

P&O chief: Dover delays 'must never happen again'

Ferry boss blames a lack of French security staff for situation where holidaymakers had to queue for up to 15 hours

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The head of P&O Ferries has hit out at French authorities following severe delays for holidaymakers travelling through the port of Dover.

Helen Deeble, its chief executive, said increased security was understandable but French authorities must have enough staff to prevent further delays.

Deeble said holidaymakers were delayed for “completely unacceptable lengths of time” and insisted the situation “must never be allowed to happen again”.

She said: “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.”

Deeble insisted that P&O Ferries did “everything we could to keep passengers moving” by providing extra sailings and more staff.

Her comments came as the head of the port of [Calais](#) said he was ashamed about the huge delays British holidaymakers faced.

Jean-Marc Puissesseau, the president of the Côte d’Opale chamber of commerce that runs the port, told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Monday that he would complain to the French authorities about the failure to prepare for increased border checks.

Holidaymakers were stuck for hours on [gridlocked roads over the weekend](#) and some spent the night in their cars as they approached Dover. At one stage there were 12-mile tailbacks and people endured 15-hour waits.

Kent police said traffic in the region had reached a “business-as-usual state” for this point in the holiday season. However, the force warned travellers would continue to face delays over the next few weeks.

Puissesseau said: “I am very ashamed of this situation. I am so sorry for the British passengers starting their holiday with so long a wait because of controls. When we know that there will be big traffic, as it was yesterday because it was starting holidays, it should be organised.

“And if the French police is obliged now to control because of all the terrorism we are facing, I can understand it, but what I cannot understand is that they don’t put on enough policemen to control.”

Police said the disruption was down to the volume of holiday traffic coupled with delays caused by heightened security at the border in the wake of terror attacks.

Increased checks were put in place by French authorities at the port, but questions have been raised about staffing levels to deal with the huge number of people travelling at this time.

UK Border Force officials have since been drafted in to work with French border police.

After complaints that just one French officer was available to check in coaches on Friday night, port authorities said six booths – four for cars, one for coaches and one for freight traffic – were manned overnight from Saturday to Sunday.

The extra pressure on Border Force came as a whistleblower said staff were already so stretched they were not being given time to properly examine travel documents.

An unnamed member of south-east Border Force staff told the BBC: “We are being crucified. There is a high percentage of long-term sick due to stress. We are being pushed completely and we cannot cope.”

He said some Border Force staff had to start their shift at Dover, drive to Heathrow to do three hours’ airport work, then drive back.

The Conservative MP for Dover, Charlie Elphicke – who was stuck in traffic for about two hours on Friday – said there had been a lack of forward planning that led to poor transport management and urged the government to apologise for the “traffic nightmare”.

The shadow home secretary, Andy Burnham, accused the government of being “caught ill-prepared once again”, adding that the prime minister should have expected heightened security checks in [France](#).

The home secretary, Amber Rudd, said she sympathised with those caught up in the chaos but insisted security was the key concern.

She said: “The security of our citizens is paramount, and as France acts to meet the heightened security pressures it faces we are also taking all necessary action to ensure the border between our two countries remains secure – whilst also ensuring goods and passengers move as quickly and efficiently as possible between them.”

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