

HS2 helps UK rail freight bounce back as 100th train rolls into Bucks construction site

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The 100th freight train arrived at HS2's main construction site in Buckinghamshire this week, as the latest figures show that construction of the UK's new high speed railway has helped the rail freight industry bounce back from the pandemic.

In Buckinghamshire, the first 100 trains – operated by DB Cargo and Hanson for HS2 contractor EKFB – have so far delivered 150,000 tonnes of aggregate for use around the Calvert Railhead. Transporting this material by rail instead of road has already taken the equivalent of 7,500 HGVs off local roads.

The temporary 26,200 sq/m Calvert Railhead site is being built by HS2's main works contractor EKFB – a team made up of Eiffage, Kier, Ferrovial and Bam Nuttall – and will be the main construction and logistics hub during work on the central section of the HS2 project.

New temporary access roads will then be used to move people and materials from the railhead, helping to take construction traffic off local roads. Once HS2 is complete, the railhead and temporary access roads will be removed and the site landscaped, leaving only a small infrastructure maintenance depot.

HS2 Project Client Director, Ambrose McGuire said: “We are serious about reducing the impact of construction on the local community and promoting sustainable construction methods. That’s why I’m so pleased to see material arriving into Calvert by rail instead of road.

“We’ve been working closely with Network Rail, EKFB and the Freight Operators for a number of years to make this possible, and to deliver not only low carbon journeys for our passengers, but also cut carbon in construction.”

Despite taking a major hit last year, the amount of freight on Britain’s railways in the last three months is now 2% above pre-pandemic levels. Construction traffic, including HS2, showed the largest increase, according to figures released by the Office for Rail and Road earlier this month.

Across the whole HS2 project, 15,000 freight trains are set to haul 10 million tonnes of aggregate to construction sites – taking the equivalent of 1.5 million HGVs off the UK’s roads.

EKFB Project Director, Peter Bimson said: “We are excited to have reached this 100th freight train milestone into the Calvert Railhead so quickly, already removing thousands of HGVs from the road in the local area.

“EKFB strives to be at the forefront of carbon reduction in the construction industry, so reducing our impact on the environment and delivering our section of the HS2 project with as little impact as possible is aptly demonstrated through our use of rail over road.”

At the peak of construction, more than 650 people will work at the Calvert Railhead. They will be some of 4,000 jobs set to be created by EKFB over the next two years working a 80km section of the railway between the Chilterns and south Warwickshire, including 17 viaducts, 81 bridges and three ‘green tunnels’.

The railhead is also next to a section of disused railway which is being brought back into use as part of the East-West rail project which is set to link Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford, Aylesbury and Cambridge. The two teams are working closely together on their construction plans, with HS2 set to deliver three bridges and 3km of earthworks along the southern edge of the Calvert site on behalf of East-West Rail.

Photo credit: HS2 Ltd