

Logistics can be as key as steelmaking

James Dunlop
Comment

The threat of closure at the Scunthorpe steelworks generated national uproar. It is more than mere British eccentricity that designates emotional significance to heritage industries. For generations they have been the backbone of economic growth, anchoring local communities and forging a shared identity.

Saving British Steel is a landmark achievement that has returned critical national infrastructure (CNI) to the top of the political agenda. Industries including rail and broadband have been recognised by successive governments as CNI but much less has been said about the crucial role logistics plays in securing our domestic supply chain, delivering goods to homes across the UK.

Manufacturing, warehousing and distribution infrastructure is the truest and most vulnerable foundation of the British economy. Modern expectations of next-day delivery, smooth returns and tracking technology, not to mention our country's green commitments, are reliant on wi-fi, automated vehicles, robotics and smart material handling equipment. Likewise, data centres and temperature-controlled warehouses, essential for storing food and medicine, depend on uninterrupted electrical power to meet safety standards.

Some areas of the UK face a ten-year waiting list to access power. In a power-constrained economy, plug-and-play energy infrastructure will be not just a perk but an operational necessity.

Trump's tariff measures are the latest indication that globalisation may be less stable than we think. Against a context of deglobalisation, the UK must broaden its criteria for CNI projects. We have been impressed by the vision, expertise, support and commitment of the UK government to delivering on the UK's supply chain and digital infrastructure requirements.

Scunthorpe highlighted our vulnerability and is thankfully resolved but true resilience demands robust logistics infrastructure. Collaboration between public and private investment is key.

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