

River Freight Pilot Part Two Lessons Learned

Scaling Up: Monthly bulk deliveries on the Thames



Overview

Cross River Partnership (CRP) worked with Absolutely Courier, Antalis, CPBS Marine Services, Complete, TfL London River Services, Mayflower Washroom Solutions, The Northbank BID and the Port of London to deliver the **River Freight Pilot Part Two - Scaling Up: Monthly bulk deliveries on the Thames.**

The six-month trial was the second edition of CRP's 2022 River Freight Pilot and focused on the monthly bulk delivery of goods to demonstrate the economic viability of river freight. Between April and September 2023, monthly bulk deliveries of approx. 5.5 tonnes were loaded at TfL's Woolwich Ferry, Royal Borough of Greenwich, and travelled into central London via the River Thames to Temple Pier in the City of Westminster. E-cargo bikes, operated by Absolutely Courier, were then used to deliver goods from Temple Pier to end customers in the Northbank area and beyond.

The total cost of the vessel was £11,944 for the 6-month trial period and was funded by the Defra-funded Clean Air Logistics for London programme.

Costs Incurred	Further Information
£11,160 (£1,160 per month)	Vessel Hire
£784 (approx. £160 per month)	Vessel Fuel
£2,000 (estimation)	Absolutely Courier Cargo Bike Deliveries



Scaling Up

The trial was the second edition of CRP's River Freight Pilot, which operated one delivery per week, for six weeks, over the summer of 2022. The initial river freight pilot aimed to demonstrate the potential of river freight as a viable and sustainable logistics solution. Goods were delivered on the Thames into central London which resulted in a 78% saving in NOx and an 88% saving in CO2 (in comparison to traditional road-based delivery methods).

The River Freight Pilot Part Two built on learnings from the initial pilot and operated one delivery per month, for a period of six months. The change from weekly to monthly deliveries over a longer time period, and increase in volume of goods delivered, aimed to more successfully integrate into the suppliers' logistics operations and demonstrate the economic viability of river freight at-scale for the businesses and suppliers involved.

Why Bulk Deliveries?

- Maximising the volume of goods transported through bulk deliveries increases the economic viability and environmental benefits of river freight.
- Bulk deliveries reduce the frequency of vessel trips required and therefore the overall cost of vessel hire making it more economically viable. It also helps to reduce the emissions associated with deliveries as there are less trips being made. Additionally, this helps to reduce congestion.
- Bulk deliveries are a viable option for customers who can store goods on site, as exemplified by trial customers Broadgate, London Bridge City, Southbank Centre and Somerset House.
- However, this does mean that it can exclude businesses who are not able to store goods on site so will only work for some organisations.

Trial Promotion

To engage with businesses in the Northbank BID area and promote the trial, a [Q&A session](#) was held with the various partners involved to help promote the service and address any queries. The Q&A session was recorded and promoted by CRP and the Northbank BID to their members and wider network via social media and monthly newsletters.

A [CALL snapshot](#) that provides detail on the trial was published and the trial was also picked up by [Greenfleet](#) who wrote an [article](#) on the monthly bulk deliveries on the Thames.



Click on the image above to view the Business Engagement and Q&A session



Impact & Emissions

The impacts associated with each delivery during the trial were captured across the 6 months so that the success of the trial could be assessed. This data indicated that the trial achieved the following operational outcomes:



4 delivery vans were removed per trip on average



17 km were travelled by the vessel per trip on average



Average of 12.78 miles (20.567 km) on cargo bike

Additionally, the estimated annual emissions savings for the trial can be seen in the table below. This is based on the average of the delivery trips, and is compared to the original delivery methods that occurred before the trial.

Deliverable	Estimated Annual Emissions Savings			
	NOx (kg)	PM 2.5 (kg)	PM 10 (kg)	CO2 (kg)
River Freight Pilot 2	0.23	0.01	0.03	288.27



Learnings

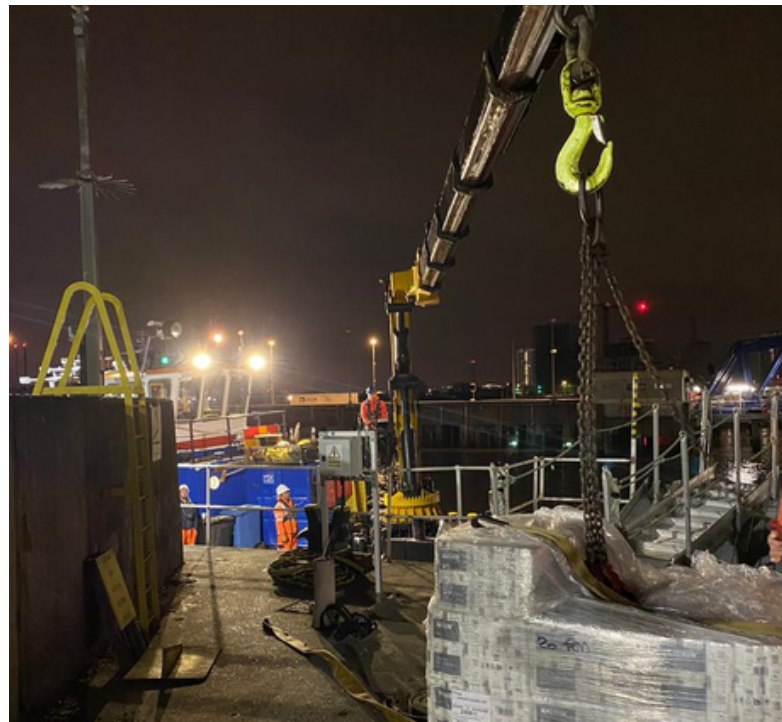
As well as capturing emissions data and operational outcomes the trial provided an opportunity to capture key learnings and challenges. The trial was largely successful and provided further evidence for the viability of river freight, in particular river freight at scale.

- All project partners recognised the benefits of taking part in the initial River Freight Pilot for enabling operational challenges to be addressed.
- Bulk deliveries took place early in the morning (approx. 03:00) to fit with wider operational timings of suppliers, vessel operators and businesses.
- Value of having overnight storage space at Woolwich Ferry to allow goods to be delivered the day before to ensure successful early morning deliveries.
- Limitations of storage space at delivery pier (Temple Pier) recognised as a potential challenge if deliveries had increased further.
- Individual project partner attended each early morning monthly delivery to oversee the delivery process from Woolwich Ferry to Temple Pier. Likely to be a dedicated member of staff in future.
- Business engagement demonstrated a behaviour change for businesses moving towards monthly deliveries as part of procurement approach.

Challenges

Whilst the overall performance of the trial was successful, it is worth noting that there were some challenges. On one occasion the scheduled delivery by river was not able to be made due to an issue with the supplier's ordering system that meant they were not diverted to go by vessel. Unfortunately, by the time the issue had been resolved, the agreed drop off date had passed. This highlights how essential good planning and communications are when undertaking river freight operations, as currently there is not much flexibility or the ability to be reactive when using the river.

Project partners also identified time constraints for business procurement processes, customer onboarding and internal governance leading the trial to be out of scope for some businesses despite initial interest. Consequently, a desire for a longer length trial to enable higher levels of involvement was noted.



Scaling Up Further?

The aim of the River Freight Pilot Part Two was to build on the learnings from the initial River Freight Pilot and demonstrate the economic viability of river freight at-scale.

Following the trial, all partners expressed an interest in progressing further with river freight and building it into operational delivery models. The below outlines further requirements identified by project partners to enable increased scalability of river freight:

- Increased investment and access to pier infrastructure to enable goods to be delivered at most suitable pier locations.
- Improved availability of information related to pier ownership and key contacts. Take a look at the [CRP Thames Directory!](#)
- Increased options and space availability for both overnight storage and at delivery piers to enable bulk deliveries at scale.
- Increased focus on sustainable procurement and delivery methods for businesses recognised as a positive for the long term viability of river freight.



“Northbank is a riverside district which needs to embrace the opportunities that the river can provide. It can support our businesses to transition to more sustainable operations. I am delighted the ‘River Freight Pilot Part Two’ has established the viability of bringing in goods via the River Thames to local organisations to reduce carbon, air pollution and congestion.”

Alison Gregory, Director of Placemaking and Sustainability, The Northbank Business Improvement District

“Everyone involved in the trial was positive and 100% committed to making the trial work. We have proved that the concept of utilising the river for freight works, it just requires the partnership working between all agencies to continue and make a change for the better.”

Robert Strong, Depot Manager, Antalis

CRP river and logistics related reports and guidance:

[Light Freight: Design Solutions for Thames Freight Infrastructure](#)

[River Freight Monitoring: Butler’s Wharf and Dartford Pier](#)

[Getting Started with River Freight: A Guide for Businesses](#)

[River Freight Pilot Case Study: Summer 2022](#)

[A Deep Dive: London Light Freight River Trial](#)

If you would like further information about anything that has been included in this guidance, please get in touch:

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