

## Growing the inland water freight sector: lessons from the Thames



A new [Freight by Water](#) publication was launched in July at the group's conference on the [PS Elizabethan](#), a replica Mississippi paddle steamer, at Butler's Wharf Pier, Shad Thames, London, chaired by its author, Alex Veitch, FTA's Head of Global Policy. It may be downloaded [here](#). The report offers the Thames as a case study for other waterways across the country. The importance of safeguarding wharves from development is one of the key issues explored.



The latest information on water freight services in the Thames region is given, the Association's proposals to grow the sector are recorded and the policy and regulatory barriers impeding growth outlined. As Alex Veitch said: "Inland water freight can make a significant contribution to alleviating road traffic congestion in London and other major cities across the UK, but there are many planning and regulatory barriers that prevent those moving freight from capitalising on the benefits".

Information given in the publication gives weight to the proposal for the establishment of a national Strategic Water Network to develop a more coordinated approach to investment and planning. Mr Veitch concluded: "Members of Freight by Water are keen to engage with industry partners and decision-makers to develop this concept and make it happen." He encourages the new Mayor of London to continue his predecessor's commitment to maintaining wharves in order to grow and develop the inland water freight sector.

## **Key recommendations:**

### **Planning authorities** should

- require water freight as part of planning consent wherever suitable;
- carry out enforcement during development to ensure water freight is being used as required;
- scrutinise planning applications that seek to change safeguarded wharves to protect against deliberate non-use and
- ensure that new developments do not compromise support services (boatyards and supply).

**Local and regional authorities** should improve coordination and develop a regional strategy, using London as an example.

### **National authorities** (England, Scotland and Wales) should

- ensure that transport authorities champion water freight, coordinating across other departments;
- amend freight grants to provide equal support to water and rail freight and
- promote careers and qualifications in the water sector to address the skills gap

### **Planners, public authorities and water freight promoters** should

- not view water freight in isolation and recognise it can be used as part of an urban supply chain;
- investigate what other cities are doing to use water transport in solving environmental issues and
- consider developing projects through nationally or European funded projects

### **Two examples of water freight delivering goods in urban areas of Holland and France are given below**

For a number of years Utrecht in Holland has been using its waterways to deliver beer and other goods to 60 catering businesses located along its canals. Known as the 'Beer Boat' this service is owned and run by the city authority using an electric powered craft, funded from the air quality budget.

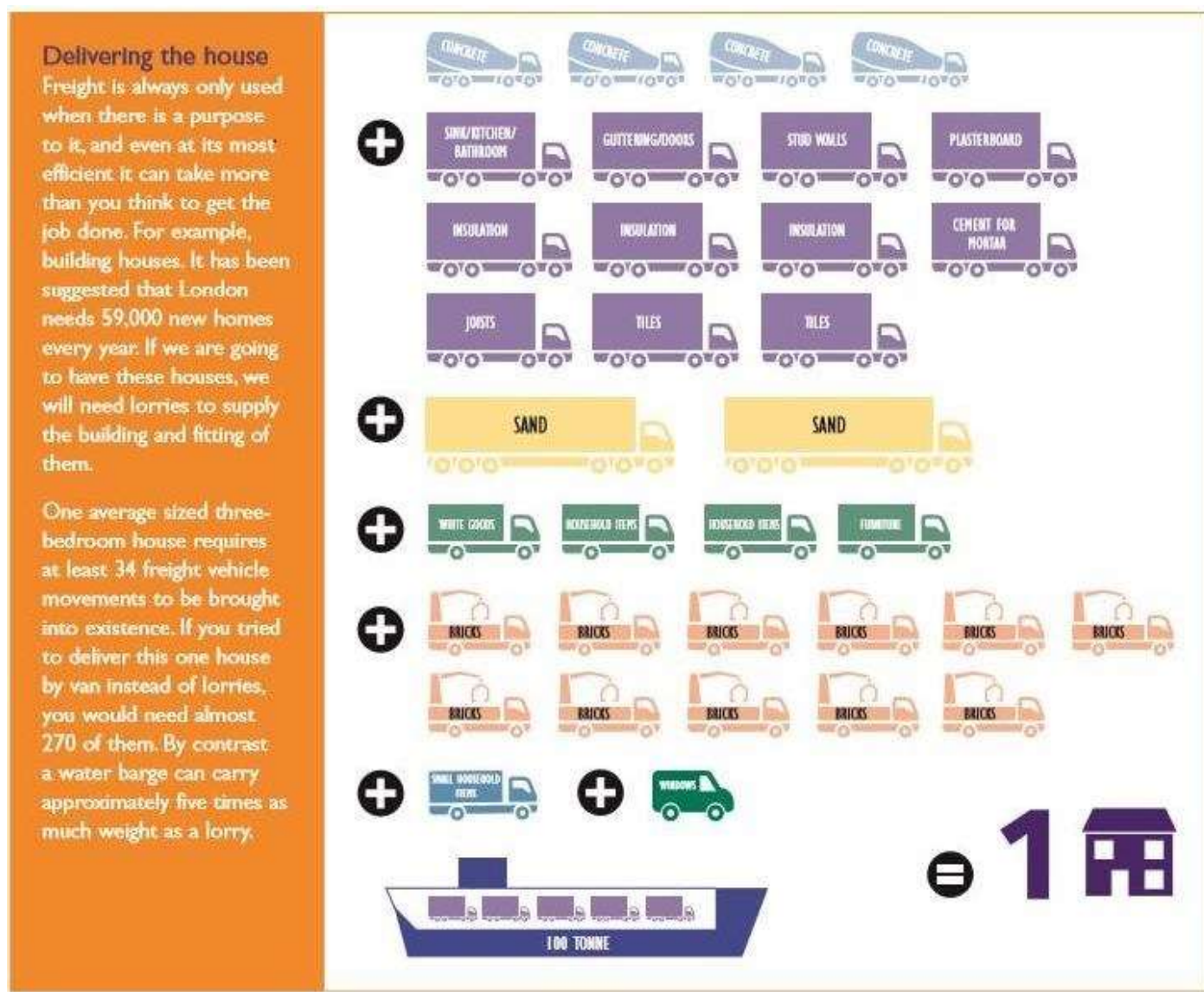
Paris is also taking steps to make better use of the River Seine. A leading supermarket chain, Franprix, has used the river to make the initial part of the delivery to its central Paris stores since 2012. Standard 20-foot containers are loaded onto barges and moved from a depot located on a tributary of the Seine to the centre of Paris, where they are transferred to lorries for the last mile of the delivery journey. Franprix stocks 135 of its 350 stores in the city and says that using the river takes 2,600 lorries off the road each year, the equivalent of 300,000km of lorry journeys.

**The report concludes by introducing the concept of a Strategic Water Network (SWN), which would set out the priority freight routes for inland waterways and potentially guide planning and investment decisions.**

A SWN would promote and enable the provision of water-based options for shippers, which requires integration with road and rail freight and inland and coastal ports. It would do this by clarifying which river facilities have strategic priority and should be protected through the planning system.

This paper has illustrated the size and importance of the inland water freight sector in the UK, highlighting its potentially significant contribution to alleviating road traffic congestion in London. It has analysed the various planning, policy and organisational barriers impeding the growth of water freight and made recommendations to overcome them.

As British cities are being required to undertake large-scale construction of new housing, the report's persuasive graphic (below) compares the carrying capacity of water barges with the large number of lorries currently required to carry concrete, other construction materials and white goods to building sites - and could have added the preliminary disposal of materials removed from these sites during demolition and clearance.



The UK faces serious and escalating problems related to poor air quality, traffic congestion and increasing urban populations. These are also global challenges and many cities with usable waterways running through them are looking at ways to exploit their presence and incorporate water freight into city transport systems. UK engineers [Atkins Global](#) point out, “Europe is already ahead in terms of its capacity for water transport, as well as having the will and financial backing to enable its development. Now it seems that economic and environmental pressures could drive the UK to follow its lead”