LOGISTICS UK

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR THE SOUTH EAST

Call for evidence: The South East and 'Global Britain': what role for transport infrastructure in underpinning Britain's plan to trade and grow?

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About Logistics UK

Logistics UK is one of the country's largest business groups, supporting, shaping and standing up for safe and efficient logistics. We are the only organisation representing the entire logistics sector.

We represent a sector delivering an increasingly innovative, productive and sustainable system of essential national infrastructure. This system ensures the availability of the products that households, businesses and public services rely on every day, and is supporting the UK's transformation for the future. Our membership of over 20,000 includes global, national and regional businesses and SMEs spanning the road, rail, sea and air industries as well as the buyers of freight services, such as retailers and manufacturers.

Introduction

Logistics UK's ambitions for our industry is one that is:

- Flexible and resilient
- Recognised for the value it adds to society and the economy
- Optimal in its efficiency
- Progressing towards zero environmental and safety negativities

It is imperative that decision makers consider each of these four aspects when deciding new policies as each is essential to delivering a sustainable logistics industry fit for the future.

For an efficient logistics industry, free flowing roads with minimal delays are crucial. Road freight is an essential enabler of all business activity: in 2020, road accounted for 89% of all freight traffic, playing a crucial part in the UK's supply chain. It also plays a key role in facilitating and supporting other freight modes. Transport infrastructure spending continues to be needed to improve roads across the UK, nationally and locally, to enhance capacity and reduce unreliability. Appropriate policies and funding are also needed to help provide facilities for drivers to attract sufficient resource to the industry.

Logistics UK was broadly supportive of the most recent Roads Investment Strategy (RIS2) and felt it went a long way towards addressing infrastructure needs; providing that the Government ensured sufficient long-term funding is in place to deliver improvements both during and beyond the RIS2 period. We are therefore concerned that many of these schemes, such as the Lower Thames Crossing, have not progressed as planned.

We are actively engaged with the development process for RIS3 for the National Highways spending period 2025 - 2030, as well as other long-term infrastructure plans, and will continue to highlight the need for investment strategies to support the growth and efficiency of the logistics sector.

While roads connect all modes and are a significant part of the supply chain, multimodal logistics is also extremely important in the UK. 90% of the UK's imports by volume arrive by sea due to its island status, whilst 13% of domestic freight is transported by water. In carrying commodities out of ports and throughout the UK, both road and rail play a crucial role. Alongside this, air freight accounts for 40% of UK imports and exports by value and connects with both rail and water.

Is existing Transport infrastructure in the South East region fit for purpose?

Logistics UK believes current transport infrastructure in the South East region is not fit for purpose. The region is home to crucial international trade routes supporting the whole of the UK and includes important gateways, such as the Port of Dover, Eurotunnel and the Port of Southampton. The fragility of the network in the region is highlighted by the unreliability of the Dartford Crossing and lack of suitable alternative routes. In addition, every time the Operation Brock traffic management system is required to be deployed on the M20, it not only impacts on the drivers and vehicles heading to the continent, but also on the businesses and residents of Kent.

Operation Brock

The need for Operation Brock and other accompanying traffic initiatives are having a negative impact on logistics operators and efficient trade. Operation Brock is a significant improvement on its predecessor, Operation Stack, as it allows freight traffic to be queued according to its destination – Eurotunnel or the Port of Dover. This means that if there is disruption at one location, HGVs heading to the other can continue to be released from the queue.

However, for periods of extended disruption, such as experienced at Christmas 2020, and during the start of the school holidays in summer 2022, Operation Brock is not suited to meet expected welfare needs of queuing HGV drivers. Operation Brock is a live carriageway that makes it very difficult, on safety grounds, to deliver welfare such as food and toilets. Logistics UK is calling for better data on queue times and an agreed trigger point at which drivers are directed to locations such as Ashford Truck Stop and Sevington Inland Border Facility, where they can be provided with access to toilets, washing facilities and hot food.

Lorry parking

Lorry parking is a priority issue for our members and the lack of suitable facilities at the roadside is often cited as one of the main reasons that people are hesitant to come and work as a professional driver, as well as by those deciding to leave the industry. By improving the facilities available, this will deliver better working conditions, helping to attract a larger and more diverse pool of talent, alongside improving public perception of the sector. Greater attention must be given to the chronic shortage of commercial vehicle parking spaces, on or close to, the Strategic Road Network. The need is for the provision of high-quality, safe and secure roadside facilities including showers, toilets and hot food.

The shortage of lorry parking facilities also impacts on local communities. HGV drivers by law must take a rest break of at least 45 minutes after a maximum of 4.5 hours of driving. They must also take legally mandated rest breaks overnight and at weekends. Failure to comply with Drivers Hours regulations is a serious road safety offence and can result in a driver losing their vocational entitlement to drive. If there are no facilities available where and when a driver needs to stop, this can result in them having little choice, but to park up in less suitable locations.

The latest Lorry Parking Survey published in September 2022 shows the provision of lorry parking at on-site facilities in England is nearly at critical level, having reached 83 per cent utilisation level across the network, with the highest utilisation rates found in the East, South East and East Midlands. The previous study, conducted in 2017, found there to be a critical lack of around 1400 overnight parking spaces across England. Logistics UK has been pressing for these spaces to be delivered, along with supportive measures such as addressing delays to planning applications and identification and options for sites on Government owned land. Section 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework sets out that local planning policies and decisions should recognise the importance of providing adequate overnight lorry parking facilities, taking into account any local shortages, to reduce the risk of parking in locations that lack proper facilities or could cause a nuisance. Proposals for new or expanded distribution centres should make provision for sufficient lorry parking to cater for their anticipated use. Logistics UK welcomed the Roads Minister Richard Holden MP's announcement on 24 November 2022 that up to £100 million has been allocated to boost the improvement of HGV roadside facilities.[1]

[1] Department for Transport (2022) Up to £100 million boost to improve HGV roadside facilities. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/up-to-100-million-boost-to-improve-hgv-roadside-facilities

Lower Thames Crossing

Logistics UK supports the construction of the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC), as it will provide much-needed resilience for the region's roads by facilitating strategic traffic and helping alleviate the congestion challenges at the existing Dartford Crossing. The Dartford Crossing regularly carries traffic over its designed capacity. The proposed new crossing will almost double road capacity across the Thames east of London. But importantly, it will add resilience into the network by providing an alternative route.

Currently, if there is a closure of the Dartford Crossing, there are a limited number of alternative routes, that are suitable for freight traffic. The closest crossing, the Blackwall Tunnel, is itself heavily congested at peak times and is not designed to carry strategic traffic. It also has a low height limit, so taller HGVs are forced to utilise the M25 via Heathrow.

Whilst Logistics UK supports the need for an additional river crossing, it is vital that the scheme incentivises freight to use the route by pricing it accordingly and the charging infrastructure must be interlinked to other UK systems to cut down on bureaucracy for businesses. The crossing must also connect to rail, sea and air transport hubs by ensuring that supporting upgrades, such as improvements to the M2/A2 route to the Port of Dover are included in RIS3.

Earlier plans for the LTC included proposals for driver rest facilities. Logistics UK is disappointed that these have been removed from the current plan. The absence of a designated rest area will result in professional drivers having no opportunity to take legislated breaks as required under Drivers' Hours rules along the new route.

M2/A2 corridor

The successful completion of the Lower Thames Crossing will make the M2/A2 a more attractive route for freight traffic accessing the Port of Dover. However, this route currently suffers from several pinch points which must be addressed in RIS3 and in time for the opening of the new crossing. These include Brenley Corner, near Faversham, which is the junction where the M2 reconnects with the A2 and links into the A229. This is a notorious bottleneck and is included in the RIS3 pipeline of projects. Logistics UK believes that given the importance of this route, it must be included in the final list of schemes for the 2025-2030 Roads Investment Strategy.

Another significant pinch point along this route is between Lydden Hill and Dover where the A2 is predominantly single carriageway. The A2 Dover Access Scheme is also listed in the RIS3 projects pipeline and Logistics UK strongly supports its inclusion in the final list of schemes for RIS3. If this scheme is progressed, it will improve safety, accommodate future traffic growth and provide more reliable day-to-day journeys along the A2, including access to the Port of Dover and for local road users.

Logistics UK welcome the ongoing improvements to the M2 junction 5. According to National Highways, the M2 junction 5/A249 Stockbury Roundabout is not able to cope with existing traffic flows. The junction is also one of the top 50 national casualty locations on England's major 'A' roads and motorways. The A249 provides and important East-West link for the region.

A34

The A34 is an important freight route linking the Port of Southampton to the Midlands and beyond. Logistics UK is aware of issues linked to congestion on the A34 around Oxford impacting on journey times and journey time reliability for logistics businesses and importantly on road safety.

Logistics UK supports A34 improvements which according to National Highways, will provide opportunities to reduce congestion and improve safety on the A34 between the M4 and M40. National Highways strategic objectives are based on addressing these challenges and improving journeys for everyone using the A34

between the M4 and M40. Given plans for local growth in the area, future demands for this road are going to increase in the future, therefore business and locals will rely more on the A34.[2]

Rail

The UK's rail freight sector is expected to continue year on year growth increases in its operations. At current levels, UK rail freight is growing yearly by 3%, indicating that the usage of rail is gradually expanding. Due to the reductions in traffic and environmental advantages, rail freight growth is crucial for UK supply chains. Economies of scale may also be attained by transporting large volumes over long distances, particularly when consignors and the transportation industries for freight by road and rail collaborate. While the industry continues to innovate and boost productivity, new business - whether from existing users or, more challengingly, from new customers - can only be won if rail freight continues to concentrate on improving its efficiency. It is imperative that rail remains competitive and aligned with developments in road freight.

The South East hosts four major rail freight corridors across the region – as illustrated by Network Rail's Key Freight Corridors. Included within these three are: Southampton (Port) to the West Midlands and the West Coast Mainline (WCML). Channel Tunnel for intermodal, automotive and metals freight movements. Cross London traffic, including Thameside. The Brighton Mainline and North Kent Lines play a key regional role in moving goods. Rail freight traffic within the region recovered to pre-pandemic levels by late 2020 and has increased by around 2% since 2019.

However, rail freight's national mode share is quite low, and its potential for expansion in the South East is constrained. For example, rail transportation of containers is restricted in some locations (e.g. Dover) due to limitations in the railway gauge. Therefore, providing appropriate links and improvements to the rail network at expanding and or relocating ports in the South East, will allow for the implementation of expanded capacity rail freight schemes. Particularly on key routes, this in turn could result in further line electrification and gauge improvements, which would further strengthen the modal shift from road to rail.

How will the delivery of transport infrastructure help or enhance the government's ambitions for "Global Britain"?

For the UK to maintain its global standing post-Brexit, the Government's vision for 'Global Britain' is to reinvest in relationships, championing the rules-based international order and demonstrating that the UK is open, outward-looking and confident on the world stage.[3]

For an enormous number of businesses across the country, the South East is the UK's international gateway to global markets. For this reason, infrastructure investment in this region is of national benefit as it is an impactful enabler of growth throughout the UK. For example, significant amounts of the UK's freight coming into and out of the UK is processed in an area of the Midlands known as the 'golden triangle' due to the high concentration of national distribution centres. It is therefore common for freight to arrive at the UK through the South East, be transported to the Midlands distribution centres for processing and then return to the South East for regional distribution and delivery. This means that the road and freight rail routes that connect the South East to the Midlands and the north of England are of particular importance when it comes to freight and trade, so are vital if the Government is to achieve its 'Global Britain' aim.[4]

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[2] National Highways (2021) The beginning of the A34 project. Available at: https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-roads/a34-improvements-north-and-south-of-oxford/news/the-beginning-of-the-a34-project/

[3] Foreign & Commonwealth Office (2018) Global Britain: delivering on our international ambition. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/global-britain-delivering-on-our-international-ambition#:~:text=Global%20Britain%20is%20about%20reinvesting,confident%20on%20the%20world%20stage

[4] Transport for the South East (2023) Freight, logistics and gateways. Available at: https://transportforthesoutheast.org.uk/our-work/freight-and-logistics/