

# Move to revive freight rail plan

■ Central Railway seeks financial backing for £10bn project ■ Documents reveal government's thinking on rejected proposal

By Robert Wright,  
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Directors of Central Railway, which hopes to build a high-capacity freight railway from the Channel Tunnel to Liverpool, will attempt to revive the project after a key government decision went against it.

The attempt to resurrect the scheme follows the receipt of documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, which reveal government thinking on the project. The documents show that some ministers and officials had been enthusiastic about the project's potential but that finan-

cial concerns had ruined its chances.

Alan Stevens, chief executive, has written to shareholders to say the company plans to seek corporate and financial supporters who will be able to convince politicians that the project has enough backing to fund the lengthy approval process before work can start on the £10bn project.

Mr Stevens told the Financial Times that directors might also explore whether the project could be reshaped as a public private partnership project.

"We recognised that we needed to put together something more

in order to convince the government," Mr Stevens said. "We assume that the issue is we have to come in with more redoubtable partners as part of the consortium."

Mr Stevens declined to name which companies Central Railway had approached, but they are likely to have included construction and logistics companies and shipping lines.

In March last year, the Department for Transport rejected Central Railway's request for it to introduce a hybrid parliamentary bill that would have given it permission to acquire land and undertake other work necessary

for the project. A hybrid bill is generally seen as the most cost-effective way to win permission for large transport projects.

Central Railway was listed on Ofex, London's third-tier market, but dropped its listing after the government's decision.

The company has been slow in responding to the department's decision, partly because of the death in November of Andrew Gritten, the company's chairman and a driving force behind the project.

The government said at the time that it was unconvinced financial backers would provide the necessary funding for the

project. It was concerned it might be forced to pay for the project's completion if the company failed during construction.

The project is intended to make use of the trackbed of the now mostly closed Great Central Railway and other closed lines to build a new railway where bridges and tunnels would be large enough to allow carriage of far larger loads than is the norm on British railways.

Central Railway has not yet decided whether to seek a fresh hybrid bill or to take another route.

The DfT said the reasons for last year's decision still stood.