

Potential logistics implications of Brexit for cross-border transit routes

In the event of a no-deal Brexit, there are likely to be significant logistics implications for firms moving products between Northern Ireland (NI), the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Great Britain (GB). Each of these are now outlined.

Logistics impact of NI to GB

In the event of a no-deal Brexit, NI products transiting through the ROI to GB are likely to require a Transit Accompanying Document (TAD). This is normally prepared by a haulier. The holder of the procedure will indicate by lodging a transit declaration to undertake the transit operation.

The holder will be responsible for the production of the goods and the TAD at the customs office of destination within a specified time limit. Also, the holder of the procedure is responsible for the payment of the duties, and other charges which may become due in the event of an unanticipated problem occurring.

Some of the ports may not be fully prepared for new customs and border checks. The absence of technology solutions to automate some of the administrative process is likely to make the situation worse. A further problem associated with delays at ports is congestion on the road networks.

Logistics impact of NI to the ROI

In the event of a no-deal Brexit, World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules could apply to trade across the land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Every WTO member is required to treat all other members equally under WTO rules. Where the UK did not enforce a border with the European Union (EU) in NI, it would not have to enforce a border with all members of the WTO.

Similarly, where the ROI did not impose tariffs on exports from the UK, it could be in breach of WTO obligations, as well as the rules of the EU customs union. Where NI continued to transport products to the ROI, without an alignment of standards, and to other EU countries, checks on products leaving the ROI for other EU countries could be put in place.

Non-tariff barriers could also create delays at the NI/ROI border. For example, EU law does not allow health and safety inspections for food and animal products arriving from a third country, such as the UK post-Brexit, to take place very far inland. These safety inspections have to be undertaken at designated border inspection posts, at the first point of entry into the single European market, on 100% of products.

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Logistics impact of NI to the mainland EU

A lot of imports and exports move directly between NI and the ROI and mainland Europe primarily on containers. However, the bulk of “roll-on, roll-off” lorry and road freight traffic use GB as a land-bridge. For example, lorry loads of products entering Dover from outside the EU are subject to checks that can take 45 minutes on average, as a result of being subject to the same checks on entering the EU.

In order to reduce delays, the UK and EU will have to strike deals on the movement of trucks or lorries, vehicle registrations, and the ability of drivers who are EU nationals to drive vehicles into the UK and vice versa.

This is likely to have significant impacts on transportation times, which is critical for certain products. For example, lorries can currently travel to continental Europe destinations from NI in less than 20 hours by travelling the GB land-bridge route. However, direct sea routes to France could take 40 hours, which would have a particularly detrimental impact on just-in-time and perishable products.