

# The road lobby goes for mega bust

Half of the existing freight carried by rail could switch to road if the Government gives in to the road lobby and allows mega lorries on British roads.

But a National Opinion Poll survey has shown that 75% of the public are opposed to the introduction of "road trains" – also known as Long Heavy Vehicles (LHVs).

The survey also revealed that 80% of the public want the Government to encourage more freight to go by rail instead of by road.

Yet the Department for Transport is considering allowing trials of lorries between 25.5 and 30 metres long which weigh between 60 and 84 tonnes.

The DfT is said to "favour" a 60-tonne 25.25-metre truck – which is 50% longer and over a third heavier than existing 44-tonne lorries.

It is ignoring the awful impact of road trains on people and the environment in Australia.

Freight on Rail campaigner Philippa Edmunds argues that more rail freight is much more positive than "road trains" as it reduces carbon emissions and alleviates road congestion.

However she warns: "Rail freight could be halved over the next few years if the Government allows these monstrosities on to our roads. If the Government is genuinely committed to the environment and travel safety it will reject these trials."

Freight on Rail is asking Railfuture members to write to The Secretary of State for Transport, Ruth Kelly, at Department for Transport, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DR, copied to your local MP, to urge her not to allow trials.

The road lobby is also on the march inside the offices of the European Union so FoR is also asking for letters to be sent to your MEP.

Rail and environmental groups say the introduction of bigger lorries in Europe would lead to more traffic on the road and not reduce it.

They have warned the European Commission that there would also be an overall increase of external costs by the introduction of mega-trucks.

There would be more carbon dioxide, more congestion, and more accidents but those costs are still not borne by the user, but by society as a whole.

Rail would benefit if all modes of transport paid for the external costs they incur, instead of leaving the bill with the taxpayer.

The latest Freight on Rail briefing about these lorries, including suggestions for objections, can be found at <http://www.freightonrail.org.uk/HotTopics/WritetoNewSecretaryofState.htm>. Big lorries are twice as likely to be involved in fatal accidents as cars.



An eye-catching newly painted tram in the West Midlands is promoting integrated transport.

Public transport body Centro-WMPMTA has decorated the Midland Metro tram with a design promoting "Network West Midlands".

But planners and politicians have to do more than exhort people to use public transport. They must ensure that there is more electrification.

We have waited for years for a proper programme of rail electrification.

Instead we get pseudo-scientific half truths from officials justifying doing nothing.

Electric engines are substantially more efficient than even the cleanest diesel.

The most widely used electric locomotives are two and a half times more efficient in terms of carbon dioxide emitted per passenger-mile than cars.

Few significant efficiency gains can be expected from diesel technology in future, while electric trains, already more efficient in absolute terms, offer the prospect of progressively lower carbon

Eighteen-metre-long bendy buses cause over twice as many injuries as other buses.

Freight trains emit five times less carbon dioxide per tonne mile than road haulage.

An average freight train can remove 50 heavy goods vehicles from our roads.

One haulier campaigning for bigger vehicles admits it is unrealistic to expect all roundabouts and

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output as the electricity generation switches to a new mix of gas, nuclear and renewable sources. Greater efficiency means lower long-term energy costs.

The Government should take a lead. Electrifying the railways is an easy first step to combating climate change.

The Tories are waking up to reality. Leader David Cameron said in July: "Trains are the most environmentally effective way of getting around."

And the chairman of the Conservative Transport Group Dr Robert Kinghorn has called on the party to plan a long-term programme of rail electrification.

"In contrast to most of mainland Europe, where railway electrification is widespread," said Dr Kinghorn, "many main lines in the UK, including those to the West, South West and East Midlands, are still diesel-operated, as are most suburban services outside London.

"There is a wide perception of rail travel as overcrowded, unreliable, and in many parts of the

country uncomfortable due to poor and outdated rolling stock.

Investment in a programme of electrification would overcome many of these issues.

"New electric services would immediately be perceived as an environmental step forward both in terms of improved local air quality and noise reduction."

"With a rail electrification programme the type of fuel would be more varied with power stations able to supply electricity based on greener energy sources and better able to control emissions than diesel engines."

In Scotland there are reports that electrification of the Glasgow to Edinburgh main line is back on the political agenda after the Scottish Executive published a £3.6 billion blueprint specifying what ministers want the rail industry to deliver between 2009 and 2014.

The first-ever Scottish High Level Output Specification was submitted to the Office of Rail Regulation in July.

corners to be modified. Damage at such locations is just one of the hidden subsidies to road hauliers.

Road freight costs are kept artificially low by low wages, long driving hours and other bad practices. This enables hauliers to compete unfairly for many traffic flows with rail, whose staff hours and safety standards are closely monitored and controlled.

Motorists and taxpayers are

already subsidising hauliers' use of motorways and other roads.

Freight on Rail promotes the economic, environmental and social benefits of rail freight.

Expansion of electrified railways is vital to easing the consequences of oil shortages.

You can sign a petition against bigger lorries at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/Ban60tonlorries/>