

UK PORT UPDATE



Felixstowe

2ND December 2020

Britain's busiest freight port is buckling under the pressure of the coronavirus pandemic and a host of other problems.

The Port of Felixstowe is the UK's busiest container port and the eighth busiest in Europe, with as much as 48 per cent of the UK's container trade coming through it. It handles 4million containers and welcomes 3,000 ships every year. Containers are stacking up on the dockside at the Port of Felixstowe, with turnaround time increasing from 48 hours to 10 days. The situation has escalated due to staff shortages and a spike in arriving containers. In recent weeks, Felixstowe port authority was forced to ban hauliers from bringing back empty containers for six days which resulted in significant impact to haulage in that, containers were neither collected, nor returned. This was a temporary move however: the impact is still prevalent. Congestion at the port is exacerbated by post- lockdown volumes as the UK economy begins to recover. Efforts to reduce the spread of coronavirus through daily cleaning means that productivity halts for a few hours per day. Covid-Secure working practices have also diminished productivity by around 30% and to compound matters; drivers are not working due to the pandemic - either because of furlough, holiday or quarantine requirements.

In order to expand capacity - Hutchison Ports has announced that 300 staff previously furloughed under the coronavirus job retention scheme have been brought back. Secure private testing is in place for employees, and it will be recruiting more than 100 new drivers. The port will also open on Sundays to allow hauliers to pick up containers and increase its booking availability to more than 4,300 vehicles a day.



Southampton & London Gateway

As a result of carriers actively avoiding discharging vessels at the port of Felixstowe; pressure is increasing on nearby ports Southampton & London Gateway.

Adverse weather, abnormal increases in volume throughput, terminal productivity, transport shortages and added coronavirus precautions have all contributed to congestion at Southampton & London Gateway.

Acute shortage of UK haulage has given way to carriers requesting 2 – 3 weeks advance notice of haulage bookings, from customs clearance; delays are quickly increasing, and demurrage charges are coming into effect.

DP World Southampton & London Gateway are attempting to tackle the issues by extending their weekend opening hours in order to deal with the container congestion and affected productivity. Port omissions, cut and runs and move count restrictions mean that congestion in the berthing plan and container yard at London Gateway are expected to continue.

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