

Government sets 40% rail freight growth target

RFG welcomes new interim target as Government sets out ambition to increase rail freight

Rail Freight Group has welcomed the Government's announcement of a new target to increase rail freight by at least 40% by 2040.

The target represents an interim milestone towards the Government's existing ambition of growing rail freight by at least 75% by 2050. It will be accompanied by expectations for growth of 65% in high-value goods, 45% in construction materials and 7% in critical goods.

Government estimates that achieving the target could increase the annual value of goods moved by rail from £33.7 billion to £49.5 billion. It could also save one million tonnes of carbon dioxide each year compared with transporting the same goods by road.

The Railways Bill will require the Transport Secretary to set a rail freight growth target for Great British Railways, embedding freight growth within the new organisation's decision-making. A dedicated member of the GBR board will also have responsibility for freight.

Alongside other senior industry leaders, Maggie Simpson OBE, RFG Director General, said in the government announcement: "We welcome this announcement as a further signal of government's commitment to growing rail freight.

"There are huge opportunities for moving more goods by rail and the sector stands ready to fulfil government's bold targets for growth, making an even stronger contribution to the nation's productivity, development and resilience."

In a further comment, Maggie added: "Government has committed to rail freight growth as an essential part of delivering its ambitions for the UK. Moving more products by train is a critical enabler of good growth, be that in housebuilding, green energy or reindustrialisation. This new target will enable a focussed action on delivery across industry, Government and Great British Railways as it is established."

[Read the Government announcement here.](#)



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Celebrating success, influencing change and driving rail freight growth

*Maggie Simpson OBE,
Director General, Rail Freight Group.*

Our Awards Dinner on 10 September was a fabulous evening, and it was great to see all our amazing winners and runners-up. A huge thank you goes to everyone involved in making the evening such a success, including our sponsors, GB Railfreight and Burges Salmon, our judges and the RFG team for all their hard work arranging the event. You can see our photo gallery for the evening starting on page 6 and learn more about all our winners too.

Celebrations like this remind us of just how hard everyone across rail freight works to deliver change and success. When times are volatile, economically challenging and uncertain, it is even more important that we recognise the efforts and achievements of our teams. And there is no doubt that there are many uncertainties at the moment, from geopolitical issues affecting global oil prices, domestic uncertainty ahead of the budget, continued suppressed demand in construction to structural changes in some of our larger members. On top of that the sector has to navigate the accelerating plans by Government for rail reform and the establishment of Great British Railways.

The team at RFG have therefore been working hard to support our members, and to drive forward the policies and support needed for rail freight to thrive. We were pleased when Government published its interim rail freight growth target for 2040 earlier this month, building on the previously announced 2050 target. We have supported growth targets throughout the rail reform programme, and their inclusion in the legislation, along with the target of 40% growth by 2040 now sets the basis of a strategic framework for GBR.

Elsewhere we were pleased to see many of our concerns reflected and managed in the draft Access and Use policy

published for consultation by Network Rail (**and do sign up for our [members' webinar on 7 October](#)**), including some key protections for freight services in the new capacity allocation process that GBR will operate. You can read more on this on page 3.

Huw Merriman continues to make good progress for RFG with politicians in Parliament, and we recently held a dinner with key members of the House of Lords to discuss the passage of the Railways Bill through its scrutiny stages. Eight peers, including several former transport ministers, were present, and were keen to see how best they can support freight growth. RFG has also recently met with the new Rail Minister in Welsh Government, Mark Hooper MS, to set out the case for rail freight in Wales. We also met the new Scottish Minister Stephen Flynn MSP to discuss rail freight in Scotland during a site visit to [West Fraser's](#) terminal.

Aside from rail reform, RFG continues to work on influencing policy to support freight. Over many years we have worked with other freight associations to make the case for planning reform, and we were pleased to see that the recently updated National Planning Policy Framework now explicitly references the need to protect land for freight and logistics purposes, whilst also emphasising the 'agent of change' principle for adjacent development. Whilst planning law remains complex, this change means that local plan-making and assessment will be better guided on freight transport, supporting our members in their developments. We were also pleased to see the draft Airports National Policy Statement make explicit reference to rail freight, and we have responded to several other planning documents including Local Plans and draft NPSs making the case for rail freight.

With increasing regional devolution, we have also been working to bring rail freight to local and regional mayors and politicians. Across the north of England we have been making the case for freight, particularly with colleagues in Greater Manchester, and in the ongoing work on Transpennine Route Upgrade. Phil Smart, RFG's Regional Policy Manager, recently appeared on *BBC East's* Sunday politics show *Politics East* making the case for continued investment in the railways in East Anglia in support of the new growth targets.

Our ability to bring change and influence policy is only possible however because of the support of our members, not only through their membership but through the brilliant things that are achieved, day in, day out in rail freight. The benefits to society and the economy delivered by our sector make the case for change, driving home why our sector demands support. We can only recognise a few at our awards, but the collective contribution is making a difference.

RFG's latest new members:

RFG is delighted to welcome its latest new members. Please take a moment to view their respective websites and service offering.

Netcompany

Netcompany strives to be one of Europe's trusted technology partners in AI-driven digital transformation. Founded in Copenhagen in 2000, we have grown into an organisation of more than 9,500 professionals across more than 10 countries, supporting governments, critical industries, and enterprises with secure, reliable, and transparent digital solutions.

Netcompany

Hayley Daxis

Hayley Daxis is a leading UK supplier of engineering components, consumables and maintenance support services. Its nationwide network serves customers across manufacturing, transport, utilities and other industries.

HAYLEY
DEXIS



New Class 99 freight locomotive enters commercial service

GB Railfreight has operated the first commercial service using its new Class 99 freight locomotive.

On 28 July, the inaugural service departed DP World London Gateway for Maritime Transport's Hams Hall Rail Freight Terminal in the West Midlands, carrying intermodal freight. The Class 99 fleet represents a £150m investment and is designed to operate using electric power on electrified routes and renewable

fuels on non-electrified sections. GB Rf says the locos can reduce emissions by more than half on a typical journey, while offering improved performance and flexibility across the national network.

The first commercial service follows more than four and a half years of planning, engineering and testing, delivered in partnership with Stadler, Beacon Rail and Network Rail.

GBR launches consultation on future Access and Use Policy

Great British Railways (GBR) has launched a 12-week consultation on its proposed Access and Use Policy, which will help determine how operators secure capacity and the charges they pay.

The [consultation](#) covers the proposed Access and Use Policy, model contracts for track, station and depot access, including the respective GBR Codes, templates for Commitments and Planning, including the Capacity Plan, Commitments Register and Planning Schedule.

Stakeholders can respond to the complete consultation package or focus on the documents and proposals most relevant to them. The consultation closes at 11.59 pm on 2 December 2026.

In a statement, Anit Chandarana, Group Director of System Operator at Network Rail, said: "Our aim is simple: to continue to make fair, transparent and consistent decisions about access to the railway, so we make the best possible use of the network for passengers, freight customers and taxpayers. The existing access and charging framework is no longer fit for purpose. It has grown over 30 years through layers of legislation, regulation, contracts and codes, and too often encourages different parts of the railway to take decisions in isolation.

"Change on this scale needs to be handled carefully and openly. The current draft of the policy has already benefited from positive



engagement across the industry, and we are keen to hear further views through this consultation as we continue to shape the way forward."

Maggie Simpson OBE, Director General, RFG, said: "RFG welcomes the opportunity to review and respond to these significant proposals, which would change the way freight operators and customers secure capacity for their trains and the charges they pay. Over the coming weeks, we will review the plans in detail and identify the key opportunities and concerns within the proposals."

RFG is hosting a members' webinar to cover the key issues at 11:30 on 7 October 2026. If you are not yet an RFG member and would like to join please email contact@rfg.org.uk

[RFG members can click here to register](#)

We are delighted that Network Rail colleagues will present the consultation, giving members an important opportunity to ask questions.

News in Brief:

- RFG Regional Policy Manager Phil Smart appeared on BBC One's Sunday politics programme, *Politics East*, to discuss the Government's new rail freight growth targets. Speaking from the Port of Felixstowe, Phil highlighted the contribution rail freight makes to the East of England and the importance of continued investment in rail capacity and infrastructure. [Watch the full interview here.](#)

- The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has appointed Paul Smith as its new chief executive following a public competition. Smith, an experienced regulatory leader who has held senior roles in the aviation, energy and payments sectors, will take up the position on 4 January 2027, succeeding interim chief executive Feras Alshaker.

- RFG has called for rail freight to be explicitly recognised in the proposed National Policy Statement for fusion energy generation. With fusion plants expected to require several million tonnes of concrete materials, RFG said low-carbon logistics must be considered from the earliest planning stages. [Click here for more.](#)

- RFG has responded to the Department for Transport's post-implementation review of the Railways (Interoperability) Regulations 2011. The review considers whether the regulations and wider technical standards framework remain effective and how they may need to evolve ahead of the establishment of Great British Railways. [Click here for RFG's response.](#)

Changing ownership across UK rail freight

DB Cargo UK has announced that it is beginning a structured process to identify a new owner capable of supporting the company's next phase of development.

The company said a new owner could provide additional capital, wider market opportunities and the scale required to support its growth plans. The decision follows DB Cargo AG's move to focus increasingly on its core Central European operations and forms part of the wider strategic direction of the group.

Legal and financial advisers have been appointed to support the process and engage with potential interested parties. No timescale has been given for its completion. DB Cargo UK stressed that the business would continue to operate as normal throughout the process, with no immediate changes for customers, employees or suppliers.

The company remains one of the UK's leading rail freight operators, serving customers across a diverse range of markets, including intermodal, construction, automotive and industrial goods. It also operates a substantial locomotive and wagon fleet, alongside an extensive property and facilities portfolio across the country.

DB Cargo UK said the process was intended to secure a strong long-term future for the business, enabling it to pursue further growth opportunities and continue playing an important role in the UK rail freight sector.

VTG GmbH has signed an agreement to sell VTG Rail UK to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), one of the UK's largest pension schemes.

VTG Rail UK operates a fleet of around 4,500 rail freight vehicles and will continue to be led by CEO Marc Hurn following completion of the transaction. Under USS ownership, the company plans to continue investing in its fleet, customer base and future growth.

Marc Hurn said the sale marked "the next exciting chapter in VTG Rail UK's journey", adding that its day-to-day operations would continue as normal.

USS said the acquisition reflected its strategy of investing long-term capital in resilient UK infrastructure businesses. It intends to support VTG Rail UK as the company contributes to the growth of the rail freight sector and the Government's ambitions to increase rail freight volumes. The transaction is not subject to regulatory approval and is expected to complete in the fourth quarter of 2026. Until then, VTG Rail UK will remain part of VTG GmbH.

RFG meets new Welsh Transport Minister

RFG was delighted to meet with the new Welsh Deputy Minister for Transport, Mark Hooper MS, in Cardiff on 17 August to discuss how growing rail freight in Wales can help deliver the priorities of the newly elected Welsh Government. In a positive and productive discussion it set out the key case for growth and the new markets emerging in Wales that rail freight can and is supporting. It also stressed the need for the right governance and support from the Welsh Government and from Transport for Wales, particularly during the transition to GBR.

The Deputy Minister was open that he was on a steep "learning curve" both regarding his brief and given that he was only elected to the Senedd at the May election. He is currently engaging in a fact-finding exercise and is meeting a wide range of stakeholders. His number one priority is reducing the congestion on the M4 around Newport and Cardiff and the Deputy Minister recognises the key role that rail freight can play in delivering this objective which is "close to his heart". In response RFG emphasised that rail freight has long been a key component of the freight market in South Wales and can do more by growing both intermodal and bulk rail freight. RFG stressed that its members are keen to do more.

In the discussion, the Deputy Minister noted that earlier that day, he met Lord Terry Burns who had chaired both the South Wales and North Wales Transport Commissions. From the former came the proposal for the new 'Burns' stations now being planned and developed along the South Wales Main Line and aimed at increasing rail passenger numbers and reducing congestion on the M4. RFG stressed that while increased use of the rail network was welcomed the additional services must not be accommodated at the expense of rail freight.

The Senedd election in May precipitated a sea-change in the Government of Wales. Hitherto, since devolution in 1999, the Labour Party had provided the leadership of the Government operating for periods as both a majority and a minority

administration as well as in coalition with Plaid Cymru for a couple of years.

In the 2026 election, Plaid Cymru became the largest single party with 43 seats out of the new total of 96 Senedd Members, and proceeded to form a minority government alone. Second was Reform UK Cymru with 34 seats while Labour came third with 9 seats. The leader of Plaid, now also the First Minister, The Rt Hon Rhun ap Iorwerth MS, appointed a Ministerial Team of 10 Cabinet Ministers and 5 Deputy Ministers. Among the former, Adam Price MS is Cabinet Minister for Enterprise, Connectivity and Energy and his team includes Mark Hooper MS, the Deputy Minister for Transport. Operating in such a minority is going to make for interesting times as the new Government seeks to deliver its priorities.

RFG had written to Mark Hooper MS to congratulate and welcome him to the Transport brief and, in return, were invited to the meeting in Cardiff. Maggie Simpson and Robin Smith, Wales and West Midlands Representative, represented RFG while the Deputy Minister was supported by Senior Officers Stuart Evans (Welsh Government's Head of Rail) and Andrew Gainsbury.

In parallel with the work of the new Ministers and their teams, the Senedd's Scrutiny Committees (similar to the Westminster Select Committees) are also preparing their programmes for the coming years. RFG was invited by the Economy, Energy and Connectivity Committee to submit details of, and justification for, three priority areas the Committee should investigate. This was done and Robin Smith is attending an in-person follow-up stakeholder session with Members of the Committee on 23 September.



DCRail wins Business of the Year at RFG Awards 2026

DCRail was named Business of the Year at this year's RFG Awards after demonstrating excellence in sustainability, safety and driving rail freight growth.

The judges praised the company's investment in people, equipment and a network of multi-user freight facilities. Over the past seven years, DCRail has brought disused rail terminals and depots back into operation, made challenging traffic flows commercially viable and helped attract new freight to rail. Customers also highlighted the company's flexibility, reliability and ability to respond to changing schedules and complex logistical demands.

DCRail has grown from a small business into an increasingly significant rail freight operator, now moving more than one million tonnes of goods each year. It operates a fleet of eight

locomotives and 100 box wagons and has achieved annual turnover of more than £11 million.

A record year for the awards

A record number of entries was received for this year's awards, with the winners announced at the RFG Awards Dinner on Thursday 10 September at Hunton Park Hotel, Abbots Langley. A special Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to John Smith of GB Railfreight in recognition of his longstanding contribution to the rail freight industry.

The evening also celebrated excellence across the sector, with awards recognising achievement in growth, innovation, safety, sustainability, project delivery and individual contribution. A huge thank you to Richard Bowker CBE, our guest speaker, and to our award sponsors Burges Salmon and GB Railfreight.

See over the page for the full list of award winners and a link to the gallery of images.

Booking now open: Our AGM and Autumn Members' Meeting

RFG's AGM and Members Meeting will be held on 11 November 2026 at the Holywell Park Conference Centre in Loughborough, with an informal dinner networking event the previous evening.

A wide range of topics will be covered at Rail Freight Group's AGM and Members Meeting in Loughborough on 11 November.

Speakers will include representatives from UKRL, DfT and Network Rail, together with Deanne Logan, who will discuss RFG Mentoring 2027. There will also be an opportunity to visit the UKRL site after lunch.

To book a room please [click here](#). You can call 01509 633033 or email beds@lboro.ac.uk and please mention Maria/RFG when making your reservations. Please note that all room bookings will be on a non-refundable basis.

[Click here to register to attend](#)



RFG Awards Dinner 2026

Sponsored by GB Railfreight & Burges Salmon

GB Railfreight

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A huge thank you to everyone who joined us for our amazing RFG Awards Dinner 2026. The event was a great success and it was fantastic to see so many members and colleagues coming together to celebrate the effort and successes achieved from all corners of the UK rail freight sector.

Congratulations to all of our amazing winners and runners-up. A full gallery of images from the night is available [here](#), with all photographs free to use. On the night we were also delighted to raise £3,500 for the [Railway Benefit Fund](#) through our charity raffle.



Driving Rail Freight Growth

Winner: Network Rail

The judges were impressed by the Access Charge Discount Policy and its success in unlocking new demand and helping customers make the transition from road to rail. They noted that the scheme enabled commercially challenging flows to begin and continue beyond the initial discount period, contributing to a measurable 1.58% increase in rail freight during the last financial year.

Runner-up: DCRail

Runner-up: Direct Rail Services and Tesco

Rail Freight Innovation

Winner: Railfreight Consulting Ltd and RSSB

The judges were impressed by the project's rigorous examination of outdated data against real-world railway performance. They noted that recalculating Trailing Load Limits and Sectional Running Times allows faster or longer trains to operate within existing paths, improving productivity, capacity, safety and service quality.

Runner-up: VTG Rail UK and Knorr-Bremse Rail Systems UK

Runner-up: Network Rail, GB Railfreight and TEF Gauging



Safety Excellence

Winner: ABP, Tata Steel and DB Cargo UK

The judges were impressed by this collaborative project's fundamental redesign of how steel slabs are handled, loaded and discharged in a live rail environment. They noted that custom-designed magnetic attachments removed the need for manual intervention, while close engagement with operators, engineers, safety professionals and suppliers produced excellent measurable safety outcomes.

Sustainability and Environmental Excellence Winner: Maritime Transport

The judges were impressed by Maritime Transport's comprehensive approach to reducing emissions across its UK supply chain. They noted its increase in long-distance rail use from 6% to 25%, investment in a new strategic rail freight interchange, work to decarbonise remaining road journeys and introduction of more accurate carbon reporting, alongside improvements in recycling, waste management and energy efficiency.

Runner-up: DP World Southampton
Runner-up: Breedon – Hope Cement Works



Rail Freight Project of the Year Winner: Fishbone – HS2 project

The judges were impressed by Fishbone's transformation of how bulk materials are planned, transported and coordinated for major construction projects. They noted that consolidating operational information into a central data repository and interactive performance report enabled faster, better-informed decisions. The project has supported the safe and efficient delivery of more than four million tonnes by rail and provides a scalable model for future infrastructure schemes.

Runner-up: GB Railfreight – National Seasonal Treatment Transformation Project
Runner-up: Network Rail, GB Railfreight, Freightliner, DP World, and DB Cargo UK.

Outstanding Individual Contribution Winner: Julian Worth

The judges recognised Julian Worth's exceptional contribution to rail freight over a career spanning more than 45 years. They highlighted his combination of practical experience, intellectual rigour and interpersonal skills, as well as his influence on industry strategy and policy. They also noted his longstanding commitment to mentoring colleagues and helping others develop their careers.

Runner-up: Jess Lippett, Network Rail



Young Rail Freight Professional Winner: Jozef Ochwat, Hutchison Ports UK

The judges were impressed by Jozef Ochwat's leadership, customer focus and commercial judgement, which have helped transform relationships between the port and its major stakeholders. They noted his growing influence on regional and national freight strategy and identified collaboration as a defining feature of his leadership.

Runner-up: Alister Johnson, GB Railfreight



Lifetime Achievement Award Winner: John Smith OBE, GB Railfreight

John Smith OBE has made an outstanding contribution to UK rail freight over a career spanning more than four decades.

After founding GB Railfreight in 1999, he led its development into one of Britain's foremost freight operators, creating jobs, encouraging investment and championing innovation.

A passionate and influential advocate for the sector, John has worked tirelessly to promote rail freight's vital economic and environmental role.



A huge thank you to our guest speaker, Richard Bowker CBE, and to our awards sponsors, Burges Salmon and GB Railfreight, for their vital support in helping us recognise some of the incredible work taking place across our dynamic and critical sector.

Congratulations to all of our winners and runners-up on the night!





Sizewell C receives first commercial freight train

Sizewell C has reached a major construction milestone with the arrival of the first commercial freight train via its new Green Rail Route.

The train delivered more than 1,000 tonnes of construction materials from Tunstead Quarry in Derbyshire. Each service is expected to remove the equivalent of around 50 HGV journeys from local roads.

Around 100,000 tonnes of material will be delivered by rail between now and Christmas, removing approximately 5,000 HGV journeys. Services will increase in phases, with up to four freight trains a day operating at peak capacity.

The Green Rail Route forms part of Sizewell C's commitment to transport at least 60% of construction materials by rail or sea.

Network Rail is planning a major renewal of Saxmundham Junction on the East Suffolk Line in preparation for freight trains carrying construction materials to Sizewell C.

The junction connects the Leiston branch with the East Suffolk Line and forms part of the designated route for heavy freight services supporting the project. The existing manually operated junction will be modernised with a powered crossover and integrated signalling controlled from Saxmundham signal box.

Damian Leydon, Site Delivery Director of Sizewell C, said: "The arrival of our first commercial freight train is a major milestone for Sizewell C and a significant step forward in how we build the project. The Green Rail Route is the result of years of planning, engineering, and collaboration with key partners.

"By delivering 60% of our materials by rail and sea, we're significantly reducing the burden on local roads and local communities here in Suffolk. We want to deliver this project differently, minimising impacts and maximising the benefits for local communities – our rail plans are a big part of how we can achieve that."

Government outlines direction for long-term rail strategy

The Department for Transport (DfT) has published an update setting out the proposed direction, structure and content of its long-term rail strategy.

The strategy will provide the overarching direction for the railway, set by the Transport Secretary and delivered by Great British Railways. It will establish the Government's long-term priorities for the

network and the outcomes against which GBR's plans, investment decisions and performance will be assessed.

The update has been published to align with the Railways Bill's passage through the House of Lords and outlines how the final strategy is expected to guide future decision-making. It will consider the railway's contribution to economic growth, connectivity and environmental objectives, alongside the need to provide reliable services and deliver value for passengers, freight customers and taxpayers.

The document says the strategy will provide a stable, long-term framework while allowing GBR sufficient flexibility to respond to changing circumstances. It will

also help clarify the respective roles of the Transport Secretary and GBR, connecting the Government's objectives with the organisation's operational and business planning.

The Department for Transport said further analysis and stakeholder engagement would inform the strategy's development. This will include work to refine its intended outcomes and identify appropriate measures for assessing progress. The final long-term rail strategy is expected to be published in autumn 2027.

[Click here to access the document.](#)



Rail reform will only succeed if freight succeeds

By Alex Kirk, Commercial Director, GB Railfreight and RFG Board Member.

Having spent much of my career working with customers that depend on rail freight, I've seen first-hand the difference the railway can make when it delivers a reliable and competitive service. I've also seen how quickly customers look elsewhere when it doesn't. That is why rail reform matters. The creation of Great British Railways (GBR) presents a genuine opportunity to build a more joined-up and accountable railway. Done well, it can support economic growth, attract investment and help Britain meet its environmental ambitions. But from a freight perspective, GBR will ultimately be judged on a simple question: does it make it easier for businesses to choose rail, or harder?

Much of the debate around reform has understandably focused on passengers. But the railway does far more than move people. Every day, rail freight helps build homes, support manufacturing, keep power stations supplied, connect ports to markets and keep businesses moving across the country. Many people rarely see the role freight plays in their daily lives. Trains deliver aviation fuel into Heathrow, helping keep planes flying and holidays possible. They move aggregates, cement and construction materials used to build homes, schools and major infrastructure projects. They carry containers from ports such as Felixstowe, Southampton and London Gateway into distribution centres serving communities across Britain. Behind countless products, projects and journeys is a freight train helping make them possible.

What is often overlooked in discussions about reform is that behind every freight train is a customer making a commercial decision. Those customers are deciding how to move their products, where to invest their capital and how to design their supply chains. In most cases, rail is not competing with another rail operator. It is competing with road. That is why network access matters so much.

Too often, train paths are viewed simply as slots in a timetable. For freight customers, they are much more than that. A train path is a commercial commitment. It is the train that gets aggregate to a construction project, fuel into Heathrow or containers off a ship and into a distribution centre. It sits behind customer contracts, investment decisions and long-term supply chain planning. Businesses invest millions of pounds in rail-connected terminals, production facilities, rolling stock and handling equipment because they believe the railway will provide reliable access to the network. That confidence is fundamental. Without it, investment becomes harder to justify.

The rail freight sector has been one of the railway's great investment success stories. Freight operators, customers and investors have committed hundreds of millions of pounds to locomotives, wagons, terminals and technology without relying on taxpayer funding. At GB Railfreight alone, we are investing £150 million in a fleet of new Class 99 bi-mode locomotives. Across the sector, ports, construction companies and logistics businesses continue to back rail because they see it as an efficient and dependable route to market.

Those decisions are often made over decades, not years. Growth follows investment, and investment follows confidence. If customers believe they will have reliable long-term access to the network, they will invest. If they don't, they won't. It really is that simple. The construction sector provides a good example. Major building materials companies have invested heavily in rail-connected facilities in recent years because rail offers a reliable and sustainable way of serving customers across the country. Those investments support jobs, economic activity and housing growth. But they only make sense if freight operators and their

customers have confidence that access to the network will remain dependable.

I've never had a customer tell me they use rail because they want to support the railway. They use it because it helps them run their business better. It allows them to move large volumes efficiently, reduce road mileage, improve sustainability and build supply chains they can rely on. Equally, customers rarely move traffic from rail to road because they suddenly prefer lorries. They move when reliability becomes unpredictable, disruption becomes too frequent or access to the network becomes more uncertain. Once a customer redesigns a supply chain around road haulage, winning that traffic back can take years, if it happens at all. That matters because traffic lost from rail is unlikely to disappear. More often, it ends up on already congested roads, increasing emissions, congestion and pressure on infrastructure.

Passenger services will always be important, but freight cannot be treated as an afterthought. The value of a train path should not be judged solely by the number of people travelling on a service. We should also recognise the wider economic value that service creates.

A commuter train supports communities and local economies. Equally, a freight train carrying aggregates may support the construction of thousands of homes. A container service linking a deep-sea port to an inland terminal can keep manufacturers supplied and supermarket shelves stocked. Freight trains carrying steel, fuels, biomass and consumer goods play a critical role in supporting economic activity across Britain.

The same principle applies when planning engineering work. Maintenance and renewals are essential, but so is understanding the impact on freight customers and the supply chains they support. When key freight routes are closed for prolonged periods, the consequences extend well beyond the railway. Construction projects can be delayed, ports can face congestion and manufacturers can struggle to receive critical materials. In many cases, the only practical alternative is to move more freight onto the road network.

None of this is an argument against reform. Quite the opposite. It is an argument for getting reform right. GBR has the opportunity to create a framework that gives freight customers, operators and investors confidence for the long term. That means recognising freight as an integral part of the railway, protecting fair access to the network, considering the needs of national supply chains when planning disruption and ensuring freight has a strong voice in strategic decision-making.

For decades, freight customers have invested their own money in the railway because they believed it could provide a competitive and reliable service. Reform should build on that success, not undermine it. Ultimately, customers do not care about governance structures or organisational charts. They care whether the railway can deliver for their business. If GBR creates the conditions for freight growth, investment and innovation, the whole country will benefit. Get it right and freight will continue to take lorries off the road, support industry and help grow the economy. Get it wrong and customers will look elsewhere.

That is why rail reform will only succeed if freight succeeds.

RFG backs call for urgent action on sustainable transport

Rail Freight Group has joined more than 50 organisations in backing a joint statement calling on Government to take urgent action to reduce transport emissions and improve the resilience of Britain's transport networks to extreme weather.

Coordinated by Campaign for Better Transport, the statement calls for a national trajectory to deliver a sustained shift towards more sustainable forms of transport, alongside the Government's commitment to a rail freight growth target. It argues that recent heatwaves and wildfires have highlighted the need both to cut transport emissions and ensure infrastructure is better able to withstand increasingly extreme weather.

RFG Director General Maggie Simpson OBE is among the signatories, alongside representatives from across the transport, environmental, health and business sectors.

[Click here to read the full statement.](#)

Response to proposals for modifying non-GBR licences

RFG has responded to the Office of Rail and Road's discussion document on modifying non-GBR licences as part of rail reform.

While Great British Railways will operate under a new licence issued by the Transport Secretary, freight, open-access and devolved operators will remain outside GBR and continue to hold licences issued and enforced by ORR.

RFG recognises that some changes will be necessary to reflect the new structure of the railway. However, it has stressed that amendments to existing licences should be kept to a minimum to avoid unintended consequences, additional costs and an unnecessary transfer of workload and risk onto freight operators.

Any proposed changes should be clearly justified, proportionate and developed through sufficient consultation with affected licence holders. RFG also considers it important that the new framework recognises the different roles and operating models of organisations remaining outside GBR, rather than applying requirements designed for the new body indiscriminately across the sector.

[Read RFG's full response here.](#)



RFG joins trade and logistics roundtable at Labour Party Conference

RFG joined Logistics Minister Keir Mather MP and representatives from across the freight and logistics sector for a Global Trade & Logistics Roundtable at the Labour Party Conference.

Hosted by Logistics UK, the discussion explored how the sector can support trade-led growth by improving connections to international gateways, reducing trade frictions and strengthening supply-chain resilience. Participants also considered opportunities to improve UK - EU trade and respond to an increasingly complex global trading environment.

Mr Mather outlined his ambition to champion logistics across government and ensure the sector is recognised as a nationally significant foundation of the UK economy.

Maggie Simpson OBE, RFG Director General, said: "Rail freight has a vital role to play in delivering trade-led growth, connecting businesses and communities with ports, terminals and international markets. It was encouraging to see logistics recognised as a strategic national priority and to discuss how government and industry can work together to build more efficient, resilient and sustainable supply chains."



Photo credit: West Fraser

West Fraser terminal highlights rail freight's role in supporting growth and resilience

RFG's Scotland and North of England Representative, Martin Bignell, joined Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport, Stephen Flynn MSP, and Inverness and Nairn MSP Emma Roddick on a visit to West Fraser's newly opened rail freight terminal near Inverness.

The £11.2m terminal, part-funded by a £3m Freight Facilities Grant (FFG), is expected to enable West Fraser to remove up to 20,000 HGV movements from the road each year. It serves West Fraser's "cloud factory", the UK's only OSB manufacturing site, which produces around 1 million tonnes of product annually for the UK market and export, including an established market in Japan.

The visit provided an opportunity to highlight the wider business case for rail. West Fraser is experiencing long-term growth, with timber-frame construction increasingly being adopted in England alongside its established use in Scotland. For the company, rail provides additional resilience and capacity to support that growth, alongside the benefits of reducing road movements.

The visit included a tour of the plant and control room before moving to the new terminal, where the 600m sidings accommodate a daily service between West Fraser and Inverness intermodal terminal. The service becomes a combined train between Inverness and Coatbridge.

West Fraser, Russell Group, DRS and Tesco have been working together to optimise curtain-sided intermodal units, carrying retail products northbound and OSB southbound. Coatbridge is not the end of the journey: loads are consolidated there before continuing by rail to DIRFT in Northamptonshire. West Fraser also moves product for export through Grangemouth and to Tilbury, while its other processing mill near Stirling produces a range of additional timber-board products.

The Cabinet Secretary was able to see the train being prepared for departure and hear directly about the operation and the challenges involved in expanding rail freight. Martin took the opportunity for a one-to-one discussion with the Cabinet Secretary, highlighting West Fraser as a strong example of public

and private sector collaboration. As an FFG-funded facility, the terminal is operated separately from the manufacturing site and is technically open access, providing the potential to support other customers.

The discussion also covered the role of rail alongside zero-emission road haulage. Martin welcomed Transport Scotland's recent £2m investment in zero-emission haulage, noting that shorter-distance electric HGV operations are a natural partner for long-distance rail. More than 70% of Scottish rail freight is long-distance, cross-border traffic.

Importantly, Martin emphasised that West Fraser's decision to use rail has not been driven solely by decarbonisation or immediate cost savings. Securing resilient capacity for future growth, particularly against the backdrop of longstanding driver shortages and challenges in the road haulage market, is a key consideration.

The Cabinet Secretary acknowledged the point, recognising that Government's approach to rail freight needs to reflect the way customers are actually making transport decisions. He expressed a desire to see more freight moved by rail and welcomed RFG's input on the barriers and opportunities. Martin also stressed that supply chains are not constrained by administrative boundaries. In response, the Cabinet Secretary agreed that, whatever structure the rail industry ultimately adopts, Scottish Government needs to recognise that rail operates as a system and that rail freight must work effectively across geographical and administrative boundaries.

The message was clear: industry and government must continue to work together, keeping the needs of customers at the centre and ensuring that opportunities to grow rail freight are not lost through fragmented approaches. The Cabinet Secretary encouraged RFG to remain engaged with Transport Scotland officials, confirmed the Government's willingness to support the industry, and invited RFG and the wider sector to continue challenging Scottish Government to ensure the full opportunity for rail freight is realised.

Pictured – left to right: RFG's Martin Bignell; Alan McMeekin, MD and Senior Vice-President, Europe, West Fraser; Stephen Flynn MSP; Emma Roddick MSP and George Webb, European Purchasing Director, West Fraser.



DRS and Tesco mark 20 years of rail freight

Direct Rail Services (DRS) and Tesco have marked 20 years of working together to move goods across the UK by rail.

The partnership began with a single service and has grown into one of the UK's largest rail freight operations, with DRS now running up to 10 services each day for Tesco.

Over two decades, the collaboration has removed hundreds of thousands of lorry journeys from Britain's roads. Each train replaces around 40 lorries, while rail freight produces at least 76% less carbon dioxide than road haulage.

The anniversary was celebrated at Tesco's Daventry terminal on 22 September, where locomotive 88010 was named Tesco - 20 years of rail freight. The nameplate was unveiled by Ciara Middlehurst, Co-CEO of DRS owner Nuclear Transport Solutions, and Tesco UK Transport Distribution Director Mathew Rhind.

The celebration followed the partnership's success at the National Rail Awards, where it won the Freight & Logistics Achievement of the Year category.

Ciara Middlehurst said: "What started as a single service has grown year-on-year into a major operation that moves millions of miles' worth of freight while delivering substantial environmental benefits. This partnership demonstrates the vital role rail freight can play in supporting the UK's economy while reducing emissions and congestion."

She also thanked the drivers, planners, fitters, control staff and support teams whose work ensures Tesco products reach stores reliably and efficiently.

Innovation has remained central to the partnership, including DRS's introduction of the Class 88 bi-mode locomotive. Capable of hauling up to 1,500 tonnes with zero exhaust emissions under electric power, it combines lower-carbon operation with the flexibility to work beyond the electrified network.





DCRail unveils modernised Class 60 locomotive

DCRail has unveiled locomotive 60022 Ingleborough at Derby railway station as part of its multimillion-pound investment in modernised heavy-freight capability.

The rebuilt Class 60 locomotive will haul aggregates to construction projects around the country. Its name references the mountain overlooking the Settle–Carlisle line, connecting its future role in construction supply chains with Britain's rail freight heritage.

David Fletcher, Rail Director at Cappagh Group of Companies, said the investment reflected DCRail's confidence in rail freight's contribution to moving aggregates "safely, sustainably and efficiently".

Photo: Mayor of Derby, Councillor Jonathan Smale, launches 60022 Ingleborough with David Fletcher, Rail Director at Cappagh Group.

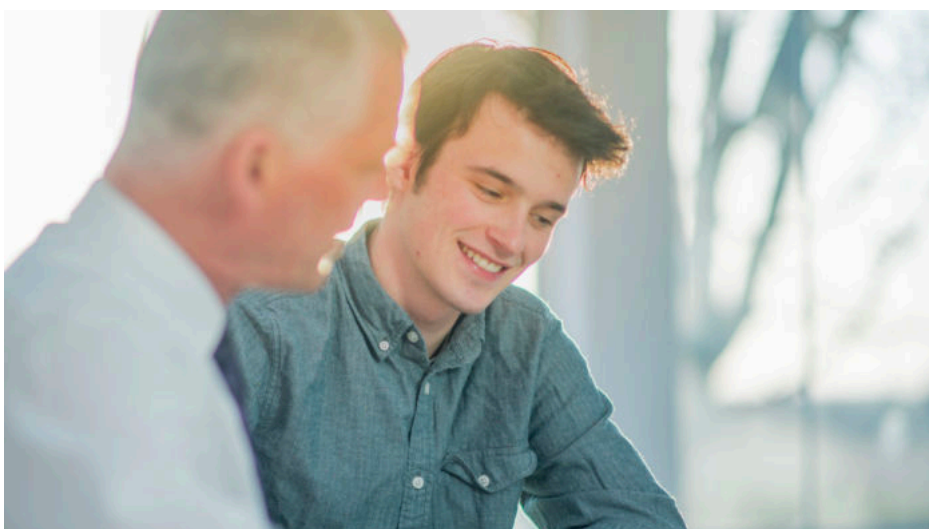


Help us extend the reach of the RFG Mentoring Programme

Preparations are beginning for the 2027 RFG Mentoring Programme, and we are asking members to help us connect with their internal HR, People or Learning and Development teams.

The FREE cross-industry programme is open to anyone working throughout the rail freight sector, including operational, frontline, commercial, finance, HR and IT roles. It provides a confidential environment in which participants can build confidence, develop new skills and gain a broader perspective of the industry.

Connecting directly with People teams will help us introduce the programme to more colleagues across member organisations.



Please send the name and email address of the appropriate HR, People or Learning and Development contact within your organisation to Deanne Logan at deanne@mulberryandmint.co.uk.

This is only open to RFG members, if you are not yet a member but would like to take part please email contact@rfg.org.uk

Rail industry launches crackdown on trespass-related crime

The rail industry and British Transport Police (BTP) have launched a campaign targeting trespass-related crimes after incidents caused more than 3,300 hours of delays during 2025/26.

Cable theft, vandalism and deliberate obstruction cost the industry more than £10 million in delay-related charges and disrupted passenger and freight services.

Cable theft alone caused more than 2,100 hours of delays, an 84% annual increase, and cost almost £6.8 million. Vandalism and deliberate obstruction, including objects being placed on the railway, accounted for a further 1,200 hours and more than £4 million.

Network Rail, BTP and the wider industry will work together to improve evidence collection, identify offenders and strengthen prosecutions. Greater use of victim-impact statements will also demonstrate the consequences for rail users, staff, freight operations and local communities.



DRS launches ETCS driver-training simulators

Direct Rail Services (DRS) has installed new driver training simulators to support the rollout of the European Train Control System (ETCS) across the UK rail network.

Located at DRS's Regents Court office in Carlisle, the virtual cab and desktop simulators recreate real-world driving conditions and ETCS operations. They allow drivers to practise a range of scenarios, build confidence and strengthen decision-making skills without affecting live railway operations.

ETCS replaces traditional lineside signals with digital in-cab signalling, improving safety, reliability and network capacity. It is already being introduced on the East Coast Main Line through the East Coast Digital Programme.

Tony Hewitson, Rail Director at Nuclear Transport Solutions, said the simulators demonstrated DRS's commitment to training excellence and would help drivers develop the competence, confidence and operational readiness required for digital signalling.

The simulators were designed and delivered by specialist supplier CORYS and funded by Network Rail as part of the ETCS rollout.

Chris Hobden, Programme Director for the East Coast Digital Programme at Network Rail, said: "Making a successful switch to digital signalling is about people as much as the technology involved. Network Rail is investing in these facilities to ensure drivers have both the competence and confidence to drive in ETCS."

SAVE THE DATE: RFG Members' Party 2 February 2027

We're delighted to announce that the RFG Members' Party will take place on the evening of 2 February 2027 at Truckles of Pied Bull Yard, London.

This popular annual event is a fantastic opportunity to network face-to-face, catch up with colleagues, and make new connections right across the rail freight sector. We usually welcome around 100 guests from across the industry, making it one of the most enjoyable and well-attended social events in the RFG calendar.

Please save the date – bookings will open in due course.



GBRf launches 'Work Safe = Home Safe' campaign

GB Railfreight (GBRf) has launched a new safety campaign during its 25th anniversary year, encouraging colleagues to put safety first in every decision.

'Work Safe = Home Safe' brings the company's safety communications under one banner and will highlight investments, innovations and improvements across the business. Since 2020, GBRf has invested more than £22 million in safety, wellbeing and working conditions, including upgraded facilities, improved lighting and walking routes, and air conditioning for its Class 66 and 69 locomotive cabs.

The campaign will also showcase GBRf colleagues' work in local communities, including school visits promoting rail safety awareness.

GBR publishes rolling stock and infrastructure strategy

The Government and DfT Operator Limited have published a strategy outlining how Great British Railways will plan passenger trains, infrastructure, depots and maintenance as a more integrated system.

The strategy includes the possibility of purchasing new passenger trains rather than automatically leasing them, where public ownership provides better value. It also aims to create a clearer long-term investment pipeline for rolling stock and infrastructure.

Although primarily focused on passenger fleets, the more coordinated approach to infrastructure, depot and traction planning will need to take account of freight requirements and avoid constraining freight capacity or investment.

£1.4m investment to deliver smoother and more reliable journeys in Lincolnshire

Network Rail is investing £1.4m to renew more than 730 metres of track between Hubbert's Bridge and Swineshead in Lincolnshire. The project will replace life-expired track components, improving the reliability and resilience of the route for passenger and freight services.

The renewal is also expected to provide passengers with a smoother journey and reduce noise from passing trains for nearby residents. Its longer-term benefits include lower maintenance requirements, fewer disruptive engineering interventions and the removal of temporary speed restrictions caused by deteriorating track conditions. Network Rail said completing the work now would help provide a more reliable railway and reduce the need for future maintenance.



The hidden cost of rail incidents isn't the incident, it's the repeat

By Paul Hastings, Account Director at Comet.

Rail is unusually good at counting the immediate cost of failure. When a signalling fault causes a delay, a possession overruns, or a worker is injured on track, the rail industry knows how to price the consequences. Delay attribution and Schedule 8, medical treatment, plant damage, investigation hours: Network Rail, the tier 1 contractors and their supply chains all track those figures.

The harder cost to see is the one that appears later, when the organisation pays for the same failure twice.

The second event may happen on another route or within another contractor team. Its circumstances will look different enough to appear new, yet the underlying causal conditions may be familiar. The issue is no longer simply that an incident occurred. It is that the organisation had already encountered part of the answer and failed to convert it into effective control.

Repeat incidents are evidence, not coincidence

Rail organisations do not lack investigation activity. Safety events, near misses and operational failures generate reports, reviews and corrective actions. The process can be extensive and still fail to produce organisational learning.

The weakness often appears when an investigation settles on the first credible explanation. A worker did not follow procedure. A component failed through wear. A possession overran because of poor planning. These statements may describe what happened, but rarely explain why the conditions existed for it to happen.

A procedure may be difficult to apply in the field. Wear may reflect an unsuitable maintenance regime. A planning failure may originate in incomplete information or weak interfaces. Unless the analysis reaches those conditions, the action that follows is likely to address the symptom rather than the source.

This is how reasonable corrective actions can leave risk intact. A briefing is issued, a checklist amended, or a requirement restated. The action is completed, but the conditions that shaped the event remain unchanged.

The second incident changes the question

Repeat failure changes what the incident says about the organisation, because the financial and safety cost of an incident is rarely linear. A first occurrence may be relatively contained. But each repeat carries compounding cost: increased regulatory attention, reputational exposure with Network Rail and passenger bodies, insurance and contractual implications, and critically the erosion of confidence in a contractor's safety management system during framework reviews and tender evaluations.

For tier 1 contractors operating across multiple frameworks, a repeat incident is rarely viewed in isolation. It is read as a signal about the maturity of the wider safety management system, which can affect standing well beyond the specific contract or site where the failure occurred.

The challenge with isolated investigations

Robust root cause analysis produces better questions asked in a consistent order. COMET's coded taxonomy and Root Maps carry the investigator past the first answer into the conditions that allowed the failure, across communication, operating



environment, management, equipment and training. Barrier and change evaluation exposes the defences that failed or were never in place, and human factors analysis runs inside the same workflow, keeping human error from becoming the terminal finding.

Consistency: Root cause analysis shouldn't depend on which investigator happens to be assigned, or how much time they have that week. A structured, repeatable process ensures the same rigour is applied whether the incident happened on a major renewals scheme or a routine maintenance shift.

Closure, not just logging: A preventive action is only effective if it is tracked through to verified completion, and if its effectiveness is actually checked afterwards. An action that "made sense at the time" but was never followed up is functionally the same as no action at all.

The business case reframed

The value of an investigation is not proven when the report is signed off. It is proven when the organisation can show that the conditions behind the event have changed.

Completing an action confirms that something was done. It does not confirm that it worked. If the same causal factor appears again, the organisation needs to know whether the action was insufficient, poorly implemented or based on an incomplete diagnosis.

This is where the business case for better RCA becomes stronger. Every repeat incident requires the organisation to spend again on investigation, disruption, recovery, assurance and management attention. It creates another exposure to harm that prior experience should have reduced.

A mature rail organisation should become more capable as its incident history grows. It should recognise recurring conditions earlier, connect learning across boundaries and test whether preventive action has altered risk.

If it cannot, then the hidden cost is not simply recurrence. It is the cost of repeatedly acquiring knowledge the organisation already paid to learn.

Key links

[The DNA of a Failure | Cost of Repeat Failure | Comet](#)

[Comet Explorer - Optimise safety and performance across rail operations](#)



Where is there low-hanging fruit?

By Jonathan Roberts, JR Consulting

Two important Government rail announcements were made this month: an update on a Long Term Rail Strategy (LTRS); and an interim target for rail freight growth.

The LTRS is being developed in tandem with other key government strategies including the Integrated National Transport Strategy and the 10-year Infrastructure Plan. An updated working document was published on 16 September, setting out the proposed structure, illustrative content and strategic direction, with a summary the previous day. Links are provided here to these documents:

- [Update on the LTRS](#)
- [The Long-Term Rail Strategy: House of Commons Railway Bill factsheet - GOV.UK](#)

Railways Bill requirement

The Railways Bill includes a requirement for a Long Term Rail Strategy, with a final version to be developed through further analysis and stakeholder engagement ahead of expected publication in autumn 2027.

The LTRS is to set out strategic objectives for the railway over a 30-year period. It will include a requirement for explicit consideration of rail freight. To redress a lack of clarity over the direction of travel for the railways, the LTRS will look at the long-term issues the railway will need to tackle, such as the implications of an ageing population, environmental changes and technological advances.

The government expects the final version will reflect key themes raised in responses to the [Railways Bill consultation](#). These include growing freight traffic, improving accessibility, and the importance of improved integration of rail with housing, other modes of transport and with international ports and airports.

In the factsheet, the government says that the LTRS will inform Great British Railways (GBR) about the government's priorities, helping GBR to make long-term choices which influence the whole rail sector. "This longer-term context ensures that ministers are not dictating day-to-day operational decisions that need to be taken by GBR".

Key LTRS elements

Instead, the LTRS "will help GBR to deliver long-term positive impacts on the railways and across society, while allowing it to remain responsive to emerging operational challenges and opportunities". It will set out:

- the Secretary of State's vision for rail
- five strategic objectives that should guide decision making; catalysing long-term economic growth; ensuring rail is financially sustainable, efficient and value for money; reducing inequality and improving connectivity between communities; meeting the needs of future passengers and freight customers; supporting government's sustainability objectives.
- the long-term outcomes the railway is expected to deliver to support the government's broader social, economic, and environmental policy ambitions, such as growing the economy and increasing housing.

"The LTRS will not be a 'once and done' document binding future governments without revision. No one can accurately predict, for example, technological and environmental changes over the coming decades".

The expectation will be that revisions by future administrations will be undertaken following consultation with key stakeholders

and published transparently, to announce any changes to the strategic goals for the rail sector. This will also allow future administrations to demonstrate their priorities for the rail sector.

Who is the LTRS for?

While the primary audience for LTRS is GBR, the strategy will be relevant for the whole rail industry:

- the Secretary of State to consider their own LTRS when creating any new rail policies
- GBR to demonstrate how its work supports the LTRS's strategic objectives
- Office of Rail & Road (ORR) to take the LTRS into account in its non-safety related work
- supply chain and investors to make decisions understanding of the direction of travel
- mayoral strategic authorities have the LTRS to inform and support their wider ambitions.

Uncertainties

The updated working document stresses that there will be multiple choices and trade-offs for GBR to consider and address. So the document is well worth reading in full – and between the lines. Here are introductory topics on priorities, which convey some of the tensions:

- Where will rail matter most in future passenger markets?
- Where will priorities enable freight growth?
- How do priorities support local objectives?
- How will GBR ensure operational decisions are developed with a view to supporting the widest range of strategic objectives rather than treating them in isolation?
- How can GBR attract more passenger and freight customers?

Prioritising rail freight

There is a section on rail freight 'meeting customer needs' which is worth quoting in full:

"Supporting and growing rail freight is a strategic priority. The Government has been clear that the success and growth of rail freight is intimately linked with achieving key strategic priorities, especially around growth and environmental sustainability. The Railways Bill contains statutory duties and protections for the sector, and the Rail Freight Growth Target will set ambitious targets for growth. The LTRS will be clear that GBR will be an active partner in growing freight.

"Proactively balancing its needs against the needs of the passenger railway is key. GBR will likely have to make difficult decisions around capacity allocation to ensure a fair balance between local and network priorities as set out in the Access and Use policy. GBR should not treat freight outcomes as contrary to the Transport Secretary's view of a successful railway."

It is noteworthy that the DfT has felt it necessary to include that last, rather circumlocutory sentence – and in a strategy, not an operational instruction! That - if nothing else - highlights that the Department anticipates tensions within GBR, and that the rail freight sector may well have to press hard, for GBR corporately to sustain adequate safeguards for line freight capacity and cargo growth against other financial and growth factors.

Interim rail freight growth target

The previous week, on 8 September Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander set an additional target of a 40% growth in rail freight tonne kilometres by 2040. She said this is part of "continued support for the freight sector to realise its economic and environmental benefits".

"We have previously affirmed our support for the existing target of at least 75% increase in freight moved by rail in net tonne kilometres by 2050. To help realise this ambition, I am now setting an additional target as a milestone towards achieving the desired growth, namely of at least a 40% increase in freight moved by rail in net tonne kilometres by 2040.

The growth is expected at different rates by commodity:

- an increase of 65% in high value goods in net tonne km
- an increase of 45% in construction goods in net tonne km

Continued over the page.

- an increase of 7% in critical goods in net tonne kilometres.

"This new target reflects not only our ambition for the sector, but our commitment to improving supply chain resilience, economic growth and decarbonising our logistics sector. It is estimated that delivering the 2040 growth target will increase the value of goods moved by rail freight from £33.7 billion to £49.5 billion. It is also estimated that meeting the target would save a million tonnes of CO2 per year compared with freight moved by road".

These interim growth targets have been set for a date shortly after the anticipated opening of HS2 between Old Oak and Birmingham, so with some potential for more capacity at the London end of the West Coast Main Line, which is Britain's busiest freight railway. The targets are set as tonne km, so not necessarily lots more tonnes but more miles. The high value goods percentage could be a pointer towards growth for parcel distribution or pallet-based flows, along with single-digit growth in time-critical Tesco-type long-distance rail haul.

Not stated is that all this will come at a (GBR-overseen) trade-off – as the present rail network is often capacity-stressed, and there will be trade-offs between funding for renewals and enhancements during the next 15 years. For example:

- will there be completion of auto-transformer upgrades on the WCML which were deferred in the 2000s work, to increase electrified line freight capacity?

- how much work/cost is needed on the network to extend freight train loops, junction capacity and signalling for modern-length freight trains to achieve the extra tonne kms?
- what impact will ongoing renewal of WCML infrastructure north of Preston have on intermediate-years' tonne km capacity and output during the 2030s?
- what about the limitations south of Preston?
- are there plans in place for intermodal cargo growth at ports where rail freight could achieve more?

In conclusion, there are important positives in these two government statements, but there is a long way to get from the present – partly financially-imposed – constraints on investment, to a 2040 vision where GBR is freight-motivated and has successfully tackled multiple blocks. Like the carrots in Mr MacDonald's field, the low-hanging fruit is the other side of the fence.



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Your chance to name a locomotive in support of the York Special Care Baby Unit Support Group

Davis Wagon Services has announced a unique opportunity to name one of its shunting locomotives while at the same time raising vital funds for the York Special Care Baby Unit Support Group.

It's a charity close to the heart of John Hall, Managing Director of the rail wagon

maintenance and repair organisation, having experienced first-hand the impact of the support. The object of the group is the relief, care and treatment of premature and sick new-born babies in the Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) at York Hospital, by providing and assisting in the provision of specialised medical or surgical equipment and improved amenities and facilities including education and vocational training," explained John.

"Our Granddaughter Aurora was born prematurely on the 15th January 2025. The love and support given not only to Aurora, but to her parents Megan and Joe were second to none. Becoming a parent is challenging enough, however with the

constant support of SCBU, Aurora was given everything she needed to give her the best start in life. We are forever grateful."

Tickets to enter are a minimum of £20. Multiple entries of £20 are also accepted, with a winning name picked which will then be added to a locomotive at its Ferrybridge depot. The closing date for entries is December 3. The winner will also be invited to attend a special naming ceremony.

Click [here](#) to go to the JustGiving page to support this great cause.

RFG Sponsor Partners 2026

The RFG's Sponsor Partners provide additional support for our activities and events throughout the year. The companies involved in the scheme represent a wide range of key stakeholders and we would like to thank each of them for their commitment.



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Our Platinum Sponsors

RFG's Platinum Sponsors are a select group of leading industry organisations whose commitment, investment and expertise help shape the future of rail freight in the UK.

These partners play a central role in strengthening RFG's work, supporting policy engagement, industry representation and thought leadership, ensuring that the voice of rail freight is heard clearly at the highest levels of Government and across the wider transport and logistics sector.



GB Railfreight





34TH ANNUAL RAIL FREIGHT GROUP CONFERENCE 2026

8 October 2026 | Addleshaw Goddard – London

- Hear the progress with delivering rail reforms and how to prepare for the implications for rail freight
- Understand the pipeline of major infrastructure projects and the opportunities for rail freight to be involved in their delivery
- Identify the new markets for rail freight and consider how the industry can maximise the potential opportunities
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Mayor Brabin backs rail freight to sustainably deliver local homes and jobs

West Yorkshire Mayor, Tracy Brabin, recently showed her support for using the railway in Yorkshire to deliver the new homes, offices and growth in Leeds and minimise the number of HGVs on the region's roads.

On a visit to Tarmac and its rail freight operations at Cross Green, in Leeds city centre, the Mayor was shown a freight train delivering materials into the city by rail from Tarmac's Swinden quarry in North Yorkshire. The Mayor heard how a delivery by just this one freight train can provide the materials to deliver up to 35 new local homes, or surface 1.5km of road, whilst simultaneously removing around 60 HGV movements from local approach roads into Leeds.

Each month, on average, 60 freight trains carry construction materials into the terminals at Leeds from quarries in North Yorkshire and further afield. From the railway, the train's cargo is turned into the manufacture materials needed for new homes, office developments and new and resurfaced roads in Leeds. With rail freight reducing emissions by 76%, compared to transporting into the city solely by road, the railways are helping to reduce air pollution and road damage and helping to combat congestion and road safety concerns.

Speaking after the visit, Mayor Brabin said: "Improving our railways doesn't only boost journeys for passengers – it also gets freight from A to B. Transporting freight via rail, rather than heavy goods vehicles on our roads, is the sustainable way to get materials to construction workers, to build new homes and grow our local economy. As we create a greener and better-connected West Yorkshire, we will work closely with rail and freight experts to ensure everybody's needs are met".

During the visit, the Mayor and the teams from Tarmac, Network Rail and the Rail Freight Group discussed the challenges and opportunities of using the railway as a sustainable construction conveyor belt from quarry to city centre growth. Forthcoming

changes to the way the railway is planned and operates, and plans to devolve more rail powers to the Mayor, were discussed so rail freight can continue to grow and deliver for Leeds.

Chris Swan, Tarmac's Head of Rail for UK and Europe, said: "It was a pleasure to welcome Mayor Brabin to our rail headquarters in Leeds and show the Mayor how we sustainably deliver the materials needed to help grow the local economy while minimising the impact on residents in and around the area. To meet the Mayor's ambitions to deliver more affordable homes, and tackle unreliable transport, we will need to deliver more material by rail. We are keen to work with Mayor Brabin to do so."

Georgie Newby, Head of Customer, Commercial and Performance for Network Rail's freight division, said: "Rail freight plays a critical, yet often overlooked, role in powering the UK economy – keeping supermarket shelves stocked, supporting construction projects and keeping supply chains running. Showcasing this to Mayor Brabin is important, not only to bring the industry's impact to life, but also to highlight the future opportunities that can be unlocked through our shared commitment to sustainable growth."

Huw Merriman, representing the Rail Freight Group, said: "It was great to welcome Mayor Brabin, who, in the years I have known her, has always flown the flag for making the best use of our railway. From the reduction in pollution, road damage and congestion to the public good which Tarmac's products deliver to help provide new homes and jobs for local people, there was much to discuss on the visit. We can do much more, and we are pleased that the Mayor shares our ambition for rail freight growth."

The Mayor and West Yorkshire Combined Authority are working to reduce local carbon emissions with a target of reaching net zero by 2038. Local emissions have been reduced by 42% since 2005. Whilst rail freight only accounts for approximately 7% of all logistics transported in the UK, the Government has set a rail freight growth target of at least 75% by 2050. It is hoped that this growth target will contribute to the reduction in carbon emissions which the Mayor is seeking to achieve.

Locomotive named in honour of Wigan Springs Branch

GB Railfreight has named locomotive 66745 “Wigan Springs Branch” in recognition of the Network Rail seasonal maintenance hub and the contribution of the team based there.

Since GBRf began operating at the site last year, Wigan Springs Branch has become an important base for its Rail Head Treatment Train operations. The depot maintains ten Multi-Purpose Vehicles and supports GBRf’s five-year seasonal services contract with Network Rail.

Six daily circuits operate from the site across North West England and North Wales, supporting leaf-fall treatment, winter anti-icing and weed-spraying work. The team also maintains four locomotives based at Mossend in Scotland.

GBRf Chief Operating Officer Ian Langton said the naming recognised the professionalism, dedication and pride of the Wigan Springs Branch team in helping to keep the railway operating safely and reliably throughout the year.



Why it's time to get serious about unlocking intermodal growth

RFG Policy Manager Mathis Edwards has contributed an article to Rail Director examining the increasingly important

relationship between Britain's ports and rail freight.

She highlights how the creation of Great British Railways and the Government's Rail Freight Growth Target could help unlock further intermodal growth, strengthen supply-chain resilience and support the expansion of ports and inland logistics hubs.

The article also calls for freight requirements to be embedded within future railway planning and investment decisions.

Rail movements begin from Phillips 66's Lindsey site

Phillips 66 has begun moving products by rail from Lindsey Rail Loading to the Warwickshire Oil Storage Terminal, marking an important milestone in the phased integration of its Lindsey assets.

The integration of the Lindsey infrastructure with the Humber Refinery is expected to increase capacity, flexibility and inland distribution options across the company's UK network.

Further phases include expanding the capabilities of the Killingholme Road Loading terminal, reopening the Phillips 66 terminal at Jarrow and returning the Finaline pipeline to operation.

[Click here for further details.](#)



RFG Events Calendar

Rail Freight Group (RFG) offers a full events calendar with a mix of networking events throughout the year.

From the Parliamentary Reception and Multimodal to specialist forums and the AGM, the calendar reflects RFG's commitment to bringing the rail freight community together. Please note the dates below in your diary, some are already open for booking while others will open in due course.

Our next RFG Event:

- [8 Oct - 34th Annual Rail Freight Conference, Addleshaw Goddard, London, in partnership with Waterfront.](#)

Forthcoming events: Dates for your diary!

- [10 - 11 Nov - AGM & Group Meeting - Holywell Park Conference Centre, Loughborough](#)
- 9 Dec - Christmas Lunch, Royal Lancaster Hotel, London.
- 2 Feb - Members' Party 2027, Truckles, London.

RFG Forums:

- Construction: 4 Nov (11am - 1pm)
- Intermodal: 13 Oct (11am - 1pm)
- Innovation, Technology & Digital: 24 Nov (11am-1pm)

For further details on attending any of our Forum events please email Maria Papp, RFG Business Manager, at maria@rfg.org.uk



DP World pilots intermodal corridor for finished vehicles between western and southeastern Europe

DP World has completed the first delivery of finished vehicles from Zeebrugge in Belgium to Aiud, Romania, launching a new rail corridor connecting western and southeastern Europe.

The initial shipment, destined for Chisinau, Moldova, is the first vehicle rail operation in Europe managed end-to-end by DP World. From Aiud, the vehicles will continue by road to their final destination. The company plans to use Aiud as a regional distribution hub for finished vehicles serving Romania and neighbouring markets.

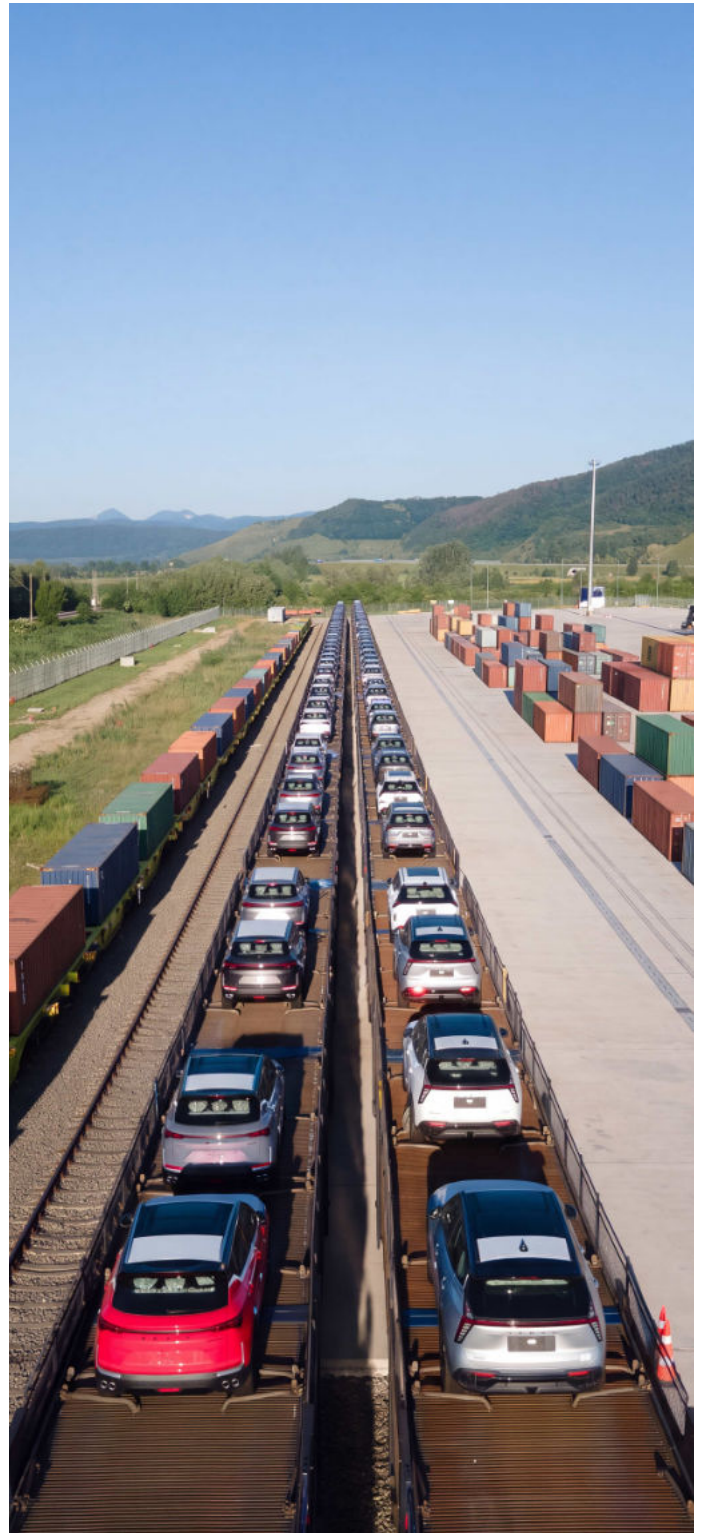
The pilot forms part of DP World's broader strategy to strengthen Aiud's role as a regional automotive logistics hub. The company plans to introduce a regular service, with twice-monthly operations in the second half of 2026. DP World also plans to connect Aiud to other European ports, including Koper in Slovenia, in the same way.

The shift to intermodal transport delivers significant environmental benefits for customers, including up to a 55% reduction in CO₂ emissions compared to equivalent long-haul road transport. It also reduces exposure to cost volatility linked to evolving European road transport regulations and rising road usage charges across transit countries, while improving predictability by minimising cross-border administrative complexity.

Dragos Calin, Director Freight, Balkans at DP World, said: "Automotive companies are looking to reduce their exposure to long-distance road transport. By combining rail and road in a single integrated service, we are giving customers greater reliability, lower emissions and a solution that can scale as trade flows across Europe continue to evolve."

Svitlana Balaban, CEO of DP World Romania, said: "Our strategy is to build a more connected European logistics network, creating new trade corridors and giving customers greater choice in how they move goods across the continent. Aiud is an important part of that vision, creating new links between western European ports and markets across southeastern Europe."

The Aiud multimodal logistics terminal, opened in 2024 following DP World's €21 million investment, is a 180,000 m² facility. Located adjacent to the A10 motorway and connected to Romania's national rail network, the terminal provides container handling, storage, customs services and freight forwarding capabilities.



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Knorr-Bremse wins Europe's first equipment contract for Digital Automatic Couplers

Knorr-Bremse has secured Europe's first commercial equipment contract for Digital Automatic Couplers (DAC) from ÖBB Rail Cargo Group, marking a significant step towards the technology's wider industrialisation and rollout.

The technology will enter live fleet operations in 2028 through the EU-funded PioDAC project.

Knorr-Bremse will equip 23 freight wagons with DAC systems, electronic control units and sensors for digitally monitoring vehicle functions and condition.

DAC replaces traditional manual screw couplings with an automated system that establishes continuous power and data connections throughout a freight train. This will allow wagons to be coupled and uncoupled at the push of a button or through a tablet.

The technology is expected to accelerate train formation and preparation for departure, improve safety for shunting staff and deliver operating time and cost savings. The real-world trial will build on previous work undertaken through Europe's Rail and help prepare DAC for wider commercial use across European rail freight.

TX Logistik and Greenbrier Europe expand NIK intermodal platform

TX Logistik AG and Greenbrier Europe have signed a deal covering the production and leasing of the NIK (Neutral Intermodal Key, formerly NiKRASA) handling platform.

Greenbrier Europe will manage production and leasing, while TX Logistik will continue to lead commercial development and sales. The agreement, signed at InnoTrans in Berlin, includes an initial order for 50 platforms. The partnership aims to help shift more freight from road to rail. Greenbrier Europe also sees opportunities for further development of the system.

"The handling platform is an excellent fit with our product range in the intermodal sector and expands the range of services we offer our customers," said William Glenn, President of Greenbrier Europe.

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News in Brief:

- EU rail freight performance fell by 1.8% in 2025, from 375.1 billion to 368.2 billion tonne-kilometres. Eurostat said this was the fourth consecutive annual decline.
- ÖBB Rail Cargo Group says almost 10,000 additional shipments have been processed through the Transporeon platform since its launch in December 2023. The platform allows customers to plan, book and track rail, road and multimodal shipments in one digital environment.
- Kombiverkehr is expanding its European intermodal network with new services linking Duisburg and Malmö, Regensburg and Verona, and Neuss and Barcelona. It has also increased its Cologne-Basel service from three to five weekly round trips.
- Catalonia has approved a €126.96 million first-phase investment programme covering four new rail freight terminals between 2026 and 2031. The facilities form part of plans to strengthen the region's logistics network and increase rail's share of freight traffic.
- A new weekly rail service has been introduced between Rotterdam and Garmersheim in Germany, providing additional inland capacity while water levels on the Rhine remain constrained. The service is scheduled to operate from 18 September until the end of 2026.