

Rail Freight Group Statement to Chiltern Railways' TWA Inquiry

21 October 2010

Background

My name is Lord Berkeley. I am Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers, a Fellow of the Institute of Transport & Logistics, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. I have pursued a career in civil engineering and transport, working on world-wide projects with Sir Alexander Gibb & Partners, George Wimpey plc and Eurotunnel plc. I sit in the House of Lords, and am Secretary of the All Party Parliamentary Rail Group. I am President of the European Rail Freight Association, and Chairman of the UK Rail Freight Group.

Rail Freight Group

The Rail Freight Group (RFG) was formed in 1991. It represents over 150 companies in the UK who operate freight trains, ports and freight terminals, and who ship their goods by rail. RFG's aim is to promote cost effective solutions for rail freight, to represent the views of its members and to provide advice and information on the rail freight industry.

The benefits of rail freight

Rail freight is responsible for around 12% of all freight movement in the UK, and transports over 120m tonnes a year. In the past 10 years rail freight traffic has grown by over 60%, and forms a key part of the supply chain for everything from wine and textiles to cars, cement, aggregates and coal. Many household names use rail freight, including Marks & Spencer, ASDA, Tesco, Eddie Stobart and Jaguar. Rail freight is particularly important for international traffic, with over 43m tonnes moving by rail to and from the ports each year as well as growing volumes through the Channel Tunnel. Rail freight is forecast to double in the next 10 years, primarily in the intermodal sector.

Rail freight offers major environmental benefits compared to road transport. A typical freight train can remove 50 lorries from the roads, and each year rail freight saves over 1bn lorry kilometres, over 5 million lorry journeys, and 2 million tonnes of pollutants. Compared to carrying the same tonnage by road, rail produces less than 20% of the carbon dioxide, 10% of the carbon monoxide, around 5% of the nitrogen oxide, less than 9% of the particulates and around 10% of the volatile organic compounds. Rail is also much safer than road transport, and since 1997 it is estimated that rail freight has led to 644 less deaths and serious injuries on Britain's roads.

Rail freight's own environmental performance has improved greatly in recent years, with advances in locomotive, wagon and track technology resulting in more fuel-efficient and quieter trains.

Chiltern Railways' Evergreen 3 project

RFG fully supports Chiltern Railways' proposals to upgrade the railway between Oxford and Bicester. This is because:

- It will facilitate re-opening of the East-West Rail Link between Oxford and Milton Keynes.
- This is in accordance with the Department for Transport's plans for the UK Strategic Freight Network

- The Strategic Freight Network plans have the objective of facilitating the effectiveness of rail freight services, and so improving the UK's productivity and transferring freight traffic off our crowded roads.

RFG also fully supports Chiltern Railways' proposals to enhanced clearances at Wolvercot Tunnel and elsewhere to W12+ gauge. This is because:

- It will enable the carriage of 9'6"-high shipping containers; these now account for more than 50% of international container trade, and this proportion is growing.
- Carrying 9'6" containers on conventional-height wagons enables more units to be carried on a standard length train, making these flows more competitive and therefore growing the volumes carried by rail.
- The enhanced loading gauge will also facilitate the transport of 9'6" containers to the Ministry of Defence ordnance depot at Bicester, both for military and commercial operations there.

Chiltern's analysis of freight operations

We agree with Chiltern's analysis that:

- It is unlikely that the Bicester – Oxford route would see any freight traffic additional to that currently being operated unless and until the East-West Rail Link re-opens to Bletchley at least.
- Should the East-West Rail Link reopen, its main freight use would probably be as a route for container trains from Southampton to the Midlands as an alternative to the present route via Oxford and Banbury.
- Rail freight operations vary significantly day-to-day, and it is likely that not all planned freight train paths will be used on any given day.

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