

**For immediate use**

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**BRIEFING DAY HELD FOR RAILFREIGHT TERMINAL**

The Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon MP made a flying visit to Telford last week during which he was updated on the progress of the Telford Railfreight Terminal.

The terminal planned for Donnington is a joint initiative between the Borough of Telford & Wrekin, the Ministry of Defence and national regeneration agency English Partnerships. It is expected to handle around 200 – 250,000 tonnes of freight per year with the capacity for further growth and is hoped to attract new companies to the Borough.

As well as the visit by the Secretary of State for Defence, the Rail Freight Group, an organisation representing all stakeholders in moving freight on rail, also recently met in Telford.

At their meeting, they were welcomed by the Leader of Borough of Telford & Wrekin, Councillor Keith Austin on behalf of the Council and its' partners in the Donnington Project (MoD and English Partnerships). Following presentations on the Project, they had a visit to the Donnington site which included the ABRO workshops (MoD's heavy engineering and repair facilities). ABRO has recently diversified into non-military work and the visitors were able to see overhaul work taking place on the running gear of railway vehicles.

On Thursday, an important milestone event in connection with the Project took place, when a large number of companies who have expressed interest in operating the Terminal gathered at MoD Donnington for a Briefing Day. Again, they were welcomed by Councillor Keith Austin and then received presentations from Peter Bradley, MP for The Wrekin, Richard Jarrott, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Peter Williams, Government Office for the West Midlands. Representatives of Telford's business community, Network Rail and Advantage West Midlands were also present.

Peter Bradley MP said: "Judging from the attendance of major companies from all over the country, the Briefing Day was a great success. There's clearly a great deal of interest not just in the Railfreight depot but in Telford's dynamic economy too and that's very encouraging.

"It was good to have the opportunity to update Geoff Hoon on progress when he visited Donnington. I never miss an opportunity to bend his ear about the importance of the terminal to the future of our economy."

The event was the first step in the appointment of a private sector company to build and operate the facility.

The project is being promoted through a Transport & Works Act Order, the application for which was placed with Government in July 2003. The Department for Transport has indicated that the decision on the Order will be made imminently.

Cllr Keith Austin, leader of the Borough of Telford & Wrekin said: "The past few days have been very successful in moving forward the complex process to deliver this important project for the town and the surrounding area. The Railfreight Terminal will help to sustain existing jobs and to create the conditions for further investment that will bring new jobs.

“Telford has a strong economic base in manufacturing and storage and logistics activities. This project will help local companies to be competitive in the national and global markets.

“Today, we have seen the strength of the interest shown in the project by the private sector and we have invited these companies to submit their proposals for developing and operating the terminal to the partners for evaluation.

“The project is in line with the Government’s strategy to increase the quantity of freight travelling by rail and the industry acknowledges that this will only be achieved by the construction of new terminals and by capturing more of the freight flows linked to manufacturing and logistics activities.”

Lance Houghton, head of sales for English Partnerships commented: “The briefing day raised a great deal of interest amongst potential developers and is an exciting step towards the delivery of a sustainable transport facility and an important development for the town of Telford.”

**ENDS**

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