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Mineral Products Association and Rail Freight Group

Building better with rail freight in Greater Manchester

Mineral Products Association

Building better with rail freight

Government at all levels can ensure that economic growth and development is more sustainable and highly efficient by supporting the growth of rail freight in the construction industry.

- Rail freight produces 76% less CO_2 than the equivalent road journey.
- One jumbo aggregates train can carry 3,600 tonnes – equivalent to 125 loaded lorries.
- Rail freight produces significantly lower NO_x and particulate emissions than road freight per tonne delivered.

Introduction

Rail freight carries up to 20 million tonnes of construction materials every year. With total production of around 200 million tonnes of primary aggregates and 9 million tonnes of cement, there is clear scope to grow. The materials delivered by rail freight are essential for homes, infrastructure and other building projects.

For the construction sector to deliver for the UK economy and the environment, it is essential that the rail freight industry is able to transport construction materials efficiently, reliably and sustainably to sites in Greater Manchester and throughout the North West.

- 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[1].
- A single path for a train carrying construction materials can deliver over £1.2m in economic benefits for the UK economy each year[1].
- 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 nine houses and all their supporting infrastructure such as roads, pavements and utilities.

[1] "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

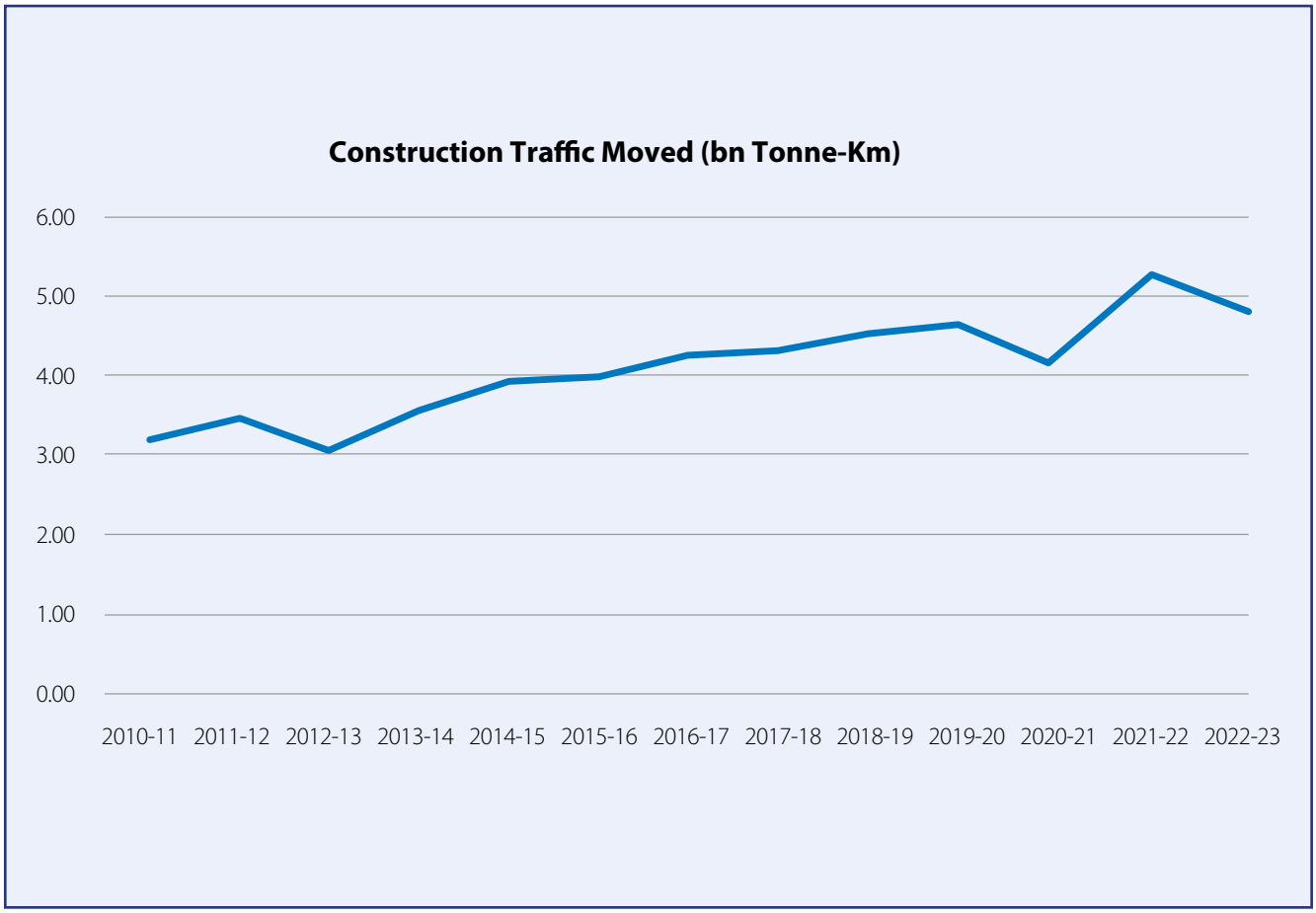
Building better with rail freight

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. We have:

- Increased the amount of construction materials transported by rail. The most recent data (Q1 2023) shows 6% growth on the same quarter the previous year, 15% over two years and 79% over ten years[2].
- 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 and depots to improve 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 make safety improvements.
- Made strides to further improve performance.
- Promoted the advantages of rail freight.
- Developed new ways of working with the infrastructure manager to explore future options for growth.

[2] ORR Data portal



Building better with rail freight

How government can help

The growth potential of rail freight for aggregates and manufactured mineral products could be limited by capacity challenges across the rail network and the lack of suitable depots and terminals. This is especially important within urban areas, where there are threats to existing sites from incompatible developments near sites, and from landowners seeking to redevelop the terminals and depots.

So what can elected officials and planners do to help the industry move more construction products from road to rail, thereby reducing CO_2 emissions and road congestion and improving productivity and efficiency?

To enable rail freight to best support decarbonisation we need:

- The role of rail freight in reducing carbon emissions and supporting net zero to be put at the heart of future rail policy.
- Commitment to a long-term 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 for research and development of new technology options.

Timetabling is critical. To deliver the best we can, 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 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.

Building better with rail freight

The planning system must deliver:

- More consistent implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework which should safeguard the operation of these strategically important railheads and depots – especially from new housing developments built close to existing sites – and which protects strategic freight land for future use.
- Better safeguarding for 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.

To engender confidence to support long-term private sector investment we need:

- Lower application costs and a less uncertain process for new connections to sites such as quarries.
- Affordable track access charges for using the rail network to be more competitive with road on cost.
- 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.

Building better with rail freight

Case studies

The Cemex railhead at Salford has been upgraded

By using rail to transport aggregates from Dove Hole quarry in Buxton, Cemex has removed more than 25,000 truck movements from Manchester roads and saved over 850 tonnes of CO_2. Continued investment has resulted in an additional 600 metres of track and upgraded storage bays to also allow hardstone to be delivered to the site.

Tarmac

Three railheads across Manchester at Agecroft, Ashbury and Bredbury enable the import of both hardstone and limestone aggregates into the area from four quarries across the North of England, from the Peak District to North Yorkshire.

Annually, this equates to over 62,000 truck movements removed from Manchester's roads.

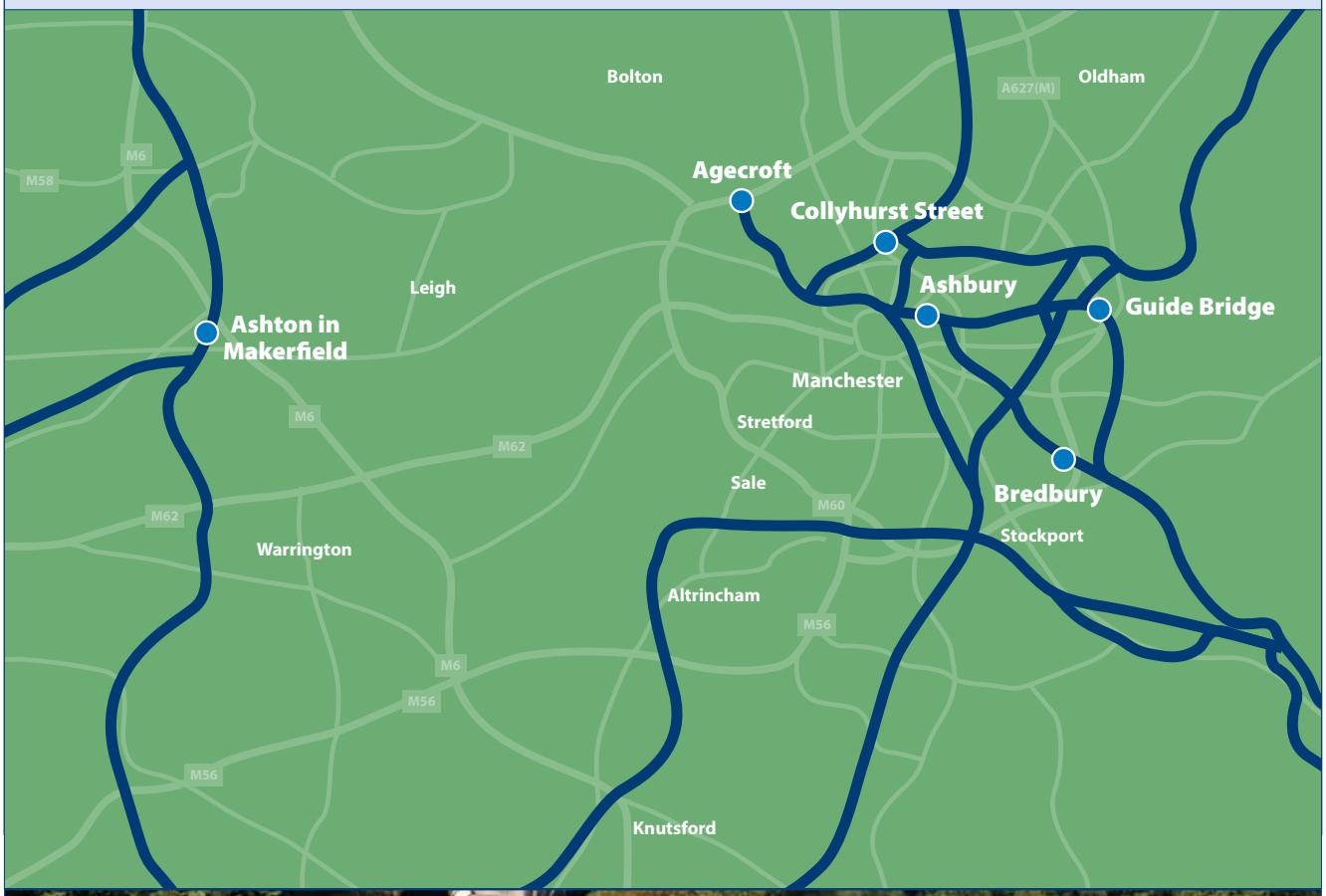
Rail utilisation enables supply to local asphalt and ready-mixed concrete plants in a more sustainable way, while also offering aggregates to the local market, improving service to customers in the city, and reducing the carbon footprint and construction time due to reduced road movements.

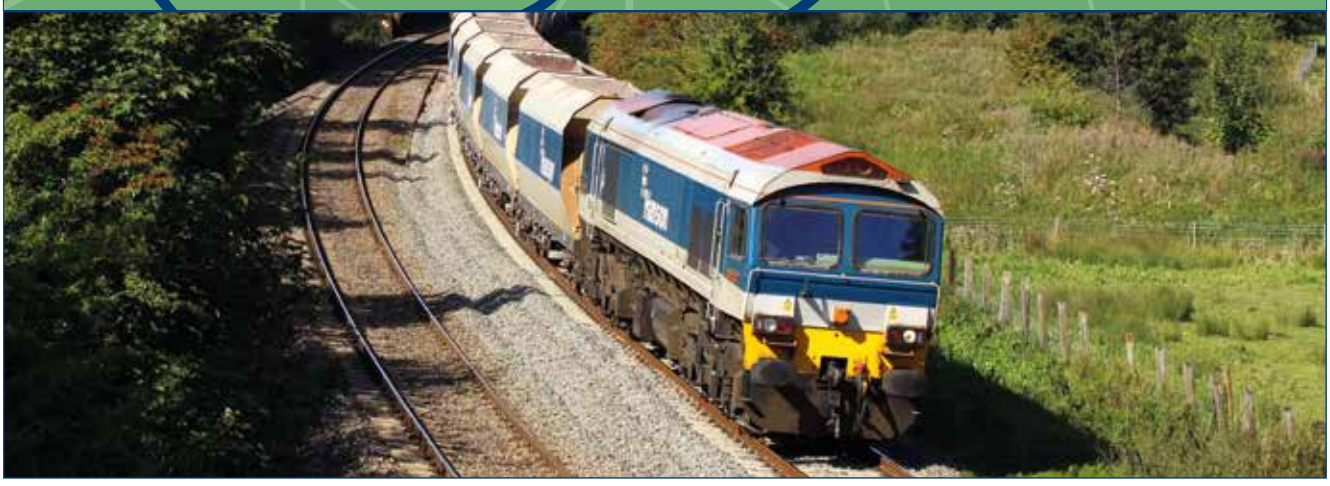
Building better with rail freight

The big picture

Greater Manchester rail terminals handling construction materials

Rail freight terminals have been established at strategic locations around Greater Manchester. 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_2 emissions.





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MPA is the trade association for the aggregates, asphalt, cement, concrete, dimension stone, lime, mortar and industrial sand industries.

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RFG
Rail Freight Group

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.

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