



“Ireland’s European Connectivity – Ports and maritime links in the Atlantic sea basin”

Joint seminar organised by the European TEN-T Coordinators for Motorways of the Sea, the Atlantic and North Sea-Mediterranean Corridors in cooperation with the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO)

Dublin, 16 / 17 April 2019
The Convention Centre Dublin

-

PRESS RELEASE





April 16th and 17th, TEN-T coordinators for Motorways of the Sea, the Atlantic and North Sea-Mediterranean Corridors in cooperation with the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) met at the Convention Centre in Dublin for a two-days joint seminar to discuss about Ireland's European Connectivity- ports and maritime links in the Atlantic Sea basin.

The seminar, which is the first event of its kind, attracted more than 100 distinguished participants. The first day was opened by Graham Doyle, Secretary General of the Department of Transport and was followed by two thematic sessions:

- *Maritime connections in the Atlantic Sea: current situation and future modelling of transport flows* (Session I chaired by Motorways of the Sea coordinator Kurt Bodewig) aimed at learning about the ongoing trends in maritime traffic in the Atlantic Sea basin and how they will be impacted by European developments (such as Brexit) and by wider discussions such as the entry into force of the 2020 Sulphur cap, and the decarbonisation of shipping.
- *Connectivity of Ireland in the context of Brexit: challenge or opportunity?* (session II chaired by Prof. Péter Balázs, European Coordinator for the North Sea-Mediterranean Corridor) aimed at exploring the practical measures, already taken or planned, by industry in preparation of Brexit, posing the question of whether the different stakeholders perceive a strategic threat or an opportunity for their business.

The second day dealt with the conclusions of the first day, the needs for a reinforced cooperation of the Atlantic maritime stakeholders and with the outline of the next CEF II programme and its funding possibilities for establishing new maritime links.

During day 1, Graham Doyle highlighted how Ireland is a maritime nation and how it relies on frequent and competitive links with mainland Europe. Kurt Bodewig, in addition, stressed the need for further cooperation across corridors. The sea basin approach indeed is needed to promote further integration of the logistics chain as well as modal shift towards SSS. Brexit means that Ireland needs to look for alternatives to the land bridge and rely more on SSS and cooperation with Atlantic stakeholders.

Interesting food for thought emerged also from the two thematic sessions: panellists highlighted a number of opportunities and challenges for the Irish maritime and port sector. What emerged is that Brexit is of course the main challenge right now: investments in capacity and new routes are needed to ensure connectivity; and hinterland connections are also crucial. The bottleneck, indeed, is often on the land side and a proper multimodal chain could be a solution.

During day 2, Pat Cox, former president of the European Parliament, summarised his impression of the first day. As stressed by Cox, Ireland is an island nation with a long maritime tradition and an open and booming economy. Brexit, especially if disorderly, has the potential to disrupt Ireland's main sectors (agriculture and food). Ports have prepared, but measures have not been stress-tested yet. They will experience difficulties and there will be long-term consequences on the supply chain. Ireland then needs to get its strategic head together and discuss what priorities that new CEF and TEN-T need to address.

As highlighted by Pat Cox, indeed,

“We are fully engaged in Europe and we must never allow ourselves to get into a peripherality state of mind. [...] Peripherality should never be our state of mind.” Indeed, *“we are connected digitally, we are connected through commerce, business, education, government, institutions”* [...] *“We stand*



in a small country that can be at the centre of the universe of our own creation. And the universe creation is built on the pillars of connectivity”.

Furthermore, a session dedicated to the *Needs for a reinforced cooperation of the Atlantic maritime stakeholders*, chaired by the European Coordinator for the Atlantic Corridor, Prof. Carlo Secchi, was carried out. The session focused on wider cooperation in the Atlantic sea basin, not only as regards maritime infrastructure, but also in terms of promoting the Blue Economy concept of DG MARE.

At the end of day 2, the three TEN-T coordinators gave concluding remarks, commending the fruitful and dynamic discussions. With Brexit on the horizon, cooperation across corridors in the Atlantic sea basin will be crucial. Preparation on the regulatory side are ongoing, with the alignment of the NSM Corridor and the inclusion of Ireland in the Atlantic corridor as of 2021.

Finally, Deirdre O’Keefe (assistant secretary for maritime transport) thanked the audience for the productive discussions. Ireland needs to stay connected to EU, keep its ports competitive and keep goods and people flowing. Brexit has brought into focus the importance of ports and the need for more direct routes to mainland Europe. Ireland’s size means it is often overshadowed when applying for funding, but it needs to think strategically and keep having meetings like this to influence EU policy.

As stressed by O’Keefe

“We need to strengthen our links to enhance the connectivity”. We need to “focus on the entire logistic chain”. Particularly “important from the Irish point of view are the new technologies, Port community systems, alternative fuels” [and] flexible funding programmes”.



The Atlantic Sea basin

The Atlantic Sea basin covers a wide variety of connections and maritime services, ranging from very frequent short-sea shipping routes in the North Sea and English Channel, to the longer routes connecting ports on the Atlantic coast with overseas ports. From a European perspective, it is also unique as its ports feed into and connect a number of TEN-T corridors, specifically the Atlantic Corridor, and the North Sea-Mediterranean Corridor, which connects mainland Europe with Ireland. In total, this area includes more than 20 core ports and as many comprehensive ports.

In particular, the Atlantic coast stands out among the European coastal areas because there are no real short-distance routes. Opposite the European Atlantic coast is the North American Atlantic coast at a distance of several thousand nautical miles. There are only six CNC ports on the European Atlantic Coast, four of which have connections with ten or more short-sea ports. Contrary to the other port ranges, connections with overseas ports (including the Azores and the Canary Islands) are just as numerous.

Ro-ro services mostly connect the Atlantic coast ports among each other (e.g. France- Portugal) and with British ports. While ro-ro traffic is less developed here than in the other European coastal areas, the Atlantic coast is strategically situated for container traffic. Three major intercontinental routes cross here: America to Europe, North Europe to Asia and Europe to Africa. Accordingly, ports along the Atlantic coast handle a large variety of deep sea services. Besides their role in intercontinental traffic, they are also the main correspondence ports on the European mainland for serving the Portuguese Azores and Madeira as well as the Spanish Canary Islands.

The Atlantic ports also play a particularly important role in connecting outermost and peripheral regions (next to the aforementioned archipelagos Azores and Canary Islands also Ceuta and Melilla). On the other hand, the Atlantic sea basin also includes a number of North Sea ports, including the main core ports of Antwerp, Rotterdam, Amsterdam and Hamburg. While not all these ports are technically considered to be part of the Atlantic Sea basin, they are nevertheless crucial to consider, as each one is connected with more than 100 ports in Europe.

In addition, there is a large amount of ro-ro traffic, particularly across the Channel as well as between Ireland and Great Britain. Ro-ro services in the North Sea comprise long-distance routes along the coastlines and medium- to short-distance routes crossing the North Sea. While Calais-Dover is by far the most important link in terms of total cargo traffic and the shortest route between the UK and the continent, there are numerous other links across the Channel. Moreover, there are also several ro-ro services between Great Britain and Ireland as well as between Great Britain and Norway/Sweden and between the North Range Ports and the Scandinavian countries.

The major container route – one of the most important ones in the world – stretches from Hamburg along the German, Dutch and Belgian North Sea coast and through the Channel to the open sea. The North Range ports offer regular services to ports all over the world. Smaller ports are connected to the network via feeder services, but also through specialised deep-sea services, most notably connecting Europe to Africa.

The Atlantic Sea basin presents an interesting case. In addition to the wide array of maritime services highlighted above, a number of specific challenges arise. First and foremost, the UK leaving the EU is expected to disrupt maritime operations and the overall logistics chain. The severity of such disruption of course depends on the final terms of the agreement (if any) between the UK and the EU. Irrespective of the scenario, preparations are ongoing at EU level (notably with the modification of the North Sea-Med Corridor) from Member States and operators, to ensure logistics chains and passenger services are not disrupted. New opportunities for passenger and cargo services, notably between different ports in Ireland and mainland Europe, are also arising.

The industry as a whole is also working on a number of environmental challenges. Port and shipping operators are preparing for the 2020 entry into force of the 0.5% sulphur limit in marine fuel. Concerns about the availability of compliant fuel, as well as of alternatives such as LNG, is also having an impact on investment decisions, and might influence route decisions and therefore traffic patterns. Discussions on decarbonisation and GHG reduction from shipping, and specifically - in the short term - discussions on slow steaming, could impact traffic flows and logistics chains.