

Ian Kapur.
Head of Strategic Access Planning,
GB Railfreight Limited,
5th Floor,
62-64 Cornhill,
London, EC3V 3NH.
Tel: 07818 421220
E-mail: ian.kapur@gbrailfreight.com

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Transport Infrastructure Planning Unit (TIPU).
Department for Transport,
Great Minster House,
33 Horseferry Road,
London, SW1P 4DR

Dear Sir,

Letter of support – Network Rail Stalybridge to Diggle (Saddleworth) Enhancements Order

On behalf of GB Railfreight Limited, I am writing to offer our strong support for the Network Rail Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO) for the Trans-Pennine Route Upgrade (TRU) project between Stalybridge and Diggle (Saddleworth).

As a Freight Operating Company (FOC) moving a wide variety of goods across the whole of the UK and specifically freight across the Pennines seven days a week, we recognise the TRU as a transformational long-awaited investment in one of the North's most strategically important rail corridors. Indeed, GB Railfreight has itself been at the forefront of the freight discussions continuously since 2014.

The scheme will deliver the modern high-performing infrastructure needed to improve reliability, support future growth in rail freight and strengthen the region's economic competitiveness. Our end-customers believe so, as well, and have input their confidential business views to DfT in support of the W12 gauge-clearance for the route from Liverpool to the East Coast of the country.

The upgrade enhancements including full electrification, W12 gauge-clearance, modern signalling, higher line speeds, provision for longer trains, expanded sidings and additional capacity, is vital to unlocking modal shift from road to rail and support the UK's wider decarbonisation goals. Importantly, the works between Stalybridge and Diggle address long-standing constraints that have limited both freight and passenger operations for decades.

For too long the Trans-Pennine corridor has operated on ageing infrastructure not designed for today's mixed traffic demands on speed and capability. Congestion, operational bottlenecks and uncertain investment timelines have hampered journey times, restricted freight paths and created challenges for businesses like ours seeking reliable, resilient connections across the North.

The clarity and ambition now being shown through TRU marks a turning point. The TRU upgrade, and this TWAO, will unlock new growth by modernising the corridor and build confidence in future business decisions for rail freight and supply-chain users, helping meet our sustainability targets.

GB Railfreight, therefore, strongly welcomes the Order and, in particular:

- The focus on resolving freight capacity constraints between Stalybridge and Diggle (Saddleworth) and the demonstrable progress delivered by TRU and Network Rail have already made in this area
- The programme's commitment to full electrification, higher speeds, modern signalling, increased line speeds and accessibility improvements, enabling growth in existing and emerging markets
- Planned interventions such as W12 gauge-clearance, grade separation and improved layouts at key junctions and stations that will remove operational bottlenecks and support more efficient, sustainable operations

GB Railfreight also recognises the need for alignment with future infrastructure investment programmes, including Northern Powerhouse Rail and integration with the Bee Network. Coordinated delivery will maximise long-term benefits and secure seamless, sustainable freight paths and legacy benefits across the region.

We urge the timely approval of this TWAO and, from our perspective, we can see how these upgrades represent a catalyst for future economic growth, increased productivity, enhanced freight performance and improved access for our staff, customers and the communities we serve.

Please feel free to contact me should you wish to discuss this letter or our freight ambitions in greater detail.

Your faithfully,

Ian Kapur
Head of Strategic Access Planning