Twitter Thread by Peter Foster

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NEW. ■■■■■■■■■■ clear signs govt is preparing for coming #brexit turbulence - consulting on new fast-track scheme for food lorries returning to Europe /1

The idea is that 300 lorries a day will be granted 'fast track' permits so they can go back EU and replenish supplies...this is because (see below) the gov fears that potential for disruption is "high" /2

1. The UK food supply chain runs on a 'just in time' basis, which means it is inherently susceptible to delays. Such disruption was seen in the UK in December 2020 following the French Government's decision to close their border to UK traffic to prevent the spread of the new variant of COVID-19. As a result of this action, the Christmas and New Year period saw significant disruption to both cross-Channel freight flows and roads in the vicinity of Channel ports. Operation Stack and Operation Brock were deployed to manage queues of Heavy Commercial Vehicles (HCVs).

2. Whilst this disruption was largely resolved following agreement between UK and French governments to allow accompanied freight services to resume, the potential for further disruption remains high. This is particularly likely during the first months of 2021 as new post-transition period processes and procedures come into force and the continuing effects of COVID-19-related absences are felt (already as high as 15-20% in some areas of manufacturing and distribution). The combination of these unprecedented factors is likely to contribute to delays at the border which could, in turn, prevent the speedy return of empty goods vehicles to the EU where they can collect more food. Such delays are likely therefore to have a direct impact on the UK's food supply.

The 8-page consultation document notes this is both because of #Brexit but also because of #COVID19 and continued French insistence on checks on all drivers from UK. /3

Lots arriving in Kent without clear tests SO separately Dept for Transport is considering £150 fines for drivers that don't have clean tests before entering Kent - problem, say hauliers, is that this requires communicating with EU-based drivers (85% from EU) /4

The govt is worried that disruptions will risk the kind of panic-buying we saw in early #COVID19 pandemic /5

3. Small but visible changes in the availability of food products in the UK can trigger disproportionate consumer behaviour, namely panic buying. This can rapidly de-stock the food system and supplies of ambient goods, as we saw in March 2020. This occurred even without any disruption to food supply chains and in spite of a concerted comms campaign. Given the potential for border delays to impact supply chains over the next few weeks, we are proposing an emergency contingency measure – the Expedited Return Scheme – that may be used to expedite the return of empty food lorries from the UK to the EU where they can be restocked with supplies.

They also reveal that before Christmas 25% supermarket deliveries failed; return journey times when from 4 to 8 days...but consumers didn't notice coz supermarkets had so many stockpiles...there will be less flex in system now. /6

6. The UK food supply chain runs on a 'just in time basis' which is inherently susceptible to delays. In December 2020, the temporary closure of the French border to vehicles from the UK increased the average round-trip journey time for food hauliers from approximately 4 days to 8 days. Around 25% of supermarket deliveries were not completed for several days. The impacts to consumers were limited in this case, as supermarkets had over-stocked prior to the Christmas period.

Those long return times are the worry because EU drivers won't want to come to UK - so that means finding ways to guarantee they wont get stuck in the Operation Brock queues if they form.

So up to 300/day could get a priority permit if scheme is agreed/7

It will be triggered if a) wait times outside Dover get 8 hours + or b) loads delivered to UK supermarkets falling below 75% of planned expectations for 2 consecutive days.

Lorries will need to show they're coming back within 7 days also /8

Will it work? @RHARodMcKenzie
says much will depend on how it was applied in practice. "Anything that allows food supplies to move faster is a good thing. However, the devil really is in the detail and in the administration of the scheme, if it will work"/9

@RHARodMcKenzie But another haulage insider reckons the bureaucracy of the scheme doesn't recognise how supply chains really work: “This is just embarrassing, and won’t work. Another knee-jerk scheme, designed for a press release," he tells me /10

@RHARodMcKenzie Either way, it's a pretty clear sign that Govt is bracing for more problems as pre-xmas stockpiles run down and traffic volumes across short strait ramp back up to normal. We shall see. ENDS