

15th June 2004

Big Box Breakthrough at Tilbury

West Coast Main Line benefits
New business for rail freight
Less road congestion and air pollution

The Strategic Rail Authority and Network Rail today announced that the Port of Tilbury has become the first port in the UK to begin full-scale operational handling of 9' 6" high container traffic on standard wagons by rail.

The work to allow 9' 6" containers to be transported from Tilbury - specified and funded by the SRA and delivered by Network Rail - is the first completed element of the £40 million Felixstowe to Nuneaton (F2N) project, which will connect a number of east coast ports to terminals along the West Coast Main Line by the end of 2004.

The project is of national importance in meeting worldwide freight market trends for bigger, 9' 6" high rather than 8' 6" high boxes, enhancing the competitiveness of rail freight in the UK. In addition, the work done at Tilbury will enhance the competitiveness of the Port and the region, safeguarding jobs and attracting new business.

Further gauge enhancement work is being carried out between Felixstowe and Ipswich, Ipswich/Harwich and London, Nuneaton and Birmingham, and Crewe and Manchester, allowing ports and terminals such as Daventry, Felixstowe, Hams Hall, Birmingham, and Manchester Trafford Park to handle more of these bigger boxes by the end of 2004.

Jonathan Riley, SRA Executive Director, Freight, said:

"Tilbury is the first port in Britain to be able to handle the new generation of 9' 6" high containers, and the first building block in a landmark scheme to make the West Coast Main Line capable of transporting 9' 6" traffic. Today's announcement will secure and strengthen the market for rail freight at Tilbury and the position of the West Coast Main Line as the UK's premier freight corridor."

Notes to Editors

Currently, one in four containers passing through UK ports are 9' 6" high - by 2010 this is projected to double to one in two containers. Gauge enhancement at Tilbury and elsewhere on the West Coast Main Line will double the market of boxes which can be carried by rail freight.

The Port of Tilbury is one of the key gateways to London and the South East, and enjoys direct links to the UK's rail and road network. Tilbury is served by three rail freight terminals, operated respectively, by Freightliner, Tilbury Container Services and Victa Railfreight. The work permits the handling of 9' 6" containers on standard wagons between Tilbury and Garston (Merseyside) and Coatbridge (nr. Glasgow, Lanarkshire).