

ATTENTION NEWSDESKS

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MEP SEEKS TO PROTECT RAIL FREIGHT ROUTE

SNP MEP, Ian Hudghton says that the recent disruption to rail freight services between Scotland and mainland Europe must not be allowed to happen again. Scotland's rail freight depot at Mossend, the gateway for 30,000 or so freight containers between Scotland and Europe faces an uncertain future following massive cuts to services last month.

Although normal services have now resumed, the freight industry still fears that the future of services between Scotland and the Continent may be in jeopardy, thus prompting the Scots MEP to write to European Transport Commissioner Loyola de Palacio voicing his fears about the future of the service and asking her to intervene to ensure that similar problems do not recur.

Explaining his actions, Mr Hudghton said:

"Rail freight services between Scotland to Europe were halted in December when the French rail operator SNCF slashed the number of freight trains to the UK. SNCF took this drastic action owing to the large number of asylum seekers who saw an opportunity to use the Channel Tunnel as their route to the UK. The rail operator faced substantial fines if any illegal entrants were found aboard. Although the French authorities have since started improving safety measures at the south end of the tunnel, recent events have brought home to freight operators in Scotland just how vulnerable this access route to continental Europe really is..

Colin Campbell MSP, my colleague in the Scottish Parliament, has placed a series of questions to the Scottish Executive over what actions it took during the recent disruptions. As usual, Labour Ministers were only too eager to shrug their shoulders, safe in the knowledge that matters concerning the Channel Tunnel are reserved to Westminster, and quite ignoring the massive inconvenience businesses in Scotland had to shoulder in reaching market outlets in Europe.

The free movement of goods within the European Community is one of the EU's underlying principles and I have written to Commissioner de Palacio asking her what steps the Commission has taken to ensure that the Channel Tunnel is kept open for the purposes of trade and what pressure has been

exerted on the French authorities to ensure that security measures are tightened at their end of this important rail link.”

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