

ORR stats show rail freight achieves highest levels of punctuality, but annual falls in freight moved and freight lifted

May 27, 2021



Freight rail usage and performance during 2020-21 was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The lower number of passenger train services in operation contributed to improved freight punctuality, while freight moved volumes fell to their lowest level since the mid-90s.

This saw 95.2% of freight trains arriving within 15 minutes in 2020-21; the highest level of punctuality achieved since the time series began in 2012-13.

Freight moved in 2020-21 fell by 8.6% compared with 2019-20, driven by a 17.2% reduction in volumes during the first six months of 2020-21.

The second half of the year (October 2020 to March 2021) saw volumes broadly return to pre-pandemic levels.

There was also a similar picture for freight lifted – the mass of goods carried on the rail network measured in tonnes.

69.0 million tonnes of freight lifted in 2020-21, a fall of 4.4% compared with 2019-20, representing the lowest annual total of freight lifted since the miners' strike in 1984-85.

In a similar manner to freight moved, freight lifted had a much stronger second half of the year with volumes up 6.6% compared with the last six months of 2019-20.

However, volumes during the first six months (April 2020 to September 2020) were down 14.4% compared with the same period in 2019-20, resulting in the overall annual fall.

Photo credit: Office of Rail and Road