

Introduction

1. Rail Freight Group (RFG) is pleased to respond to the invitation from the newly established Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee to contribute to its consultation on priorities for the next five years. No part of this response is confidential.
2. RFG is the representative body for rail freight in the UK, and we campaign for a greater use of rail freight to deliver environmental and economic benefits for the UK. We have around 120 member companies including train operators, end customers, ports and terminal operators, suppliers including locomotive and wagon companies and support services.

The Minister and Deputy Minister's Priorities for the next 18 months

3. RFG notes that in setting up the new Climate Change Department the Welsh Government has recognised the centrality of climate policies to its whole agenda and is fully committed to the introduction of measures to deliver on its stretching targets for, inter alia, decarbonisation and improved air quality.
4. However, it is clear that in the transport field the Welsh Government's focus is on passenger movements and as a result, for example, the only reference to "freight" in the letter from the Ministers dated 30 July, under the heading of Transport, is to repeat the commitment in Llwybr Newydd – The Wales Transport Strategy to develop a freight and logistics delivery plan.
5. The Minister's letter also refers, under other headings, to Welsh Government's commitments to decarbonisation, "Net Zero" and improved air quality through reduced emissions. Decarbonisation of transport is widely recognised in the UK as a key priority, and the rail freight sector is working to reduce its emissions and understand how it could decarbonise fully over time. However, the immediate priority elsewhere in the UK is for freight modal shift from road to rail which is well proven to reduce carbon emissions by up to 76%, and also substantially reduce emissions of particulates. This opportunity does not feature in the Minister's letter and it might be appropriate for the Committee to look at freight decarbonisation, including modal shift, and to understand whether Welsh Government is giving sufficient attention and priority to this aspect.
6. There is no reference in the letter to longer distance freight movements, often cross-border, by road and by rail, in the context of ensuring deliveries of consumer goods to shops and doorsteps, raw materials to factories and finished products to customers. Similarly, while the Ministers talk of a new ports and maritime strategy there is no

reference to the associated land-side movements and there is still a lack of clarity over the potential for Freeport(s) in Wales. RFG would suggest that these omissions might also be appropriate areas which the Committee could investigate.

Other potential priority areas for study

7. Recent reports and publications on transport issues in Wales, including the final report of the Burns Commission, Llwybr Newydd, and the consultation on a Swansea Bay and West Wales Metro, all highlight the benefits of passenger modal switch, but in some cases they include policies that, if adopted, would likely result in freight modal switch from rail back to road with consequent increased congestion and emissions, resulting in reduced air quality. The focus on passenger movements to the possible detriment of freight represents a disconnect that might be an appropriate area for the Committee to investigate.
8. Welsh Government's approach to rail freight appears to be distinct from Scottish Government, who have set targets for rail freight growth, and Westminster Government, who plan to do so under the Williams-Shapps Plan for rail. RFG would therefore suggest the Committee might consider reviewing the role of Welsh Government, and its agencies, in the movement of freight within, to and from Wales, and in particular on how modal shift to rail is to be encouraged.
9. Westminster Government has also set out its plans for rail reform in the Williams-Shapps Plan for rail, and the detailed proposals are now being developed ahead of potential legislation next year. These proposals could have positive and /or negative impacts on rail transport in Wales, both freight and passenger. In view of the decarbonisation benefits from modal switch, investigating the rail reform programme could therefore form part of the work of the Committee.
10. Growth in rail freight is also dependent on the availability of suitable terminals for trans-shipment between road and rail. Rail freight is a private sector operation and where a demand is identified the market will invest in appropriate facilities, based on proven economic viability. However, the identification and protection of potential sites for terminals and policies to encourage such investment are very much influenced by Government planning policies. The Committee may wish to investigate what planning policies are currently in place in Wales, or are being developed, to encourage growth in rail freight and to safeguard both existing and potential locations.