

P&O Ferries says Dover delays 'must never happen again'

25 July 2016



Image copyright PA

The delays experienced by motorists going to Dover "must never be allowed to happen again", P&O Ferries has said.

The French authorities' "failure" to provide adequate staffing for increased checks at the Port of Dover was the "primary cause" of delays of up to 14 hours this weekend, it said.

The firm said it would talk to British and French authorities to ensure there is "no repetition of this disruption".

Delays have eased but some disruption could last for weeks, police have said.

'Completely unacceptable'

Helen Deeble, chief executive of P&O Ferries, said: "The scenes which we saw at the weekend at the Port of Dover, with holidaymakers delayed for completely unacceptable lengths of time, must never be allowed to happen again.

"Increased security checks at the border are completely understandable but the French authorities must provide adequate numbers of staff to ensure that these checks can be processed quickly and efficiently. The failure to do so at the weekend was the primary cause of the delays."

Motorists queue for up to 14 hours in Dover traffic chaos

Dover delays: Tales from the queue

Police said the disruption, which began on Friday night and continued into Sunday, was caused by the large volume of holiday traffic and increased checks at the border following recent terror attacks in France.

But the Port of Dover authority said the French border control booths in Dover were "seriously understaffed" on Friday night, while Kent County Council said at one stage only one French officer was available to check passengers on hundreds of coaches, resulting in each coach taking 40 minutes to process.

The delays persisted into Sunday as more travellers continued to head for Dover while the port was still dealing with Saturday's backlog.

UK officials were sent to help at French border posts overnight on Saturday, in response to what the Home Office said was "extraordinary disruption".



copyright EPA Image caption

Traffic has since returned to normal

During the disruption, large tailbacks formed on the A20 and the A2 and there was further waits inside the port itself.

The London-bound carriageway of the A20 was also closed for hours to enable Kent Police, coastguards and volunteers to distribute water to those stuck in the Dover-bound queues, and to allow stranded motorists access to toilet facilities.

The road has since re-opened and traffic has returned to normal, but Kent Police warned that large volumes of holiday traffic and extra border checks by French authorities meant there could be more delays for weeks.



Image copyright AFP/Getty Images Image caption

Police warned that there could be some delays for weeks

France has been under a state of emergency since last November, when terror attacks in Paris left 130 people dead, and has tightened its border checks accordingly.

The port said it had raised concerns over French staffing levels with the UK government earlier this week, which were then brought up with its French counterparts.

Ms Deeble said P&O had provided extra sailings and staff on duty to help ease delays but apologised to those whose journeys were disrupted.

She added: "The port at Dover is a vital link connecting our island to mainland Europe and the governments on both sides of the Channel must act now to protect the millions of people who rely on it."

The Conservative MP for Dover and Deal, Charlie Elphicke, has called on the government to apologise to people who queued for hours in the summer heat, describing the situation as "completely unacceptable".

The Port of Dover said it had raised concerns over French staffing levels with the UK government earlier this week, which were then brought up with its French counterparts.

It also thanked Morrison's, Tesco, Khalsa Aid, P&O Ferries and Kent County Council for supplying free food and water for travellers over the weekend.

See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36886727>

Copyright © 2016 BBC