

£17m government package to protect freight routes to Northern Ireland

- New scheme will support ferry operators on 5 routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- UK government continues to work closely with NI Executive and the aviation industry to agree funding to protect air passenger services between NI and GB

Vital ferry routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland have been safeguarded, thanks to a multi-million-pound government scheme to help ensure critical freight can continue to move into and across the Union.

The package, worth up to £17 million, is being funded by the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive and will be made available to operators so that they can continue running freight services on five sea routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced today that further funding, worth tens of millions of pounds, will also be made available to support more routes across the UK, subject to discussions with operators.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Essential supplies are continuing to flow well, but operators are facing challenges as fewer people travelling means less capacity to move goods.

Today's action will help ensure we have the freight capacity we need across the UK. This funding will help ferry operators protect our supply chain and maintain the flow of critical goods across the Irish Sea and throughout the Union.

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis, said:

This is excellent news for Northern Ireland and the connectivity of the entire United Kingdom.

Although this coronavirus outbreak has reduced travel demand, this support package from the UK Government and Northern Ireland

Executive will ensure that essential ferry routes are kept open and vital transport links across the entire UK are safeguarded – guaranteeing the continued supply of critical goods, such as food and medical supplies.

I am pleased that a further support package is also being developed to help ensure crucial air passenger services to and from London, Belfast City Airport and City of Derry Airport are maintained. And we will continue to work closely with the Northern Ireland Executive to help deliver that.

In addition to the funding announced today, the Department for Transport is working closely with the wider transport sector and devolved administrations to monitor the situation on air routes which are vital in helping maintain transport links across the union.

The Secretary of State for Transport also confirmed that the Department has been working with the Northern Ireland Executive to develop a support package which will ensure passenger flights from Belfast and Derry-Londonderry, to Great Britain are maintained during the pandemic.

The Department is in discussions with the relevant airlines, airports and the Northern Ireland Executive to finalise this package guaranteeing lifeline air passenger services remain in operation.

All operators on the following 5 routes between GB-NI are in the scope of this scheme:

- Cairnryan-Larne
- Heysham-Warrenpoint
- Heysham – Belfast
- Liverpool – Belfast
- Cairnryan-Belfast

The funding package for maritime freight services to Northern Ireland is for up to 2 months. It is time-limited to help maintain services during the Covid-19 crisis. It will be made available only to roll-on, roll-off freight operators, which move freight by transporting haulage vehicles across sea routes.