



Mineral Products Association and Rail Freight Group

# Building better with rail freight in the West Midlands



# Building better with rail freight



**Elected officials, national and local government and planners can ensure that the post-Covid recovery is greener, more sustainable and highly efficient by supporting the growth of rail freight in the construction industry.**

- Rail freight produces 76% less CO<sub>2</sub> than the equivalent road journey.
- One jumbo aggregates train can carry 3,600 tonnes – equivalent to 125 loaded lorries.
- Rail freight produces significantly lower NOx and particulate emissions than road freight per tonne delivered.
- Rail freight has proved its resilience and importance during the Covid-19 crisis.

## Introduction

Building new homes and delivering high-quality infrastructure projects will help ensure that the post-Covid recovery is greener, more sustainable and supports all regions of the country. Rail Freight carries up to 20 million tonnes of essential construction materials every year out set against total production of around 160 million tonnes of primary aggregate, but there is scope to do much more.

For the construction sector to deliver for the UK economy, it is essential that the rail freight industry is able to transport the essential construction materials i.e. aggregates and cement efficiently, reliably and sustainably to sites in Birmingham and throughout the Midlands.

- Rail freight delivers economic benefits of £2.45bn to the UK economy each year – including £1.65bn in productivity benefits for customers and £800m of benefits to wider society, through environmental gains, reduced congestion and improved safety.<sup>1</sup>
- A single path for a train carrying construction materials can deliver over £1.2m in economic benefits for the UK economy each year.
- Moving aggregates and construction materials by rail reduces carbon emissions by 76% per tonne moved compared with the equivalent road journey.
- An average train can carry over 1,450 tonnes of construction materials, with the 39-wagon jumbo train, carrying 3,600 tonnes. That's the equivalent of 60 - 125 loaded lorries – reducing congestion, emissions and noise.
- A single freight train is able to transport enough materials to build 9 houses and all their supporting infrastructure such as roads, pavements and utilities.

<sup>1</sup> "The role and value of rail freight in the UK" Deloitte study for the Rail Delivery Group, <https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/media-centre-docman/12807-2021-04-role-and-value-of-rail-freight/file.html>



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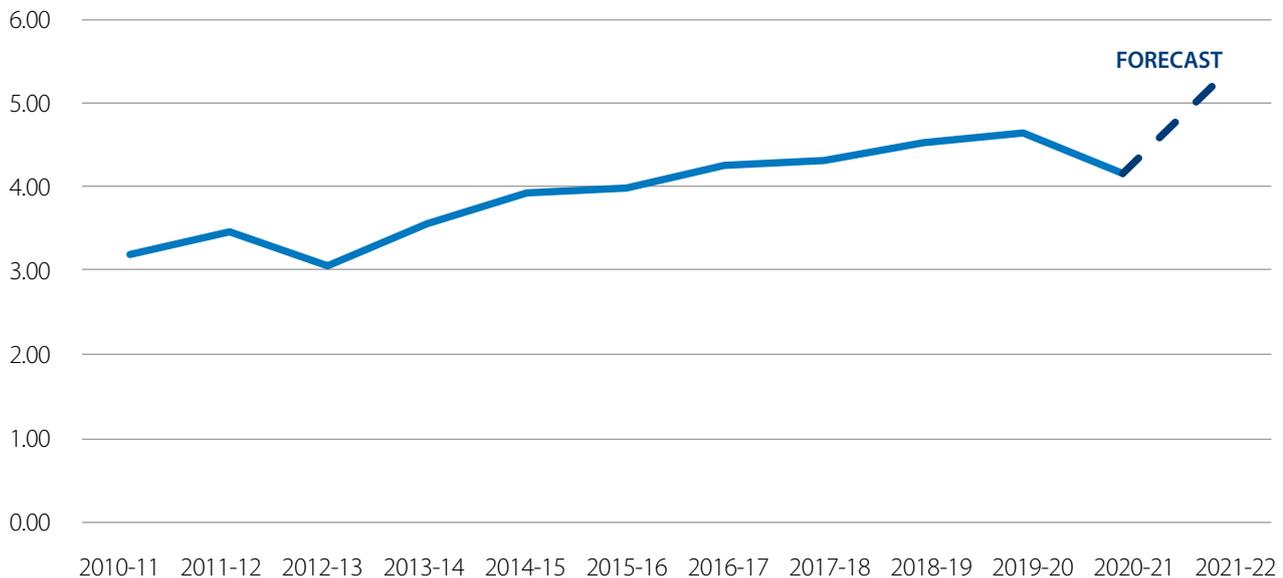


## What the industry has done

The construction and rail freight industries have worked closely together to increase the ability of rail to carry aggregate, cement and other mineral products.

- Increased the amount of construction materials transported by rail. The most recent data (Q2 2021/22) shows 20.5% growth in the amount of construction material moved by rail compared to same period in the previous year, and 9.2% up on the same period in 2019/20.
- Improved the productivity and efficiency of services by running longer and heavier trains and even running jumbo services, where the infrastructure enables this.
- Invested in terminals /depots to improved loading and unloading and allow longer trains.
- Implemented new technologies to further reduce emissions.
- Invested in research and development to further improve the environmental performance of rail operations .
- Worked collaboratively across the industry to deliver further safety gains.
- Made strides to further improve performance.
- Initiated campaigns to promote the advantages of rail freight.
- Developed new ways of working with Network Rail to help deliver materials to build HS2.

**Construction Traffic Moved (bn Tonne-Km)**



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## How local and national politicians and planners can help

The ability of rail freight to carry more aggregates and manufactured mineral products could be hampered by capacity challenges across the rail network and the lack of suitable depots and terminals. This is especially important within urban areas, where there is also a threat to existing sites from incompatible developments near sites, and to landowners seeking to redevelop the terminals and depots themselves.

So what can elected officials and planners do to help the industry move more construction products from road to rail – reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and road congestion, improving productivity and efficiency?

### Enabling rail freight to do more to support decarbonisation

#### We need:

- The role of rail freight in reducing carbon emissions and supporting net zero to be recognised by Government, following the Rail Reform White Paper.
- Commitment to a programme of rail electrification to give confidence to the private sector to develop future electric traction.
- A sustainable and affordable track charges framework that enables investment to support modal shift to rail.
- Support research and development of new technology options.



### Timetabling

#### We need

- Increased priority in the timetable for rail freight to enable the industry to meet demand for more services.
- An optimised timetable to enable longer and heavier freight trains to run to carry more construction materials and reduce carbon emissions per tonne of freight transported.
- Improved efficiency of train paths to reduce time spent waiting in loops, so increasing the average speed. This improves efficiency, reduces fuel consumption and cuts costs.
- Flexibility in the timetable to allow for new freight paths at short notice.



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## The planning system

### We need:

- More consistent implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework which safeguards the operation of these strategically important railheads and depots – especially from new housing developments built close to existing sites and protects strategic freight land for future use.
- Better safeguarding for rail-connected rail-connected terminals and depots close to city and town centres when Local Authorities are considering their housing and regeneration plans, so that aggregates, cement and other products can be delivered close to construction sites in those locations.
- A requirement for developers of larger projects to use rail wherever possible to support construction.

## Confidence to support long-term private sector investment

### We need:

- Recognition that construction products are vital to the vision of building back better – as evidenced by construction's 'key service' status during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Affordable track access charges for using the rail network.
- Long-term, affordable site rents and connection fees for facilities.
- Certainty around future capability of the network, access and charges to enable investments in new technology to further reduce carbon emissions.
- Long-term certainty to encourage investments in facilities and trains.
- Financial support for linking new supply sites such as quarries to the rail network.



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## Case studies

### Aggregates arrive by rail at Tarmac's new asphalt plant

Nearly 90% of the aggregates delivered to the new Washwood Heath asphalt plant will arrive by rail from Tarmac quarries in Leicestershire, mid-Wales and Derbyshire.



### Removing congestion from some of Birmingham's busiest roads

Cemex's new depot at Small Heath, accepting aggregates from Dove Holes Quarry, will lead to as many as 17,000 fewer trucks on the road and an annual saving of 2,200 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.



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## The big picture

### Major West Midlands rail terminals handling construction materials

Rail freight terminals have been established at strategic locations around the Birmingham area. It is vital that these existing sites are protected and allowed to be used to their full potential. They help reduce congestion, air pollution and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.





MPA is the industry trade association for the aggregates, asphalt, cement, concrete, dimension stone, lime, mortar and silica sand industries. MPA represents the vast majority of UK mineral products operating companies across its 14 product groups. These include most of the independent SME quarrying companies throughout the UK, as well as the nine major international and global companies.

Rail Freight Group (RFG) is the representative body for rail freight in the UK. Its members include rail freight operators, logistics companies, ports, equipment suppliers, property developers and support services, as well as retailers, construction companies and other customers. Its aim is to increase the volume of goods moved by rail.

For further MPA information visit  
[www.mineralproducts.org](http://www.mineralproducts.org)

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**Mineral Products Association**  
38-44 Gillingham Street, London SW1V 1HU

**Tel 020 7963 8000**  
**[info@mineralproducts.org](mailto:info@mineralproducts.org)**  
**[www.mineralproducts.org](http://www.mineralproducts.org)**

**Rail Freight Group**  
7 Bury Place, London WC1A 2LA

**Tel 020 3116 0007**  
**[contact@rfg.org.uk](mailto:contact@rfg.org.uk)**  
**[www.rfg.org.uk](http://www.rfg.org.uk)**

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