continental Europe are no more than—

**Mr Jones:** I don't suppose you run the risk of being mown down by an articulated lorry.

**John Keefe:** Probably not that side of it. The final point I would like to make is that 80% to 85% of the passengers who go through our route, the channel tunnel, are British citizens—British origin—and they will experience this on their first departure. If they don't stay current in the system and maintain their enrolment, they will have to re-enrol the next time they go through. There is a three-year window. If you holiday in Europe, then holiday in the States, then staycation at home, then go back only in the fourth year, you will be re-enrolling every time you travel. That is a significant issue.

**Chair:** I am not saying that we are running against the clock at the moment, but we need to move on.

Q38 **Craig Mackinlay:** One of the purposes of these meetings is to inform the public about quite complex issues. Let me try to overlay what this new border arrangement will look like. We have all travelled to different countries. If you go to the US, you have to do the pre-authorisation—the ESTA. You do it online at home before you start, and enter your passport number, date of birth and all that sort of stuff. When you arrive at Heathrow or Gatwick, the airline doesn't ask whether you have done that. All it wants to know is whether you have a valid passport. So you merrily get on the plane, arrive in Houston or wherever, and they will have your ESTA on the system. You then do the biometrics and the picture, a bit like the EES, and you're away.

If one goes to the United Arab Emirates, they don't have an ESTA pre-auth system unless you are a passport holder of somewhere that is a bit more obscure, shall we say? They just do the EES as you arrive. It is exactly the same in Thailand.

What the EU is proposing under its ETIAS scheme is a bit more like the US scheme, with pre-entry of various fields of data. Will the carrier—an airline going to an EU country, one of your ferry operators, Eurostar or Eurotunnel—require the person to put whatever long alphanumeric code they are given upon filling in their ETIAS on to their booking so that at least that bit is done?

The worry I have is this: if someone pitches up without having done their ETIAS, what happens to them? Will they be asked for it by the juxtaposed French? What happens if they do not have one? You have a line of chaos, or a coachload, and some have it and some have not. What will we do?



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Will a feature of your booking be that people have to put in the alphanumeric, or whatever it is? You have to when you go to the States. Will that be a feature, to be your check that you do not have two people on a coach who have not done it properly, which would mess up the whole coach?

That is the dynamic I put to you. The obvious way is that to do your booking, you will have to have whatever the ETIAS reverts to with your 15 digits or whatever.

**John Keefe:** That is a very good question, and it particularly relates to coach travel. In the current circumstances, coach operators are not responsible for the identity of the people who travel on their vehicles. We could have a situation where a group of people on a coach turn up to a carrier and they are ineligible, but there is no way that the carrier would know. It does pose a very significant issue, in particular in that field. There is clearly a role for the coach industry to take part in the advance passenger information element of this.

Q39 **Craig Mackinlay:** They are often little package tours, aren't they?

**John Keefe:** They can be package tours or a scheduled bus that somebody just gets on. Unless the information is gathered in advance, the only point that the information can be gathered is at the specific point of entry, which is at the juxtaposed frontier, at the terminal—in our case, Folkestone. We would seek to avoid that.

**Doug Bannister:** We do not yet know exactly what ETIAS is going to bring to us—

Q40 **Craig Mackinlay:** That is another question: do you think that ETIAS and EES will come in at the same time?

**Doug Bannister:** No, ETIAS is due to come in six months afterwards.

There is a benefit here of the juxtaposed controls, in that if you are having a hiccup, you do it before you leave. In the other locations, such as travelling into America, if you have not done something, you get called into one of those lovely rooms to speak to the very nice officers there, but you would have made your journey already, to fall at the final hurdle. At least with the juxtaposed controls, if you are being denied entry to the EU, you are doing it before you leave.

Q41 **Craig Mackinlay:** Renaud, is Eurostar thinking about asking for whatever the number will be under ETIAS?

**Renaud Thillaye:** We have no regulatory requirement to do so, but we have a strong incentive to check that passengers come to the terminal with a valid ETIAS, so we might look to ways to check that.

Q42 **Craig Mackinlay:** I am just thinking that this is another overlay of a few seconds going on here, all the way.

**John Keefe:** Another part of this is the lack of communication to the general public. We do not believe that the travelling public are aware that



this is coming. They cannot be aware of exactly what it means, because we even as operators do not have that final spec. When it is being introduced—if it is introduced at a decision meeting in October, we then have a test phase and would introduce it in 2024—during that period, there has to be a significant amount of communication from Government to the travelling public to explain to them what they will need to do to get through the border into the EU. At this stage, that process has not begun.

**Q43 Craig Mackinlay:** Mr Bannister, we had problems in the summer last year and in April this year with the post-Brexit wet-stamping system that has now come into play. As part of that wet-stamping system, does French border control do that swipe of your passport, copy it or whatever else, or is the entire reliance on your compliance with the Schengen 90 days out of 180 literally only done on the physicality of that stamp, should somebody look it? Is there a type of in-out system going on? We have all seen when they scan the bottom of your passport, but we never know what is going on. In the UK, they do it, but nobody seems to know who is here and who is not—but that is another matter.

What is happening? What are the French doing? Is it literally the date on the stamp that is the key, or is there currently another process—a sort of Schengen control mechanism—going on? Do you have any ideas? Is it all just for show, really?

**Doug Bannister:** I can assure you that it is not. In all the positions that we install for Police Aux Frontières to operate from, they also put in their data connections to connect to their computer. What that enables them to do, if they need to swipe the passport, look at it and have it scanned for security reasons, is go and check their computers in Paris. That is all part of their process. But it is true that, as it stands right now, the record of you entering is the stamp with the date.

**Q44 Craig Mackinlay:** Wow. So they are not actually scanning everyone's passport to see if they are on the computer as good, bad, under watch or whatever else? When I have watched it, it has seemed a bit random whether they are doing that or not.

**Doug Bannister:** I think they, like many border agencies, have a good intelligence system that they operate within. As for exactly what their processes are on any given day, we have found that it is literally down to the people who are on station that day. They are the ones who are protecting the European Union border, so it is their decision how much intervention they want to do for every traveller.

**Q45 Craig Mackinlay:** I know we always say, "What can the Government do?"—we ask that rather too much—but what can the Government do to assist the flow? You have physical limitations on your side; you all have. Is it a shortage of border guards? Is it that there are enough posts, but on some days—this seems to have been true last summer—there are just not enough border guards there? Would the geographical and physical limitations you had, such as they were, have been overcome had all the booths been working? Is it that there is almost nothing the Government can do, and perhaps it is about what the French Government might like



to do?

**Doug Bannister:** That is a really good point. Literally a year ago this week, on our first busy Friday getaway, was where we had the challenge. One of the things we find in Dover is that we start to get busy at the very start of the day—about 5 o'clock in the morning—and if we have not got on top of the queue by six or seven in the morning, then it potentially takes a day for us to get it back under control. That is exactly what happened that day, but every other day during the summertime—and in fact later that day when they were able to deploy more officers—all the positions were filled, and it worked really well.

What we are finding now is that the level of engagement that we have had with Police Aux Frontières in preparing for this summer has been tremendous. They have been supportive, they have been flexible and they have responded to all of our requests. In some cases they are overmanning on the basis that they want to make certain that it goes okay. That is born from a relationship that the port has with Police Aux Frontières, so that has helped.

Where Government have helped is that we also participate in a meeting with senior Government officials on both sides—senior officials from Police Aux Frontières, UK Border Force, Eurotunnel, the Kent resilience forum and ourselves—to make certain that we have got everything. “Have we got everything? Let’s go!” We had one earlier this week. That is instigated largely by our Government, who have got that work together. That has also proven really helpful.

Q46 **Craig Mackinlay:** Mr Keefe, you gave some evidence to the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee in November 2021—sorry to put you on the spot about something that happened a long time ago. At that meeting, you said that processing EES as well as all the other stuff you would have to do post-Brexit was going to be an impossible task.

Hearing about the system that you have so ably described this afternoon, the wet stamping and the odd scan takes a few seconds more than the old wave-through, which was more common. Now that we are looking at taking biometric data, fingerprints and whatever else they might want, it sounds like quite a few more seconds, even if it can be overcome with this mobile iPad or whatever else works—currently it does not seem to work very well. That is all going to add seconds. Are you still of the view that there is no way that you will be able to cope with this?

**John Keefe:** I think what we have learned is that the way to cope with this is by digitising and using technology. I go back to what I said earlier on about how we have managed the freight business. On the introduction of requirements for border controls and customs controls, and the step-by-step introduction of sanitary and phytosanitary controls at the moment—the first look at that was a sheaf of papers of declarations of goods being carried. It could be hundreds of pages of thick, with a requirement to register each one of those pages in order to allow the truck to go through the system.



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We moved first to handheld scanners. We then moved to the grouping of those declarations together, working with the Government. We introduced new technology. We have spent something over £100 million in developing systems and processes to manage freight. What looks impossible to begin with gets worked through in a pragmatic business sense. With businesses, we have got to make money.

Our *modus operandi*, as Doug described it, is flow. We do not have space for things to stop, for people to stop or for goods to stop. We have to work out ways to keep traffic moving at high velocity through our terminal. What is likely to happen to render the impossible possible is that we will have to invest more in this scheme, which is required by Governments to control the identity of people entering their countries. That is the step that, as commercial businesses, we have to be prepared to undertake. We cannot take the risk of our traffic not being able to travel. We have to be able to find solutions.

**Q47 Craig Mackinlay:** Finally, on the issue of what has to be done under the EES scheme, Mr Jones said that perhaps it could be done remotely, somewhere else. From the EU's point of view, there is a risk in that: perhaps you do a check and then someone else travels, or you decide not to travel at all between that remote check and wherever it is. I can see the difficulty of that and why it would not be appealing to the Commission.

Coaches seem to be a little bit different. I can foresee us having an agreement with the French—the Le Touquet agreement is inter-governmental, not an EU arrangement—to have somewhere just away from Folkestone or Dover where a wet-stamping official or EES official comes on the coach and it is almost sealed with a bit of tape or something. Then, as long as it is unsealed and the passengers have not got off, they are done and dusted. That could take a lot of pressure away from the port in a secure way that I think officials from all sides might be comfortable with. I just wonder whether that is something you might like to think about.

**Doug Bannister:** It is an excellent idea, and one that we are progressing. Specifically for coaches, we have been working really hard with our Government and France and the EU to allow the exact process that you described to take place in a site on our western docks—remote from the ferry terminal, but not so remote. It looks like we are getting some traction with that. It could very well be a great solution for that traffic type. Coach passengers represent about 15% of our total passenger complement.

**Craig Mackinlay:** Every little helps.

**Doug Bannister:** Agreed. The step at the border would be a validation process. That is not as time-consuming. Based on trials we have done at Dover, with the technology that is available, it could take eight or 10 minutes per vehicle to get everybody registered. That is just to get them on the system. Then there is another bit of time—two or three minutes—to





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get them through the border. That two or three minutes is not the time we are talking about; it is the actual registration time. Even if the registration process could be done remotely, they could still go through a normal swift process at the border.

**Chair:** The quality of the answers we are getting from all three of you is very high. They are also very informative. We are not completely up against the clock now, but—

**Craig Mackinlay:** I thought the quality of questioning was quite good.

**Chair:** Craig, your questions are always first-class, but I must move on to Margaret Ferrier for the next question.

Q48 **Margaret Ferrier:** Mr Keefe, is it fair to say that you have accepted the EES and are now preparing for its introduction, for business certainty reasons? Given that you operate infrastructure on the UK and French sides of the tunnel, do you know what re-entry to the Schengen area, after EES registration, will look like?

**John Keefe:** In real terms, we are developing the same kind of infrastructure on both sides because, regardless of the entry requirement, there is always an exit requirement attached so that the individual can be monitored in and out and the Schengen area will know where that person is. We can also imagine that at first introduction, some of the people who need to be enrolled will actually already be in the EU, so they will need to enrol at the border as they leave, to be cleared out, before they can come back in. So in very simple terms—I say this having looked at the whole of the process up until now—it requires very similar infrastructure on both terminals, in both directions.

Q49 **Margaret Ferrier:** How do you plan to offset some of the EES-related costs that you have incurred and to maximise the full potential of the channel tunnel?

**John Keefe:** In the same way as we had to do with the controls on freight. That is essentially a cost that the business has had to pick up. The introduction of the process is the Government's responsibility. The management of borders is a Government responsibility on both sides. But to maintain the flow of traffic, we have to make a commercial decision: do we wait until we have the full spec, and risk the traffic slowing down for a period because nothing is in place, or do we take a business decision to make investments ahead of the specification, knowing that we might be wrong on some of them, but gaining more certainty because we know we will be able to manage the traffic flow by making the investment in advance even of the final spec?

It is similar to what happened with the truck infrastructure. We made our first set of truck infrastructure preparations ready for 29 March 2019, which was the original date for leaving the EU, so we had the majority of our infrastructure in place. We have evolved it since then. We have upgraded it. We have done versions 2.0, 2.1 and 2.3, so we are constantly moving that forward, but we had to make that decision in advance,





because if we had been unable to transport trucks, the risk would have been much more significant.

Q50 **Margaret Ferrier:** Mr Bannister, is any work going on at the Port of Dover to prepare for the EES? If so, how is that being funded?

**Doug Bannister:** Our situation is a little bit different from Eurotunnel's. Our layout is a bit different—it is a bit more constrained in the actual border space—so what we are doing is developing. We have a contingency plan for installing an operation in our buffer zone. It won't be pretty and it won't work very well, but it is a contingency. We also have been looking at a plan to invest in the western part of the terminal.

The thing is that when you start talking about investing millions of pounds in doing something, you like to know that that is the direction that you should be going in. This is why getting answers to these questions is important. We would not make the several-million-pound investment in the western docks if remote registration were off the table. Remote registration means remote from the eyes of the Police Aux Frontières officer, so that is how much space you have to be able to operate in: how far that person can see. To commit millions of pounds to an investment like that, I would like to have the certainty that what we are building is going to be used.

**Renaud Thillaye:** On the question of cost, Eurostar is also investing in its self-interest, because we understand that flows are becoming more complex and traffic demand grows. We want to ensure that EES does not impact our ability to respond to that demand for travel, so we are investing in e-gates and border booths. All these will be available to French border police officers. Of course, that has a cost, which we have been discussing with colleagues from the Home Office. We would welcome some support from the British Government, in the same way as Governments on the continent—the French or Belgian Governments—are funding some investments in the terminals we have in Paris and Brussels.

The second thing I want to stress is that we need more space. In St Pancras, there is no space in the terminals as we have them today, but we have a long-term plan to expand the Eurostar terminals using the upstairs space. We really want to discuss that with the Government and the stakeholders who could support that investment as well.

One important parameter is the charging regime. We are an operator—we are not the station manager—so we have to pay some charges. I want to stress to the Committee that the charges on the UK part of the Eurostar network are three times higher than on the continent. They are extremely high. In the past few years, they have increased by 50% per train, so in these circumstances it is very hard for Eurostar to envisage bearing the costs of these important investments, which I think are in the UK's interest and support the UK.

Q51 **Chair:** Is that something to do with subsidies given to the people concerned? Always remember that when we are talking transport—for



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example, on roll-on roll-off—every one of our 47 port employers is privately owned, but Rotterdam, Hamburg and so on are nationalised. What you say sounds great, but are you actually being given big subsidies in order to keep the costs down?

**Renaud Thillaye:** Well, of course we are a private operator. That is pretty clear.

**Chair:** That is true.

**Renaud Thillaye:** We do not receive subsidies for our operations. However, we think that there is a case for support not just for us, but in a non-discriminatory way for all ports having to face these new Government requirements.

Q52 **Chair:** Why is there this differential? You said it was very large between the UK and the other places you referred to.

**Renaud Thillaye:** What I can say is that the French Government and the Belgian Government are investing millions to upgrade the terminals. In Paris, they—

Q53 **Chair:** You are answering my question as I hoped, but I am still interested. If the Government are providing the money, it is effectively coming from the taxpayer in France and Belgium. Isn't that right?

**Renaud Thillaye:** The French Government are subsidising investment on the territorial front, yes.

Q54 **Chair:** I just want to know the answer to the question. The answer is yes, they are providing the money.

**Renaud Thillaye:** Yes.

**Chair:** That is on the record. Iain Stewart, the Chairman of the Transport Committee, will ask the next few questions.

Q55 **Iain Stewart:** I want to touch on the UK electronic travel authorisation scheme, which is proposed to be introduced from November this year. I appreciate that they are different schemes with different objectives, but is there an opportunity for there to be some synergy between the two systems in some way that could help to reduce the burden?

**Doug Bannister:** Wherever John and I congregate and are in meetings like this or with Government, one of the things we would like to see greater emphasis on is the French Government and the UK Government working together to come up with a common platform, system or approach across the short straits. That would make it much simpler for hauliers, tourists and anybody wanting to travel or wanting goods to go across to know that that is indeed the system.

**John Keefe:** Given the essence of what border control is—controlling identities and looking at histories of travel—it is the same information being requested by both Governments, but requested in a different form. That means that each member of the travelling public has to go through



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the process twice in order to go and come back. It does seem that there is a logic to sharing some of that data capture, or sharing some of the fundamental data.

A passport is a passport. It is going to be read by a UK immigration officer and by a French immigration officer, but it is the same document. If it is the same document, handed physically to those two officers, why is it not possible to envisage that the same digital representation of that passport could be shared with those two after one process of capture? So, yes, we would definitely see a move towards a common scheme that enabled both sides to have all the different bits of data that they needed, in the form that they needed, but electronically, having captured it once in the middle.

Q56 **Iain Stewart:** Do you sense that there is any appetite in the UK Government, or in the EU, to do that?

**John Keefe:** Picking up Doug's point from earlier on, I think there is a requirement for the two to work more closely together to make trade and travel easier. It is not impossible in a process sense or a data-security sense, and it enables trade and travel, which enables economic growth, so there is a natural sense to doing it. I think that it has been difficult, up until the summit between the President of France and the Prime Minister, when relationships were quite cold. If the relationships are improving, this is the kind of discussion that we need to enable economic growth through trade and travel.

Q57 **Iain Stewart:** As far as you are aware, it is not a live discussion point at the moment.

**John Keefe:** Whenever we mention it, it elicits wry smiles from both sides.

**Iain Stewart:** I am not sure how we interpret a wry smile, but thank you very much.

Q58 **Mr Jones:** I have one brief question on ETA for Monsieur Thillaye. I actually went to Paris on the Eurostar a couple of weeks ago, and I was struck that there is not much space on either side; the space is very congested both in St Pancras and in the Gare du Nord. If the UK introduces an ETA system, will you not get the same problems that you already have with EES, only in reverse?

**Renaud Thillaye:** Not quite, because passengers would not have to pre-register their biometrics. We will not have to create an ETA pre-registration zone like the one for the EES. Passengers will request an ETA in advance—remotely, via a website, I suppose—and will come to the station. When they check in and go to see a UK Border Force officer, it would come up automatically whether they had an ETA or not.

The question, as I said earlier, is whether we, Eurostar, play a role in that process to avoid some passengers blocking the queue because they do not have the right documents. We might do that upstream in advance, at the entrance of the terminal. We expect the ETA to have a rather light impact on our operations, which is good news.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Chair:** Thank you. It has been a very interesting session. Towards the end, I was beginning to think about the Scarlet Pimpernel and how he was getting across at the beginning of the French revolution.

**Craig Mackinlay:** He would take a dinghy, I think, now.

**Chair:** “They seek him here, they seek him there,” and so on and so forth.

Thank you very much, all three of you. It has been very informative. I also thank Iain Stewart for coming along today. There are things that we will follow up, of course. I do hope that the civil servants and other people in the various Government Departments that have responsibility—Transport, the Home Office and any other Department affected—follow what has been said, because this is a bottleneck question. It is therefore essential for the sake of our levelling up and of our traffic—the to and fro of people and goods—to get this right.

I hope that the people watching this session have found it of value. Thank you for coming along and giving us such an informative session.