

Relief for rail freight

The Government gave Britain's rail freight operators some good news in October.

Rail Regulator Tom Winsor announced that Railtrack access charges would be halved.

"This provides the catalyst rail freight needs for a true renaissance, he said. "These measures make a positive contribution to the Government's objective of achieving a substantial growth in rail freight over 10 years, and delivering social and environmental benefits by relieving road congestion and reducing air pollution."

Mr Winsor said it took account of the competitive pressure on rail freight, resulting from the Government's concessions to road hauliers and the decision to allow unrestricted use of 44-tonne lorries.

The Government - via the Strategic Rail Authority - will make up the five-year £450million shortfall in revenue to Railtrack.

This money is in addition to the £4billion allocated to freight in the Government's 10-year transport plan.

The Regulator conducted three reviews of freight charges last year.

"The announcement has been a long time coming, but the delay has enabled proper detailed arguments to be put forward in support of this reduction," said Lord Berkeley, chairman of the rail freight group.

"We pay tribute to the hard work put in by the Rail Regulator, as well as to the Strategic Rail Authority and the DTLR in resolving some complex issues, particularly in the two weeks after Railtrack went into administration.

"This will be good for the growth of rail freight, and will enable customers to obtain quicker and better quotes, sometimes in competition. It will be a major contributor to the growth targets in the 10-year plan."

The Strategic Rail Authority's chief executive Mike Grant said:

"The major upgrades to rail infrastructure that we plan for the coming decade will create capacity on the network for much more freight and passenger traffic.

"But extra capacity has to be matched by more appropriate pricing, to encourage growth in the rail freight sector." The SRA's objectives include an increase of 80% in freight tonne



Swiss Railways are a watchword for efficiency and SBB Cargo recognises that it has a major marketing advantage over road haulage as more people and companies are demanding that their activities do the least possible damage to the environment. SBB Cargo AG trains are almost exclusively hauled by electric locomotives and leave no air-polluting materials behind. SBB also states that the energy needed for rail operations is largely obtained from domestic waterpower.

SBB also is quick to point out that less land is needed for rail transport than for roads. Although most freight goes by rail in Switzerland, roads use 83% of the land for transport while railways use only 13%.

Green spaces along railway embankments are also cultivated to encourage varied species of flora and fauna.

SBB launched a new Cargo Express service in June giving overnight delivery with late evening loading times and early morning deliveries at 20 terminals. SBB operates wagon-load freight, full-size containers, mini containers and horizontal-transfer loads.

miles over 10 years. Earlier in the year the SRA awarded £4.8million in freight facility grants which, collectively, are expected to save over 657,000 lorry journeys over the next 10 years.

The money, which was spread across seven companies, "levers in" over £2.4million of private capital.

Totalfina Elf Bitumen Ltd have been awarded a grant of nearly £2million for dedicated rail handling, unloading and storage facilities at its Preston plant. 110,000 tonnes of bitumen per annum will be delivered by rail from Immingham.

Simsmetal (UK) Ltd have been awarded a grant of £0.8million for flows of metal from Nottingham to Cardiff.

DFDS Tor Line Ltd have accepted a grant offer of £0.8million for an intermodal gantry crane and associated facilities to handle steel traffic at the Nordic Terminal at Immingham. Grants have also been awarded to English, Welsh & Scottish

Railway (£26,000) for wagon refurbishment, two to the Potter Group at Selby (£264,000) and Knowsley (£321,000) for handling equipment, Alcan Smelting & Power Ltd (£400,000) for the purchase and modification of 20 powder wagons and Day Aggregates (£238,000) for mobile handling equipment.

Then in September the SRA allocated £17.5million to ensure that the upgrading of the East Coast main line ensures sufficient freight capacity.

It will include preliminary work on the Peterborough-Spalding-Lincoln-Doncaster line as a freight diversionary route.

Railfuture's freight committee met on 22 September and were expected to meet again on 24 November.

One of the issues they are working on is the viability of trains which can carry both passengers and freight. Gary Tinsey is preparing an internal Railfuture paper on this subject. Meanwhile Anglia Railways in

partnership with GOfers Logistics Management have announced they are planning to carry parcels on some of their passenger trains.

On Merseyside, plans for an intermodal railfreight distribution centre on the former Parkside Colliery site at Newton-le-Willows are going ahead. The aim is to remove around 37million lorry kilometres.

Freight trains are also returning to the Tay Bridge for the first time in seven years. EWS is starting an express parcels service between Aberdeen and the Midlands this month.

And freight sidings at Ordsall Lane, Salford, Greater Manchester, have been reopened by Creative Logistics after a five-year period without traffic. It has already enabled one international freight flow to switch from road to rail.

In London, Bow Midland waste will soon start taking trains from Stratford to Calvert, Buckinghamshire.