



The Association of  
Pallet Networks

## 2021 pallet sector report

APN collates data from all of the UK's pallet networks, allowing its members to benchmark their performance. This data also provides a unique insight into the health of the UK logistics and palletised freight distribution sectors.

Key highlights from our data is below. For more information on the significance of this data please contact Paul Sanders, APN chairman on [chairman@theapn.co.uk](mailto:chairman@theapn.co.uk)

### In 2021 APN members delivered **31.5m pallets; 13.2% growth overall year on year**

The network sector passed the 30 million pallets mark in 2021, with 13.2% growth against 2020, and even stronger growth against 2019 levels (16.8%). This was despite industry-wide skills shortages and the economic challenges facing many sectors. It also defied recent reductions in UK road freight overall, most particularly in the groupage and food sectors.

### **Economy pallets rose by 12.8%**

While premium pallets remained a strong favourite with customers, economy pallets also grew, and represented 36.8% of all pallet network freight.

### **63% of all pallets on a next-day service**

As in 2020 customer confidence in next day and timed delivery services remained very strong with 19.9 million pallets being delivered on a premium service.

### **B2C surpassed five million units**

B2C held its percentage of the pallet network business during 2021, despite the explosive growth in home deliveries during 2020's lockdowns. One in every six pallets is now delivered to a dwelling (17.4% in 2021, against 17.9% in 2020). More than five million units were delivered overall.

Although pallet networks were originally designed to cater for B2B freight movements, the network model has shown huge flexibility in dealing with the needs of the B2C marketplace.

APN contributed significantly to 2021's tail-lift safety guidance produced by Road Haulage Association and endorsed by HSE. Pallet network members have embraced dynamic risk assessments and other best practice guidance, and APN campaigned to educate the marketplace of freight customers' responsibilities for safety. Although tail-lift deliveries are not purely a feature of residential deliveries, almost all B2C deliveries require a tail-lift.



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## Trailer utilisation sets high bar at 75%

Trailer utilisation increased again in pallet networks to average 75% across the year, against 2020's 73%. At its highest, in March 2021, trailer utilisation was more than 78%. By contrast, according to the Department for Transport, the industry as a whole averages trailer utilisation of 63% for artics. APN estimates pallet network efficiency saves in the region of 150,000 vehicle journeys per year.

There were 1.59 million trunk movements across APN's eight member networks.

## Average pallet weight in 2021 was 374kg

In 2021 UK pallet networks delivered 11.8 million tonnes of freight with the average weight 374kg. In 2020 the average weight was 379kg. The average weight has reduced slightly each year, driven by the confidence of the home delivery and just in time markets.

## Networks drive greater efficiencies for more sustainable logistics

Despite skills shortages, rising costs and surging volumes, the pallet networks managed to drive significant efficiencies throughout 2021. FLT hours rose by 9.5% to meet pallet increases of 13.2%, giving a 3.6% productivity improvement. Trailer utilisation increased to 75%. Hub FLT drivers take an average of only 2.6 minutes to load or unload a pallet

## Hub safety continues to improve

Although numerically safety-related incidents at pallet network Hubs increased slightly, the rate of incidents per 100,000 pallets reduced for the fourth consecutive year. The rate is now 0.49 against 2020's 0.53. The most common cause of Hub related safety incidents, accounting for 23% of the total, is load security equipment such as straps, nets and curtains. In total there were 152 Hub safety incidents, 3.8% down on 2019, and 0.7% higher than 2020.