

The Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP
Chair, Business and Trade Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

16 January 2026

Dear Liam

I am writing to you on behalf of the Road Haulage Association, following our Trade Policy Lead Alastair Gunn and member Toby Ovens appearance before the Business and Trade Committee this week.

We were pleased to be invited to give evidence and are grateful to you and your committee for taking an interest in the significant challenges facing our industry. As you will appreciate, road transport is often overlooked, despite its central importance to the work of the Department for Business and Trade, and we therefore welcome the opportunity to support the Committee's inquiries.

The Government's desire to reset our relationship with the EU is an opportunity for our industry which has suffered considerably from additional border and customs checks which have added cost, delay and bureaucracy to hauliers crossing our borders.

We therefore wanted to follow up on some of the key discussion points regarding the EU/UK Reset in writing for your committees record which we will set out below:

Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement

The government's efforts to negotiate on the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) deal is welcomed, particularly by the agri-foods haulage industry.

As the Committee heard in evidence from Toby Ovens, Managing Director of RHA member, Broughton Transport, the introduction of full SPS checks has added layers of complexity, cost and delay to what were previously routine movements of goods. These requirements have fundamentally changed the commercial viability of certain routes, with hauliers facing increased administrative burdens, longer border dwell times, and greater exposure to disruption where paperwork or consignments are rejected or delayed.

We therefore strongly support efforts to secure a pragmatic SPS agreement with the EU that reduces duplication, minimises physical checks, and restores a greater degree of predictability to cross-border movements.

Schengen Travel Restrictions

A significant issue facing our sector is the limit on days that drivers can stay in the Schengen Zone - the 90/180 rule.

The 90/180 rule has recently come sharply into focus due to the ongoing rollout of the Entry Exit System. This monitors how many days non-EU nationals spend in the Schengen area, enabling enforcement measures that risk penalising those UK national HGV and coach drivers whose work is essential to cross-border trade and tourism. This is potentially catastrophic for the viability of international haulier and coach operators, and for their specialist employees who are facing difficult decisions over whether to continue to work into Europe as well as greater prospects of redundancy.

This is a significant issue for UK event haulage vehicles carrying out multi-day music tours that rely on extended periods in the EU often beyond 90 days at a time. Before the election, the Chancellor spoke of introducing a visa for touring artists who are affected by this issue. We believe this is too narrow a focus, as it would exclude the support crew and drivers that are essential for putting on events.

By way of example, one RHA member employs 200 drivers and delivers concerts for some of the biggest artists. Last year they ran the trucking and merchandise storage for the Taylor Swift Eras tour, which involved 100 trucks out for 4 months - a considerable job which would have been impossible with strict enforcement of the 90/180 restrictions.

We have consistently raised the need for a professional drivers' exemption to ministers and would welcome the Committee considering this as a formal recommendation.

Windsor Framework and the Murphy Review

We also welcome the Government's response to Lord Murphy's Independent Review of the Windsor Framework, which rightly acknowledges the need to reduce friction and restore confidence in the movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

While the acceptance of the Review's recommendations is a positive step, we have cautioned that the response represents a missed opportunity to go further in addressing the practical, day-to-day challenges faced by haulage operators. In particular, businesses continue to encounter complexity, uncertainty and additional cost when moving goods across the Irish Sea. We believe measures such as a Trusted Haulier Scheme – explicitly mentioned by Lord Murphy

in his review – and moving the determination of risk away from the border to the point of sale would help address this.

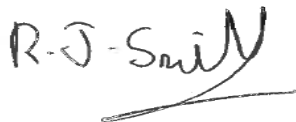
Lord Murphy also recommended that the Government should, “monitor the effectiveness of its new customs arrangements against the experiences of logistics businesses”. We would welcome clarity from the Government on how the RHA can help it meet this recommendation.

Delivering meaningful simplification and certainty for operators will be essential if the Windsor Framework is to function effectively in practice and support the resilience of UK internal trade.

Engagement with the Department for Business and Trade

Finally, in response to Ms Sarah Edwards MP’s question on the challenges we have faced in engaging with Ministers at the Department for Business and Trade, I can confirm that since the election Ministers have repeatedly failed to respond to requests to meet with us to discuss issues affecting the industry, including business resilience, trade and other pressures relevant to the department’s responsibilities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R-J-Smith', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Smith
Managing Director
Road Haulage Association