

# Rail freight's role in greening the country

June 17, 2020



The Rail Freight Group (RFG) was delighted to join its member Addleshaw Goddard in jointly hosting a two-part webinar covering the key issues of rail freight's role in the future of a green economy and sustainability.

In the first session, Maggie Simpson, Director-General, RFG, and Paul Hirst from Addleshaw Goddard, were joined by Henri Murison, Director, Northern Powerhouse Partnership and Geoff Lippitt, Business Development Director at PD Ports.

Some 73 listeners heard how the sector was addressing electrification, the decarbonisation of rail itself, and advancing the case for greater modal share with road. Rail's role in improving air quality was seen as key in advancing the green debate nationally as were the establishment of new railheads to enhance the attraction of rail to large 3PLs and retailers.

Henri said: "Rail has to become a brand leader in the green economy and it should define the future of the railway and become a key differentiator and not just be seen as cleaner than road. We have to move the debate on."

Geoff highlighted how the use of rail has helped it extend its hinterland connections, but noted that rail freight needed to keep pace with innovations in other sectors, particularly in decarbonisation.

In a snapshot poll of listeners, the group asked about the two most important factors required to enable

growth in modal share. By far, they said greater network capacity and better access to the rail network were needed.

In the second part of the session, Cathy Fearnhead, Real Estate Partner at Addleshaw Goddard and Ed Clarke, MD of Ground Operations UK, FedEx Express, addressed the challenges around the sustainability of supply chains.

Ed Clarke spoke about the challenge of connecting urban centres with out of town distribution hubs and connecting end-users with their supply chain providers. He outlined FedEx's approach to addressing the future needs of last-mile delivery and where rail freight could make an impact in the future, particularly around out of hours platform use at stations. 63% of listeners thought this would be possible in the next five years.

Maggie said: "Success is not just about serving our current rail users but encouraging new companies to put their goods onto the railway. The sector is now at a place where companies like FedEx are seeing the practical benefits of rail and are interested in supporting it further as a viable option.

"The webinar was a great opportunity to discuss the potential of rail freight as part of an integrated solution for solving the future problems the UK has over establishing its green economy. A huge thanks to all of our speakers and to everyone for 'tuning in'. I urge all of our members to continue to join us as we continue our programme of webinars this summer."

*Photo credit: Rail Freight Group*