



Department for Transport

Freight Council Secretariat – Freight Council Meeting

Date and Time – 11 February 2026, 14:00-15:00

Location – Ministerial Board Room (GMH) & Microsoft Teams

Chairs:

- Keir Mather MP, Minister for Aviation, Maritime and Decarbonisation
- Louise Morgan, Director, Freight and Borders, Department for Transport (DfT)

Freight Council Members:

- Richard Ballantyne, CEO, British Ports Association
- Sarah Bell, Director of Public Affairs UK, UPS
- Clare Bottle, CEO, UK Warehousing Association
- David Boot, Director of Public Affairs and Policy, Road Haulage Association
- Stephen Carr, Director of Public Affairs, Peel Ports Group
- Geraint Evans, CEO, UK Major Ports Group
- Ben Fletcher, CEO, Logistics UK
- Amanda Francis, CEO, Association of International Courier and Express Services
- Fiona Hamilton, Head of Public Affairs, Royal Mail
- Edwin Morgan, Policy & Public Affairs Director, UK Warehousing Association (online)
- Nick Potter, Transport Director, Tesco
- Maggie Simpson OBE, Director General, Rail Freight Group (online)
- Chris Welch, Managing Director, Welch Group

Government representatives:

- Anne-Therese Farmer, Director, Environment Strategy, DfT
- Laura Marquis, Deputy Director, Multimodal Freight Division, DfT
- Policy officials from the Multimodal Freight Division within DfT, the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero (DESNZ)
- Antonia Williams, Director General, Road Transport Group, DfT

Minutes

1. Welcome and introductions

The meeting started with recognition of the contributions made by Isabel Dedring, who recently stepped down as industry co-chair. Members paid tribute to her leadership of the Council and her effectiveness in shaping its early work.

The Minister echoed these remarks, expressing regret that he had not been able to work with her longer and noting the strong foundations she had established for future collaboration between government and industry.

Members also noted Minister Chris McDonald's intention to join the meeting before being called away, welcoming this as a positive sign of DfT–DESNZ alignment on



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freight-energy and decarbonisation, and expressed hope he could join a future meeting given the clear portfolio crossover.

2. Introductory remarks from the Minister

The Minister welcomed members and reflected on the breadth of his multimodal portfolio, underlining the interdependencies between road, maritime, rail freight, aviation, borders and decarbonisation. He stressed the importance of agility in government, balancing immediate operational challenges (including system resilience and live issues) with longer-term strategic planning.

He invited frank discussion, encouraging members to be clear on where government intervention is most needed and where industry would prefer government to step back.

3. Economic growth and the strategic role of freight

Logistics UK opened the discussion by emphasising that freight is both an enabler and a catalyst for economic growth, comparable in scale to UK manufacturing, but often under-recognised politically. Members also highlighted the need for:

- Stronger cross-government recognition of freight's economic contribution.
- More consistent engagement with HM Treasury, DBT and Skills England.
- Embedding freight more explicitly within the Industrial Strategy, planning reform and wider economic development frameworks.
- Transforming the way freight is viewed so that it is recognised as core economic infrastructure, rather than treated as a purely operational or sector-specific issue.

4. Skills, workforce and driver welfare

Members raised concerns about:

- Ongoing structural workforce shortages, particularly drivers, with RHA noting that approximately 60,000 new drivers are required every year for the next five years to maintain the baseline.
- The sector contributing £1.3bn into the apprenticeship levy while receiving only 32p in the pound back, with UKWA highlighting that efforts to elevate the Transport Manager and Warehouse Manager apprenticeships from Level 3 to Level 4 have stalled due to delays in Skills England's wider reform.
- Poor facilities, lack of safe rest areas, and inaccessible or unsuitable amenities (especially for women) as a major and persistent barrier to recruitment and retention.
- Workforce resilience and the impact on broader national resilience and security planning, noting that logistics labour constraints could have system-wide implications during disruption.

The Minister recognised the urgency and long-term nature of the skills challenge, including the cross-government dimensions, and reflected on the need for long-term alignment between skills policy and freight workforce requirements, especially given the intersection with resilience and decarbonisation.



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5. Infrastructure, planning and connectivity

Members raised:

- Longstanding concerns about regional road and rail connectivity to key gateways, citing underinvestment and fragmented local planning as ongoing barriers to growth. The Port of Liverpool Access Road was highlighted as a clear example where limited connectivity continues to constrain wider economic potential.
- That major ports collectively invest around £900 million per year in their own infrastructure and argued that this level of private investment could be significantly higher if public connectivity constraints were addressed.
- The need for ports' newly designated "foundational sector" status in the Industrial Strategy to be meaningfully reflected in infrastructure decisions, with industry emphasising the importance of developing a shared, cross-government and industry understanding of what this designation should entail in practice.
- The need for stronger cross-government alignment and more consistent advocacy for freight within agencies and arm's-length bodies, including National Highways and Network Rail.

There was consensus that freight connectivity should be treated as nationally significant infrastructure, rather than assessed solely through local impacts.

6. Borders and trade facilitation

The discussion moved on to the need for further modernisation of border systems, referencing the need for:

- Real-time dashboards to flag system outages affecting government clearance processes.
- Continued digital reform to support trade flows and reduce congestion at ports.

Members emphasised that efficient border systems underpin wider economic competitiveness and supply chain reliability, noting evidence from the express sector that each package crossing a border supports around 22 UK jobs, underscoring the economic impact of system performance. Members also cautioned against deprioritising border content within the draft new Plan for Freight, noting its significance to economic competitiveness and supply chain reliability.

The Minister recognised the importance of maintaining momentum on border modernisation.

7. Decarbonisation

Members stressed the need for:

- Multi-year certainty around support mechanisms such as the Plug-in Truck Grant, rather than annual renewals, noting that fleet investment cycles typically span five to seven years, requiring clarity on expectations into the 2030s.



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- Recognition of the ongoing role of transitional low-carbon fuels while battery electric and hydrogen technologies scale.

The Minister acknowledged the importance of providing confidence to support investment decisions.

8. Energy infrastructure and grid access

Members highlighted:

- High electricity costs and grid connection delays affecting depots, ports and logistics hubs.
- Findings from the Freight Energy Forum, which suggest that projected freight energy demand significantly exceeds available supply.
- The need for stronger cross-government coordination, particularly with DESNZ and Ofgem, to ensure timely grid reinforcement and improved access for the freight sector.

The Minister acknowledged the seriousness of the energy and grid constraints, noting that decarbonisation cannot progress without reliable access to electricity at depots, ports and logistics hubs. He recognised that the issue requires stronger cross-government coordination, particularly with DESNZ and Ofgem, and agreed that freight's energy needs must be advocated for more forcefully within government.

9. Solar generation

The significant opportunity for rooftop solar deployment across the warehouse estate was discussed, with UKWA noting that only around 5% of UK warehouses currently have installations. Members suggested targeted intervention may be required to address market failures and unlock self-generation capacity.

The Minister agreed that the issue resonates strongly with local communities and aligns with wider energy security objectives.

10. Governance of the Freight Council

Following the departure of the industry co-chair, members discussed governance and leadership arrangements. The Minister suggested future meetings should:

- Avoid broad “shopping list” agendas.
- Focus on fewer, more technical deep-dive discussions.
- Distinguish between strategic (long-term, cross-modal) and tactical (short-term, delivery-focused) items.
- Officials agreed to review the Council's structure and ensure appropriate cross-government participation where required.

11. Closing remarks



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The Minister thanked members for a constructive and candid discussion. He highlighted the Council's unique role in bringing together multiple modes and identifying system-wide challenges.

He reiterated his ambition to drive practical outcomes, supported by stronger data, improved cross-government coordination and more focused stakeholder engagement. Ahead of bringing the meeting to a close, DfT officials provided a brief update on the new Freight Plan and agreed as a next step to share a refined draft of the Plan with Council members for further input.

Key Decisions and Outcomes:

- Officials will refine the Freight Plan to ensure it is:
 - Action-led and delivery-focused.
 - Aligned with the Industrial Strategy and infrastructure planning frameworks.
 - Complementary to the recent HGV CO₂ regulations consultation and to the forthcoming HGV and Coach Infrastructure Strategy on decarbonisation pathways.
- The Department will return to members with:
 - Priority themes for deeper discussion (e.g. skills, grid and energy and border modernisation).
- The Department will review governance arrangements following the departure of the Council's industry co-chair and consider options to maintain strong industry leadership.



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Actions Table

Notes: Items raised in this current meeting and marked as complete will not feature in the next meeting minute.

Ref.	Date Raised	Action	Who	Updates	Status
1.1	11/02/2026	New Freight Plan team to refine draft based on comments made by the Council and ministerial views.	DfT	An updated version of the plan will be shared in due course.	Ongoing.
1.2	11/02/2026	Freight Council Secretariat to lead on structuring future Council meetings to deliver deep-dive discussions on a smaller set of priorities, balancing strategic and tactical issues. The proposed areas for focus should be tested with Council members.	DfT	A proposal will be shared with Council members in due course.	Ongoing.
1.3	11/02/2026	Freight Council Secretariat to reassess the Council's governance following on from Isabel Dedring's resignation as industry co-chair.	DfT	Updates will be shared with members in due course.	Ongoing.