

RFG member survey reveals cautious optimism for post-coronavirus recovery

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A survey conducted by Rail Freight Group (RFG) of its members has highlighted the challenges facing companies across the rail freight sector but also offers hope that the recovery may not be as protracted as feared.

The polling, conducted over the past two weeks, reveals significant interruption to normal operations with firms highlighting reduced demand and declining customer orders, cash flow concerns, business suspension and interruption and delays in areas such as planning decisions.

- The majority of respondents had seen their businesses affected by the current situation, with 54% of those surveyed having closed parts of their business or expected to close soon.
- 55% of businesses had furloughed staff, with 42% furloughing more than a quarter of their staff, and 17% more than half.
- Sickness was not a significant issue with 80% seeing sickness levels below 10% in their businesses.

- Despite these challenges, there was cautious optimism over the return to economic normality. 45% of respondents expect their businesses to recover this year. 71% expect the recovery to take more than two months, and 38% more than six months.

Maggie Simpson, RFG Director-General, said: “Rail freight is playing a key role in keeping goods and supplies moving across the UK supporting the economy and communities. Yet the sector is also being adversely affected by these unique challenges, and our members are telling us of the difficult actions they are having to take to protect their businesses.

“It is encouraging to see that many businesses expect to see some return to normality this year, but this will only happen with continued support from Government and a steady and considered approach to rebuilding business activity.”

Photo credit: Network Rail