

National Planning Framework 4 call for ideas - response

The call for ideas on National Planning Framework 4 has asked for suggestions on 5 key areas. This is a joint response from the Rail Freight Group and Transform Scotland. Our overarching point is that rail freight should be classified as National Development. Not incorporating this in the previous framework was a missed opportunity to encourage modal shift to freight with lower carbon emissions. We have provided detail of this in the separate National Developments Response Form.

We have also responded on various other elements of the call for ideas to set out how the planning system can help rail freight to reduce carbon emissions and the number of heavy goods vehicles travelling through communities. We would be happy to provide further details on any point if useful.

We have addressed the questions in the call for ideas in turn below:

1. What development will we need to address climate change?

Infrastructure which encourages the use of rail freight should be pursued as a way to quickly reduce the carbon emissions of transport – currently the economic sector responsible for most emissions. Rail freight has around 76% less carbon emissions per freight tonne mile moved compared to road. Where electric locomotives are used, CO₂ emissions are reduced even further.

As well as designating the freight schemes as national development the planning system should ensure that new development is encouraged to use rail freight to achieve lower carbon emissions and help demonstrate a commitment to achieving our commitments under the Paris Agreement. This can be done by ensuring that the planning system ensures that new distribution centres, factories etc are built in areas where they are able to access the rail network. This will apply the same now widely accepted principle that, to reduce carbon emissions, new housing should be encouraged where it has access to rail or other public transport.

Other large scale developments and infrastructure projects should also be encouraged by the planning system to ensure the delivery of aggregates by rail. This reduces carbon emissions as each freight train removes 43 to 76 lorries from the road. Rail helps improve air quality by reducing long distance lorry movements from quarries and factories into our towns and cities. Tonne for tonne, rail freight produces significantly lower NO_x and Particulate emissions than road freight.

The planning system should also ensure a positive framework for the quick approval of infrastructure such as rail heads needed to support the rail freight sector's significant potential contribution to a future economy with lower carbon emissions.

2. How can planning best support our quality of life, health and wellbeing in the future?

Again, the planning system should ensure that major housing and infrastructure developments are located in areas where they can access rail transport. This will enable a substantial proportion of the construction materials can be supplied by rail freight reducing the amount of HGVs that have to travel through communities - helping to protect their health and wellbeing.

3. What does planning need to do to enable development & investment in our economy to benefit everyone?

The economy in 2050 will look very different as it moves to decarbonise. With carbon emissions of rail freight currently around 76% lower than road. To reach net zero Scotland should follow a similar approach to the EU's Green Deal, announced in December 2019, which recognises rail freight's potential role in reducing emissions, and proposes that 'as matter of priority, a substantial part of the 75 per cent of inland freight carried today by road should shift onto rail and inland waterways. This will require measures to manage better, and to increase the capacity of railways and inland waterways, which the European Commission will propose by 2021'.

Moving towards this will, as a minimum, need the investment in rail infrastructure we detail as a potential national development in answer to question 5 alongside ongoing electrification.

The planning system should be used to encourage major goods and distribution hubs to be built in locations that have access to the rail network. Achieving major modal shift will require significant investment in new rail facilities. The planning system should therefore seek to reduce risk and uncertainty around private investment in the rail freight network by clearly supporting such proposals.

4. How can planning improve, protect and strengthen the special character of our places?

By encouraging the use of rail freight, more HGVs can be removed from the roads meaning that more historic and special places can be enjoyed as they were intended. Strong planning policies encouraging new development to have access to rail could unlock the potential of vacant and derelict land near rail as it would encourage it to be reused.

5. What infrastructure do we need to plan and build to realise our long term aspirations?

- There should be a national programme of electrification of freight routes to further decarbonise the rail network
- An upgrade of the main intercity routes to give capacity and capability for freight also including links to ports and terminals
- Smaller tactical interventions to improve operating conditions for rail freight
- To support electrification there must also be investment in ensuring that the electricity supply will be able to meet the demand placed on it. The energy density provided should ensure that freight trains are able to run. This is especially important on cross border routes (ECML and WCML) in conjunction with the start of HS2 services
- Rail freight is well suited for travelling long distances. The planning system should consider how freight as a whole, should work in future - with rail freight from ports to distribution hubs where they can be delivered the 'final mile' by road vehicles.
- A significant swing in modal shift from road to rail would see a maintenance cost benefit for trunk roads from having significantly less HGVs using them.

See also our separate National Developments – Response Form.