

Pallet networks deliver record volumes despite driver shortage



The Association of
Pallet Networks

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Third quarter figures for the pallet network sector reveal huge increases in volumes delivered, despite the ongoing national driver crisis, and a substantial contribution to carbon reduction.

Key points include:

- 18% increase on freight volumes in pallet sector Jan-Sept 2021
- 24m pallets delivered Q1-Q3
- Utilisation rate for Hub trunking at 75%, considerably above the national average of 63%
- 20% of all pallets now to residential addresses
- 0.49 Hub safety incidents per 100,000 pallets delivered
- 150,000 vehicle journeys per annum saved by pallet network operations

To the end of September 2021, volumes for the year have increased by 18%, with 24 million pallets being delivered by the UK's eight pallet networks since January.

"We are seeing this consistent and continued growth across all pallet sizes and all services, as more shippers and hauliers realise the benefits of network membership," says APN chairman Paul Sanders.

One of the key benefits for shippers in the light of COP26 and the ongoing climate emergency is the huge saving in vehicle miles pallet networks represent.

APN calculations based on actual network data show trailer utilisation for outbound trunks is far higher at 75.4% than the national average for articulated vehicles, which is 63% according to DfT figures. Based on the utilisation figures alone, APN members save in excess of 150,000 vehicle journeys per year, making a huge contribution to lowering congestion and emissions.

"This huge saving is based on better vehicle utilisation arising from the Hub and spoke model – but it probably underestimates the additional mileage needed if our 800 hauliers were undertaking, or sub-contracting, national journeys to serve all their customer deliveries. As well as being uneconomic, this would give rise to far higher levels of empty running," says Sanders.

"Given that 30% of artic miles in the UK are still running empty, our emphasis on full trailers and balanced trunks is an important contribution to the sustainability of logistics overall."

The pallet network sector is now focusing on sustainability practices in line with COP26 and the need to progressively lower carbon in supply chains.

“The pallet networks will be continuously reviewing practices and APN is committed to helping the sector build on the sustainability wins we have already achieved,” he adds.

Sanders says the exceptionally high delivery volume is a remarkable achievement given the myriad challenges faced by the sector during 2021, including the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic, the increasing impact of Brexit, fuel shortages and economic uncertainty.

“It’s been a very challenging time,” acknowledges Sanders, “but our members have achieved remarkable service levels and continue to improve our safety and service improvement despite the obstacles of the past two years.”

As people returned to the High Street during 2021, the growth in home deliveries slowed, although overall numbers continued to rise. **One fifth** of all pallets delivered by pallet networks were delivered to residential addresses in 2021.

Safety has been a specific focus for APN in 2021, as it contributed to the tail-lift guidance to protect regional drivers and the public. Sanders is pleased to report that Hub-based safety continues to improve. “Pallet networks have an impressive safety record, with just **0.49 accidents per 100,000 pallets** delivered. Our members work closely together and with industry bodies to consistently review best practice and address common problems.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors

The **Association of Pallet Networks** has a membership of eight pallet networks in the UK: Fortec, Pall-Ex, Pallet-Track, Palletforce, Palletline, Palletways, THE Pallet Network and United Pallet Network. These in turn represent 800 hauliers, more than 24,000 vehicles and over 13 million sq ft of warehouse space collectively.

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