

**EUROPEAN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WRITTEN EVIDENCE  
VISIT KENT SUBMISSION**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Visit Kent Ltd is the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) for Kent. It is recognised as one of the country's leading DMOs and was awarded Local Visitor Economy Partnership status by VisitBritain in April 2023. Its role is to target UK and overseas markets to raise Kent's profile as a premier destination, improve quality and skills within the industry, and grow investment in tourism. Visit Kent is a public/private sector partnership supported by Kent County Council, Medway Council, district and borough councils, and the leading sector tourism businesses in Kent.
- 1.2 In 2022, the visitor economy in Kent generated just under £3.8 billion and the number of tourism related jobs supported by the visitor economy in 2022 was 74,462 which accounted for 10% of total employment in Kent.

**2. Why we are submitting evidence to this inquiry**

- 2.1 As the organisation responsible for promoting Kent as a visitor destination both within the UK and internationally – we have a vested interest in ensuring that Kent's national and international image, visitor experience and visitor economy businesses (in addition to local residents and other businesses) will not be adversely impacted by the introduction of the EU's new Entry and Exit System in 2024 and beyond.

- 3. Juxtaposed UK/France(Schengen) border controls are in operation at London St Pancras International, Folkestone and Dover. 1. introduced in its current form, what challenges will EES present UK sites facilitating juxtaposed border controls? 2. Should special dispensation for remote registration or remote pre-registration for EES be provided for at these sites?**

**How will EES affect the travel experience of third country nationals?**

- 3.1 We are concerned that the introduction of the new Entry and Exit System will result in lengthy delays and disruption at the juxtaposed border controls in Kent namely Dover and Folkestone due to the new, additional checks needed for UK citizens and other third country nationals to enter France. As you will be aware, tourists arriving on coaches at the border controls present a specific challenge due to the requirement for all passengers to disembark and

get back on again. Colleagues from Ashford Borough Council estimate that as a worst case scenario - queues for tourists could get up to 14 hours.

- 3.2 EU citizens will not be required to undergo these new checks but there is the potential for them to be caught up and affected by the likely disruption at the juxtaposed transport hubs in Kent. In December 2021, we conducted some international perception research with respondents from the USA, Germany, Spain and France - 53% stated that they were concerned about the difficulties at ports (and airports) in the UK caused by additional passport checks.
- 3.3 Lengthy delays at Dover and Folkestone are also likely to result in the activation of the traffic management system 'Operation Brock' and through our regular Business Barometer surveys - we have evidence that demonstrates the negative impact of Operation Brock on Kent's visitor economy. The most recent Business Barometer survey results from August 2023 showed that:
  - 13% of businesses (who responded to the survey) said that Operation Brock had had a negative impact on their businesses due to traffic congestion with 57% of these businesses reporting that their visitor footfall had decreased between an estimated 1% to 40%.
  - The survey also reported that for attractions in Kent (responding to the survey), their top concerns included loss of footfall (53%), followed by travel disruptions (38%) with 21% of these businesses specifically citing Operation Brock as a concern.
- 3.4 In our experience, damage from negative media coverage can linger much longer than the disruption to traffic resulting in visitors avoiding coming to all parts of Kent – even those areas that are not impacted. We are also aware that some organisations and businesses in Kent are struggling to plan ahead for events and major launches due to the uncertainty of the timetable around implementation.
- 3.5 With The Short Straits being the most important entry to Europe for the whole of the UK – we are therefore concerned that the implementation of the EES will be a major issue for tourist welfare in addition to the significant impact on local residents (who may struggle to get to work), businesses and supply chains. Key organisations in Kent must be supported with managing the expected impact on the county.
4. **What steps should the UK Government be taking to mitigate potential disruption stemming from the introduction of EES for UK ports, operators, and passengers travelling to the Schengen Area?**
  - 4.1 The introduction of the EES system is one of the key challenges Eurostar have stated in not reopening Ashford International Railway Station in Kent.

They have stated that the requirement for additional customs officers at St Pancras Station will require this resource to be diverted from Kent stations to St Pancras Station to deal with the additional checks. The timely introduction of a workable EES system is therefore essential to get international services back to Ashford International Station and Ebbsfleet International Station – both of which have juxtaposed control bureaux (which operated until Eurostar suspended services during the pandemic) and have seen substantial UK state investment to enable fast, convenient, seamless and more sustainable travel between the UK and the EU.

4.2 These stations are vitally important locations for providing access to the South East region via the convenient motorway network connections as well as providing arrival points for international visitors to enjoy the wealth of visitor attractions across the South East. Currently, international passengers visiting Kent have to travel 75 minutes each way to St Pancras to travel back to the EU and bear the additional cost of doing so. We urge the Committee not to lose focus on these important international transport assets and to ensure that in their recommendations to government, whatever provisions are promoted and undertaken for St Pancras, Folkestone and Dover are similarly undertaken for Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations as this is in the public interest.

**5. The EU is not planning to allow registration for EES remotely—e.g. via a dedicated website or mobile phone application—or physically at a location away from London St Pancras, Dover or Folkestone (such as an EU or Member State facility in a major UK city).**

- 1. Is this approach justified?**
- 2. Would remote registration be justifiable for nationals of countries with comparable immigration and security standards to the EU?**

5.1 We recommend that the Committee urge the Government to continue to work with operators, infrastructure owners, EU member state governments, the European Commission and its agencies to explore all technological capabilities and legislative possibilities to enable remote registration and consequently to reduce the prospect of delays at the border points. By allowing remote registration, the expected delays to tourist traffic to the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel would be greatly reduced. This would reduce welfare concerns for passengers, ensure the continued through flow of freight and reduce the impact on residents and businesses in Kent.

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