

Rail freight blooms

Most people have always wanted freight to go by rail rather than road but the politicians have failed to deliver over the past 50 years.

Now though, rail freight is growing. In the past 10 years it has grown by almost 50%, increasing its market share of surface transport to 11.5%.

Supermarket giant Tesco is sending some of its supplies by rail, using an Eddie Stobart train from Daventry to Scotland five days a week.

Tesco's distribution director Laurie McIlwe said: "We implement good ideas. Lots of people have had the idea but have never executed it."

Asda is also sending goods from Daventry to Scotland, estimating to have removed 20million lorry miles from the roads as a result.

Overall, rail freight is estimated to have saved two million tonnes of pollutants, 4billion lorry miles and 31.5million lorry journeys in the past six years.

Fifteen years after abandoning rail deliveries Castle Cement is reinstating cement trains from Clitheroe, Lancashire to Glasgow.

But there is a need for more rail freight depots.

February saw the launch of the Parkside 2010 Alliance which is campaigning to open a depot on the site of the former Parkside colliery in St Helen's, Merseyside. A countryside park will also be created.

As part of its campaign, the alliance commissioned a survey of MPs. It showed that 96% were in favour of shifting freight to rail and just 1% disagreed.

Lord Evans of Parkside, who is heading the campaign said: "This survey confirms that there is huge support in Westminster for moving freight on to rail."

In a YouGov survey four years ago, 80% of the public were also in favour of transferring freight from road to rail.

The Parkside Alliance says its plans will help bring down carbon emissions, reduce road congestion and provide new jobs for the area.

The plans for Parkside are being considered by Warrington and St Helens councils. A decision is expected within months.

Let's hope the councillors know that compared with carrying the same tonnage by road, rail produces less than one tenth of the carbon monoxide, around one twentieth of the nitrogen oxide, less than 9% of the fine particulates and around 10% of the volatile organic compounds.

There is however a campaign to stop the Parkside plan.

The Parkside Action group is "committed to saving the former Parkside colliery site from unsuitable development". There is also opposition to a rail freight depot plan for



Parkside's new future: Flowers and train tracks? Can the former colliery, seen being demolished left, gain a new lease of life as a rail freight depot and countryside park? Protesters are already trying to stop the freight trains coming

STOP
Parkside
strategic rail freight interchange
IN ITS TRACKS

south London. A public inquiry is expected shortly into the Howbury rail depot for Crayford Marshes.

Sadly not everything in the rail freight garden is rosy.

Two major operators of rail freight through the Channel Tunnel announced in January that they are to halt their services, citing rising costs as the problem.

The Italian logistics firm GTS Transport was planning to stop using the service it previously chartered from EWS between Bari and Piacenza in Italy, and Manchester four times a week. EWS, which runs the ser-

vice alongside the French state-run SNCF, sees this as a major setback. EWS planning director Graham Smith said: "We had hoped that the agreement we had reached with the UK government in November would be the starting point for expanding traffic, rather than reducing it. Unfortunately, the costs are still too high - and more than the market can bear."

Prohibitively high costs are also behind Unilog's decision to finish its train services from Muizen in Belgium to Daventry and Manchester, which had accounted for 20 per cent of all cross-Channel rail freight

in 2006. According to press reports, the last Unilog train was expected to run on 2 February.

Meanwhile the Estonian state-owned rail operator Eesti Raudtee - newly renationalised following a period being run by former EWS chief Ed Burkhardt - is reported to be planning a direct, regular freight service from Tallinn to China, via Russia and Kazakhstan, to compete with the many container shipping services.

Eesti Raudtee aims to provide a two-week delivery time, compared with the sea delivery time of five weeks.