

First Minister meets the Taoiseach to discuss trade post-Brexit

The First Minister will say the creation of a 'hard' maritime border between Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, because of the UK government's insistence on leaving the Single Market and the Customs Union, would be a very real threat to the Welsh and Irish economies.

Ports make a huge contribution to the Welsh economy, supporting around 11,000 jobs and providing an economic hub and trade gateway with Europe and the rest of the world.

80% of goods carried in Irish registered HGVs between the Republic of Ireland and Europe pass through Welsh ports. In 2016, 524,000 lorries passed through major Welsh ports to and from the Irish Republic.

The First Minister recently launched the Welsh Government's post-Brexit trade paper, which set out the challenges facing Welsh ports. It identified the most pressing issue for Welsh ports is maintaining the efficient movement of goods and people via seamless customs arrangements.

The First Minister said:

"Changes to customs rules that add cost, time and regulation at Welsh ports would greatly reduce their efficiency and might encourage goods to be diverted away from the sea routes between Wales and Ireland. This would be hugely damaging to our economy.

"The Welsh Government is fully committed to playing its part in supporting the Good Friday Agreement, but I cannot support any outcome which would divert traffic away from Holyhead, Fishguard and Pembroke Dock in favour of other parts of the UK.

"There must be a level playing field between Britain and Ireland. I don't want to see a hard border on the island of Ireland but neither do I want to see customs posts at Welsh ports.

"That is why the best option is for the whole UK to have continued participation in the Single Market and membership of a customs union. This removes this problem entirely. It is also in the best interests of the Welsh and the Irish economies and, indeed, the economies of the whole of the UK. And, as we have been clear, leaving the EU must not affect the arrangements for the Common Travel Area.

"I look forward to meeting with the Taoiseach to discuss this issue, as well as the importance of maintaining close links between Wales and Ireland as the UK prepares to leave the EU."

Ireland holds a key position in terms of Welsh inward investment, with over 50 Irish-owned companies in Wales employing 2,500 people. Ireland is also a top Welsh export destination with Welsh exports to Ireland worth £902m in 2016.

While in Dublin, the First Minister will also attend a round table on Infrastructure and Brexit chaired by the British Irish Chamber of Commerce and hosted by Trinity College Dublin Business School, visit Irish Ferries and meet with British Ambassador, HE Robin Barnett CMG and British Irish Parliamentary Association Members.

[Traffic Officers to begin patrolling A483](#)

Welsh Government Traffic Officers currently cover the A55/A494/A550 corridor from the A55 Britannia Bridge through to the English border at Sealand and Broughton.

The service is now being extended and will now be patrolling the A483 between Junction 1 and Junction 7 from 7am-7pm every day of the year.

North Wales Traffic Officers currently deal with around 1,000 incidents per month including road safety issues, breakdowns, clearing debris and traffic management. More than 92% of incidents dealt with by the Traffic Officers have resulted in there being no impact upon journey times. In 2017, they moved 2,067 vehicles to safety.

Traffic Officers also help to ensure a safe working environment on the roads for the fire and rescue service, police and ambulance service to carry out their duties effectively.

Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Our Traffic Officer Service plays a vital role in maintaining the resilience of the network. Officers are out patrolling every day of the year in all types of weather carrying out a range of duties to ensure our roads are safe and moving as smoothly as possible.

“Last year I asked that we examine the potential to extend the service to cover the A483 and I’m delighted we are now making this happen on what is a very important route which connects North and Mid Wales as well as with regions across the border.

“This is a great example of how the Welsh Government is delivering to improve the travel experience and minimise the impact of

incidents and breakdowns.”

[Economy Secretary congratulates made in Wales Journey's End on rave reviews](#)

The film which opened in early February is enjoying rave reviews from a wide range of publications including The Times, UK Film Review, Empire and The i. It is the work of production company Fluidity and was filmed in Pinewood Studio in Cardiff with financial support from Welsh Government.

Journey's End is based on the classic play by R. C. Sherriff and is set in the trenches in 1918. It follows a small group of soldiers as they wait for an enemy offensive and anticipate their imminent death.

The production features a host of household names including Sam Claflin, Paul Bettany, Toby Jones and Asa Butterfield. It was adapted by Simon Reade and directed by Saul Dibb whose previous films include Suite Francaise, The Duchess and Bullet Boy.

The Economy Secretary said:

“I am delighted that made in Wales production, Journey's End is wowing critics and the public alike, and being heralded as one of the best films about the First World War.

“It is a huge credit to the hard work and creativity of the production team, cast and crew and I would like to congratulate every one involved in its success.

“I am extremely proud that the Welsh Government is associated with such a first class production and the positive press coverage has been great for promoting Wales' talented crew, our locations and studio facilities.

“The film is helping to elevate our growing reputation as a premier production location and I hope we will the opportunity to work with Fluidity again in the future.”

Minister visits Monkton to discuss adult learning initiative

Started in September 2012 with support from the Welsh Government, the Launch Project aims to raise adults' skills standards and education attainment within the community by making learning accessible to everyone.

Both accredited and non-accredited courses and workshops are delivered at the school and other community venues and have been specifically designed to remove barriers so that people in the community can gain the confidence and skills needed to seek employment.

The provision has also been designed to cater for a wide range of learner needs, from basic skills and IT courses to various accredited courses including a foundation degree in Education and Social Inclusion.

During the visit the Minister met with some of the adult learners who have benefitted from the project and heard their personal accounts about how it has helped them to turn their lives around, gain new skills and seize new employment opportunities.

Speaking after the visit, Minister said: "This project is a great example of a community-driven learning initiative that has been designed by the community for the community and I applaud Monkton Primary School for its pivotal role in that.

"The school is clearly committed to lifelong learning and building an ethos of working and learning together, built on mutual respect between adults and children.

"It was also inspiring hearing from those who have benefitted from the project and seeing first hand the positive impact it has had on their lives and their confidence."

"Investment in social care is easing pressure on the NHS" – Huw Irranca-Davies

The Minister confirmed part of the additional £10m the Welsh Government has made available to relieve winter pressures in the NHS is being used to ensure

home care services are in place to enable patients who need ongoing support in the community to leave hospital earlier. The funding will also support people to remain in their own homes, avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions, wherever possible.

This funding is in addition to the £60m the Welsh Government is investing in the Integrated Care Fund each year, which is helping to reduce pressures on vital NHS and social care services. The fund is helping to drive integrated working between health, social care, housing and the third sector for a range of preventative purposes, including supporting older people to maintain their independence.

Investment has been made in a number of areas, which include:

- Commissioning additional nursing home beds or intermediate care beds to provide an alternative to acute hospital care for complex assessments
- Providing additional discharge liaison nurse & social worker hours to support complex discharge planning
- Funding additional re-ablement services so individual care and support packages for patients can be agreed and established to avoid admission and support discharge from hospital
- Increasing the capacity within local authorities' Adult Social Work Teams to meet improved flow through the hospital setting and enable individuals to return to their home environment
- Extending the support available from Care & Repair for small adaptation services for older people to facilitate timely discharge from hospital
- Providing intensive rehabilitation services to facilitate earlier and less dependent discharge
- Increasing short term urgent domiciliary care services in people's own homes 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The most recent statistics for delayed transfers of care in Wales show they are at a 12 year low. Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"In Wales, we are investing significantly in both our health and social care services, because one service cannot work without the other.

"The additional funding we have made available is being used to improve the flow of patients through the system, and treat and care for the increasing number of people – especially the frail elderly – who need health and care services at this time of year.

"Over the past few weeks, I've had the privilege of visiting a range of health and social care settings to see the excellent integrated working and collaboration between services. This vital work is helping to support people to maintain their independence and remain at home, enabling them to lead their own independent lives. It also helps avoid unnecessary admissions to hospital or residential care, and minimising delays when someone is due to be discharged from care.

“This is exactly the type of joined-up working we want to see more of, and which will form the very basis of our health and social care services in the years and decades ahead.”