

More freight can go by rail – saving time, money and CO2 – say RSSB

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Research published by the Rail Safety and Standards Board has today suggested an overhaul to the rail freight sector that could save time, money and help drive environmental efficiencies.

The details suggest that freight train operators in Great Britain can safely haul more goods wagons per train than current practices allow, a change which would improve their environmental impact and financial efficiency.

Rail Minister, Huw Merriman said: “This research is hugely promising. It’s great to see how we’re continuing to improve our freight network, so even more goods and materials can be moved with every journey, strengthening the UK supply chain.

“Government investment into new ideas and innovations is vital as we continue to strengthen the UK supply chain and strive towards greener freight and net zero by 2050.”

The research has enabled existing couplers, used to connect freight wagons, to safely connect more load. For example, a 34.5 tonne coupler rating can increase 16%, up to 40 tonnes. Larger 56 tonne rated couplers

could increase 13% to a new 63 tonne rating. There's no need for any upgrades, the change could be made today, with no need to undertake any engineering assessments, or complicated paperwork.

The research could be huge for over 12,000 wagons – 50% of the UK freight fleet – providing huge environmental and financial benefits. In real terms, looking at a 50-mile journey (each way) with 24 wagons, the simple change suggested by the research of upping the wagons to 27 wagons would provide projected environmental savings of 0.25 tonne CO2 and annual financial savings of £291,000. Not to be sniffed at!

RSSB's lead research analyst, Aaron Barrett said: "It's good to see the results of our research directly helping freight train operators. By enabling longer trains, more goods and materials can be hauled per journey. This will have a hugely positive impact on emissions and financial efficiency.

"This research project is the first in a series, funded by the Department of Transport, designed to help the rail freight sector in Great Britain. Our freight research programme is currently focusing on the safe operation of rail freight, raising the average speed of services, enabling the operation of longer trains and reducing emissions."

Director general of the Rail Freight Group, Maggie Simpson said: "Rail Freight Group members have been working hard to improve the efficiency and performance of their rail freight services and look forward to moving more goods and materials on the new capacity this research has identified.

"RSSB's research projects are bringing modern thinking and analysis to age old issues and will enable more goods to be hauled by train without needing investment in new infrastructure or rolling stock."

And with Network Rail today releasing a refreshed campaign around bridge strikes, aimed at lorry drivers and haulage operators, anything that moves freight off the roads and onto the rails will surely be a positive in their eyes too!