



Photographer: Gary Grimshaw



In each edition of Connect we enable someone in the news to speak directly to you, in their own words... Unplugged. What you are about to read is a transcript – beyond minor changes to punctuation and syntax to aid clarity – these words come directly from the person who uttered them.

## Nearer to France, closer to....doing business?

**One of the unfortunate effects of Brexit is that it added a further layer of complexity for Jersey businesses working with our nearest neighbours in France. For those trying to build up our southern and eastern links it is yet another hurdle to overcome - which is where Brian Murphy come in.**

Originally from the Midlands he spent over 20 years working as a professional guitarist and singer-songwriter, before moving onto the management of British bands in France and Belgium. Now living in Dinan, he works as a private Anglo-French business and trade consultant helping facilitate projects for British and Channel Islands businesses. He is also the President of the TransManche Development Group (TMDG), a non-profit, non-political and non-partisan organisation, which aims to develop trade between the Channel Islands, the UK and Brittany and western France and will be hosting its first Cross-Channel Economic Forum in 2023.

During one of his recent visits to Jersey, we spoke to Mr Murphy and asked him what motivated him to specialise in Anglo French business.

Years working in France in the two languages meant that I was frequently used as an interpreter when trouble had flared somehow and in the events business, there is never any time to push off decisions until later, so I learned to think fast and try to get a result

regardless of how complicated the two languages / cultures made the disputes; most off the time we found a way forward. This led me to start a second job as an Interpreter and Mediator registered with the French authorities. I got so much work that within a couple of years, the second job became my new activity. When Brexit blew the “entente cordiale” out of the water, I found myself inundated with requests to help out local government organisations and companies all at a loss to what was “maybe” going to happen when the Brexit storm hit.

**What companies and organisations does TMDG work with in Jersey?**

As co-founder, with Bastien Gibert from Rennes, and President of the TransManche Development Group (TMDG), we have excellent working relations with Jersey Business and with many other organisations including the Jersey Chamber. TMDG has regional hubs with local Delegates in Jersey, Guernsey, Brittany, Normandy, Northern France and of course in Solent and the south coast of England.

Nick Steel at Jersey Business and John Vautier in rural and fishing affairs are wonderful people and have quietly, throughout the Brexit process, gone about helping us continue our development efforts and share information directly across the water. I speak on Teams with Nick Steel every other week and we have





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already scored a few goals in development even if it's not on the news...not forgetting a local businessman David Rondel who came along to one of our first major meetings in Rennes about four years ago. Explaining the precarious position Jersey and the Channel Islands were in in the face of Brexit, he pleaded with the founders to include the CI in the UK-French TransManche project, and everyone present agreed to the new three-way project.

When people were getting worried and sometimes angry about Brexit, it was great to get local people in the other region on the phone and lay out exactly what was going on between groups and not what was being said in the headlines of our daily newspapers.

I understand that, at various political levels, people have to try to win a debate or a political situation, whereas we at TMDG are only motivated by informing people in difficulty or improving dialogue and transport links so that we can all get to and from the French coast and the European union directly, be that for business, for education or leisure. Our motivation has nothing to do with Brexit winners or losers just with being a pragmatic

organisation which links to the people who do things in the ports, airports, tech centres, transport, tourism industries.

**How have Brexit, and the ensuing fishing dispute, affected business between French and Jersey businesses?**

Nobody that I personally know in the UK or French business community expected Brexit and even less the perfect storm of covid-19 but, together they created havoc in the business and industrial world, including in our patch the English Channel or in French 'La Manche.' We have all collectively had to find emergency and innovative ways to keep afloat in just about every sector of business and it's hardly surprising that some new organisations, including our own, have grown out of this historical crisis.

Spectacular changes in rules and regulations first announced at the time of Brexit created a serious amount of fear within businesses, but also within government and local government organisations, creating even more frightening scenarios. Most stakeholders didn't know what could happen and had little or no power







to influence the situation, as everything seemed to be being dealt with in Brussels, London and Paris, and much of that fear of the unknown translated locally or regionally into arguments or disputes about who would be the winners and losers...

The fishing dispute was so easy to see happening, even hours after the Brexit vote was announced, at least to any of us used to and experienced in UK / French and Channel Island affairs, and the subsequent years of high level political debate and war of words through both French and notably some of the British newspapers lit the fuse. Some of us believe that this dispute served as a side show to draw attention away from other areas of the Brexit negotiations and I feel that history will probably confirm that. Business was affected between French and Jersey companies quite badly for a short time but then covid came along like a hurricane and overshadowed Brexit by the violent impact it had on freight, tourism and transport therefore impacting everything. Thankfully the relations are warming up, and a lot of great people (CCI35 WTC Rennes, EDEIS Saint-Malo Ports

management company) and many others) are working tremendously hard to rebuild relationships.

**We've heard that some Jersey businesses have been trying to do business with European countries, including Poland, directly, to avoid having goods going through the UK for example. Have you seen any examples of such collaboration with French companies since Brexit?**

There are a growing number of Jersey firms using or looking to use products and services coming directly from the EU and, of course, from France, mostly through the Port of Saint-Malo, which I'm sure you know is currently being modernised.

There are some formidable companies in the western part of France who already work with or for Jersey companies like Legendre and CNR Construction, who are working in joint ventures or as sub-contractors on major jobs in the island.

There are also many Breton and French firms, like the giant Pigeon Group who have 2,100 staff and 55 quarries along the Norman and







Breton costs, who are in discussions with possible partners in Jersey to see how they can supply high calibre mineral products (sand, quick lime, aggregates, decorative gravels etc...). The amount of construction on the island is growing impressively plus you have your new hospital to build, which could require considerable numbers of highly skilled construction workers from Jersey but also from around the EU, as well as construction materials of all sorts that cannot all be produced by local companies and therefore will have to be imported. The closest distance, from a carbon footprint point of view, is clearly the French coast.

**As the President of TransManche Development Group, you have been campaigning for better transport links between the Channel Islands and France. Blue Islands announced a trial route between Rennes and Jersey earlier this year. Will that be enough to improve trade and cultural links? If not, can you draw us a picture of what ideal transport links would look like?**

Will the Blue Islands trial flight be enough? No, it won't but what is impressive is the number of Breton and Jersey organisations and businesses that are and will be getting behind the project.

Rennes is a simply amazing city for culture and leisure, from gastronomy to opera to a wonderful shopping experience and premiership football and other sporting events. So, for the leisure flight that Blue Islands are starting, I think that with the right tourism and others local organisations helping them, there is no reason that the flight won't get business. However, for the

business and development service that we have been lobbying for nearly three years, this flight can only be of very limited use as a single flight from Jersey to Rennes on a Monday early afternoon with the next return flight on the following Friday is not going to work. Blue Islands' management team have been absolutely great, and we all met up in Jersey last week to see exactly what we can do to develop the service quickly into hopefully a more frequent service for both leisure and businesspeople.

**TMDG ideal transport links to properly open western France to Jersey would be...**

**Flights:** Year-round daily or frequent shuttle flight from Rennes to Southampton, stopping in Jersey and then to Southampton, like a flying metro service with a well-timed flight from Guernsey to allow Guernsey people to use the service. This would then really open a flood of possibilities between our regions.

**Maritime Freight:** Although Jersey is superbly served via its 'Northern Route' to Portsmouth, Poole and Solent, in general the 'Southern Route' to Saint-Malo is much less established and the services are nothing in comparison.

Brexit and then the covid crises showed a lot of people just how fragile the island could have become if things had really become complicated with supplies only coming from the UK. Many Jersey companies trialed, for strategic reasons, the southern route 'just in case,' which led to a new wave of people thinking it seemed a little crazy to have the French coast and the whole continent so close and yet such an intermittent service. The new service offered by Nostos Marine and the Southern Liner has had strong support by

many people in Jersey and Brittany and we hope that the service will complement the existing services and be available throughout the year.

Ferries TMDG are hoping that existing ferry companies can regain their markets battered by covid and I at least have always been impressed by Condor Ferries' services whenever I have travelled to Jersey.

**What do you believe the Government of Jersey should do to promote trade and cultural links with Normandy?**

I suggest a 'Visit Jersey' tourism office smack in the heart of Rennes and a back-office for Jersey Business would get you the best of both worlds, an enormous improvement in tourism and tourism opportunities as well as fantastic opportunities to build serious trade and partnerships in business, research and education. This idea would create great momentum for the Rennes-Jersey flight to turbocharge our relationships. The high-speed links into Paris for both Jersey tourists and the business and financial sectors would be the icing on the cake. The tourism and business created would then, I feel, spin off to the ferry and freight services as, more tourists going to Jersey means more people on their vessels, and more business with Jersey, more freight and artisans vans heading to our ports.

**All opinions in this article are those of Mr Murphy and not any British, French or Channel Islands organisation or partners with whom he or the TransManche Development Group are working with.**

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