

# Minimodal freight train



**LAUNCH:** The new system for small loads is shown for the first time at the National Railway Museum in York in September

By Eric Layfield

A simple new flexible container system for small loads was launched in September.

The Minimodal Container System allows goods to be easily transferred between road and rail.

It is designed to serve urban areas by using spare capacity at passenger stations. If necessary, containers can be unloaded on station platforms. The containers can be unloaded using a standard forklift truck.

The launch of the system took place at York Railway Museum on 12 September.

It is one of the three innovative freight systems which were the successful entrants in a competition sponsored by the Strategic Rail Authority. The other two were the Freight Diesel Multiple Unit and the Mega 3 piggyback wagon.

The Minimodal box container measures 2550m X 2550m X 2535m high, and has two hard sides and two sides with roller shutters. Empty containers can be stacked two high.

Six containers can be carried on Megafret or Multifret low platform wagons, secured by twist-

locks, and five containers can be accommodated on a standard articulated lorry.

The process of switching between modes is simple and straightforward, ideal for small consignments and avoids the high capital costs incurred in handling equipment for conventional containers and swap bodies.

During the next few months, it is proposed to run pilot operations in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and London and the South East.

Interest in the cost-effective concept has already been shown by Safeway, Ministry of Defence, Marks and Spencer, Express Dairies and TDG.

"I look forward to the success of the pilot schemes and future commercial service operations," said Richard Bowker, chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority.

Speaking at the launch, he added: "This exciting project is exactly the type of innovative scheme the SRA wanted to encourage though its competition.

"The SRA has an 80% growth target to achieve for rail freight by 2010. Products such as

Multimodal will help us achieve this by offering flexible and cost-effective distribution systems to the logistics industry."

The project is being led by Minimodal and the containers are manufactured by Boalloy. Motive power for the prototype trains is being supplied by Direct Rail Services.

■ The next meeting of Railfuture's freight committee is at 13.00 on Saturday 7 December 2002 at the Adult Education College, Wellington Street, Leicester.

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At the previous meeting on 28 September, it was reported that GNER was not interested in using trains to carry parcels traffic again because there is little baggage space to spare and GNER does not have the resources to manage this "niche business".

The committee also discussed Great Yarmouth harbour proposals, plans for a guided busway in Cambridgeshire, the Alconbury freight terminal, Birkenhead docks line, objections to road proposals near Rugby cement works, the pro-

posed rail link to Land Rover's factory at Solihull, the threat to freight traffic in the north of Scotland, reports from the Rail Freight Group, the East-West rail link proposals, rail access to Goole docks and the recent reopening of Chatham docks branch.

From October next year, the Post Office looks like abandoning its national rail network. There is the possibility that a new Post Office terminal in the Midlands will not be rail-connected. From October 2003, rail may only be used for second class and junk mail but even that is in doubt.

The Rail Freight Group has been asked to bring pressure to bear at the highest level for a solution which maximised use of the rail network.

The committee is also investigating reports that the Welsh Assembly has been less than generous with rail grants.

Following the rejection of plans for an international freight terminal near Slough, to serve Heathrow airport, the committee will be working on ways of making it easier for rail projects to get through the planning process.