Issued on behalf of Stena Line

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**Stena Line celebrates five successful years on**

**Belfast routes to Liverpool and Heysham**

*Ferry company reports significant growth since 2011 acquisition*

LEADING ferry company Stena Line is celebrating a very successful first five years on its Belfast to Liverpool and Heysham routes which have experienced significant growth following their acquisition from DFDS.

Since the £40m purchase in 2011, Stena Line’s carryings on the routes have gone from strength to strength with approximately 1.3m guests, 370,000 cars and a staggering 1.45m freight units making the trip across the Irish Sea.

Freight volumes on the two routes since Stena Line took them over have increased by a staggering 37 per cent\*, with passenger numbers rising by 14.5 per cent\* and car traffic growing by 8.4 per cent\* during the same period.

Investment in the routes has been significant with more than £9 million spent since 2011 across all aspects of the service, including cabin improvements, upgrades to the truckers lounge, the introduction of premium Stena Plus lounges and quiet rooms, and an overhaul of the ships’ existing bar and restaurant facilities to bring them into line with the rest of the Stena Line fleet. In addition, they have added extra capacity and frequency via the introduction of a fifth ship serving Birkenhead and Heysham. In 2013, the company added extra freight tonnage to the Liverpool service in the form of the Stena Hibernia which provided an extra eight trips per week, increasing capacity by 30.8 per cent and bringing the total number of weekly sailings to 34 across both routes.

**Stena Line’s Route Manager (Irish Sea North), Paul Grant**, said that this investment strategy has paid off.

“*When we initially looked at the possibility of acquiring these routes we had a vision that, operating alongside our then to be established Belfast-Cairnryan services, we could develop Belfast as a key transportation hub for both freight and tourism traffic*,” said Mr Grant.

“*Five years on, following significant investment to improve our service and facilities, both onboard and portside, as well as our reliability and frequency, I’m delighted to say that vision is really taking shape as Belfast consolidates its position as one of the most significant travel and trade gateways in Ireland*.

“*The improvements we have made to the services on both routes, added to the fact that Liverpool and Belfast have undergone transformations as vibrant tourist destinations in recent years, is reflected in an increase of 16 per cent in car and foot passenger numbers*.

“*Allied to the improving tourism picture, Liverpool has always been a strong freight gateway opening up northern and central regions, supported by Heysham, which provides us with an attractive proposition to provide reliable access to these key markets. Again, an increase of 12 per cent in freight volumes indicates that our vision and strategy are paying off,”* he added.

While Belfast to Heysham is primarily a freight route, the Liverpool service provides Stena Line with a potent year-round business mix of freight and leisure traffic.

**[more…]**

“*The ability to offer our customers the largest range of travel and freight options on the Irish Sea is one of the cornerstones of our business success and it’s great to see our Liverpool and Heysham services making such a positive contribution to our Irish Sea operation*,” continued Paul Grant.

Over the past two decades, Stena Line has invested more than £330 million in its Northern Ireland operations, providing a first class ferry service to and from Belfast and helping to drive the key freight and tourism sectors.

Stena Line operates 10 sailings daily between Belfast, Liverpool and Heysham, in addition to a further 12 daily sailings between Belfast and Cairnryan. Together with the company’s Dublin to Holyhead and Rosslare to Fishguard routes, Stena Line now offers customers a total of 222 weekly sailings across its Irish Sea network.

Stena Line is the market-leading ferry operator on the Irish Sea, offering the biggest fleet and the widest choice of routes from Ireland to Britain. Last year, the company carried more than 2.5 million passengers on its Irish Sea routes between Ireland and Britain, more than its rival ferry operators combined.

*\* based on most recent full year figures (2015) vs last full year figures prior to acquisition (2010)*

**[ends]**

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES: For further information, please contact Lawrence Duffy or Michael Rafferty of Duffy Rafferty Communications on Belfast (028) 9073 0880.**