

Delivering the future

Instant gratification:

The future of supply chains, home deliveries and parcels.



**Parcel
hero.**

**Industry
report**

Author: David Jinks M.I.L.T | Head of Consumer Research | david.jinks@parcelhero.com | parcelhero.com

Executive summary

How far away is instant gratification: the near-immediate delivery of goods and parcels? This report looks at how the way we order and receive goods will change between now and 2030, and how it might look by 2060 and beyond. In the near future, could the delivery options available to a house even come to affect what that house is worth?

- **Today's cutting edge is tomorrow's baseline:** the one-hour delivery slot, once a genuine novelty, is already the standard against which every new service is judged. 15 minutes has become the target time for urban grocery deliveries for companies such as Gopuff.
- **Drones are no longer science fiction, but they are also not yet routine:** predictions that drone networks would be as familiar as postal vans by 2018 proved wildly premature, but UK airspace regulation changed again on 1 January 2026 to embed compliance directly into aircraft and pilot requirements, clearing some of the ground for wider commercial rollout.
- **The autonomous last-mile market is growing at nearly a quarter every year:** analysts value the global autonomous last-mile delivery market at around \$28 billion in 2025, projecting growth to over \$228 billion by 2035 at a compound annual growth rate above 23% – driven by ground delivery robots rather than the flying drones that tend to capture the headlines.
- **Warehousing is heading below ground, onto rooftops and into the neighbourhood:** the UK Warehousing Association predicts a shift toward larger, taller, part-underground automated stores with rooftop solar and even drone landing strips, alongside a parallel rise of small urban 'dark stores' that shrink the last mile to a few streets.
- **The jig's not up for the gig economy, it is being automated around:** fragmented courier networks and platform-based delivery remain central to city logistics, but they increasingly sit alongside, rather than in place of, robots and autonomous vehicles handling the more predictable, repeatable legs of the journey.
- **Delivery access may already be a hidden factor in house prices:** early commentary suggests homes under repeated low-level drone routes, near fulfilment hubs or on unreliable last-mile routes could see value effects in both directions – a genuinely new variable for the property market to absorb.
- **By 2050, the shape of logistics could look radically different depending on which future arrives:** Deutsche Post DHL's long-running scenario work sketches five plausible, starkly different worlds for logistics in 2050, from mega-efficient green cities to a fragmented, protectionist planet – a reminder that the far future is a set of possibilities, not a single forecast.
- **The furthest frontier of 'instant' delivery is not a van at all:** physicists working on quantum teleportation have already moved a particle's state across three metres with complete reliability, and openly discuss – while stressing enormous practical barriers – the theoretical possibility of 'transporting' larger objects in the very long term.

None of this suggests that gratification will ever be truly instant. But it suggests that the gap between "I want it" and "it has arrived" will keep shrinking for as long as there is commercial and human appetite to shrink it. And the infrastructure built to close that gap, from delivery hubs to drone corridors, will increasingly shape the streets, skies and property markets we all live among.



Autonomous delivery robots could become an everyday sight in towns and cities by 2030. (Copyright iStock)

1. The last mile becomes the last minute

In the future, the way we order and deliver goods will be radically transformed. That sentence could have been written at almost any point over the past fifteen years, and it would still have been true. What changes each time is the baseline. A decade ago, next-day delivery was the mark of a serious online retailer. Today it is the minimum expectation, and the genuinely competitive promise is measured in hours, or in the busiest UK city centres, in minutes. Just look at the increasing speed of grocery deliveries. In certain areas of the UK, Amazon promises to deliver in 30 minutes, Tesco's Whoosh in 20 and Gopuff in just 15 minutes.

The question this report addresses is not whether delivery will keep getting faster – it plainly will – but how far away truly instant gratification really is, what has to happen technologically, socially and legally, to get there – and what the knock-on effects might be. Some of those effects are obvious: fewer vans idling outside houses, less packaging, different jobs. Others are much less obvious, including the

prospect, discussed later in this report, that the delivery options available at a given address could start to influence how much that address is worth.

To make sense of a genuinely uncertain future, this report splits its predictions into two horizons:

The first covers the period to around 2030: technologies that are already being trialled or deployed today, and which are highly likely to become mainstream within the next few years.

The second looks to 2060 and beyond, drawing chiefly on long-range scenario work by organisations including Deutsche Post DHL, the UK Warehousing Association (UKWA), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Parcelhero's own research and the UK Government Office for Science, alongside more speculative territory where physics, rather than logistics, sets the outer limit of what 'instant' could ever mean.



Amazon's drone services are expanding in the UK and the USA and could become common by 2030. (Courtesy Amazon)

2. Predictions for 2030: The near future of instant

The next few years will deliver a steady compression of the time between click and delivery, driven by four parallel developments: aerial and ground drones, robots and droids, autonomous vehicles and an increasingly 'thinking' supply chain that starts to anticipate orders before they are placed.

2.1 Wings over suburbia: Drones take off?

Predictions that drone delivery networks would be as familiar a sight as the postal van by 2018 have not aged well, and are a useful reminder that hardware is rarely the hardest part of a new delivery technology – regulation and public acceptance usually are. Airspace safety, noise, privacy and liability have taken far longer to resolve than the flight technology itself.

That regulatory picture is now moving faster. From 1 January 2026, the UK's Civil Aviation Authority framework for drones changed again, replacing earlier transitional arrangements with UK class

markings and clearer, weight-based rules for the Open Category in which most commercial delivery flights would sit. ^[1]

The intention behind the changes is not to restrict drone use but to embed compliance into the aircraft and pilot requirements themselves, in order to support long-term growth in an increasingly complex airspace – precisely the kind of groundwork that a genuine drone delivery network needs before it can scale beyond pilot schemes.

Ever quick off the mark, on 12 January 2026, Amazon launched a new drone delivery service – albeit covering only a very limited area around its Darlington logistics hub. The service requires a very specific set of elements to align in order to make it work, including a distribution centre near a semi-urban area, houses with gardens, no groupings of high-rise buildings and a host of other restrictions. As such, this is a pioneering trial and far from the beginning of mainstream drone services.

Nonetheless, it's a fascinating coincidence that Darlington is where the world's first public, steam-powered railway to carry both passengers and freight opened 201 years earlier, in 1825, ushering in the world of global supply-chains we know today.

Already, drones have a useful role in dropping medical supplies to remote locations such as the Orkneys and, by 2030, drones could have a part to play in rural and semi-rural deliveries, medical supply runs and time-critical parcels. Some analysts claim aerial delivery drones are the fastest-growing single vehicle category within the broader autonomous last-mile market, projected to grow at close to 25% a year, even though ground robots are expected to carry the larger overall share of volume. ^[2]

Meanwhile, across the Pond, Amazon's Prime Air drone services are expanding rapidly. Amazon drone services are already operating in 11 locations, spanning states including Arizona, Florida, Michigan, Texas and Nebraska.

New launches are planned around Chicago, Atlanta, Cleveland, Syracuse and Boise, with individual Prime Air hubs able to serve several surrounding communities within a roughly 7.5-mile radius. Amazon plans to bring Prime Air to nearly 500 US towns and cities by the end of the year.

2.2 Droids, robots and the automated pavement



A fleet of delivery waiting to start the day's service in Downtown Miami. Droids are already firmly established in many towns and cities across the globe including Milton Keynes and Cambridge in the UK. (Copyright iStock)

Final-mile delivery on foot, or rather on wheels, is already underway. Small, pavement-navigating delivery robots are operating commercially in a growing number of UK and US towns and cities, and the trend line points firmly upward.

The autonomous last-mile delivery market as a whole is expected to grow from around \$28 billion in 2025 to more than \$228 billion by 2035, and ground delivery bots – rather than drones or self-driving vans – are forecast to hold the largest share of that market, at close to 65%, driven by driver shortages and rising labour costs in conventional courier fleets. ^[2]

Droids such as Starship have become familiar sights in UK cities such as Milton Keynes and Cambridge, serving retailers such as Co-Op, Uber Eats and Just Eat. Globally, Starship droids passed 10 million deliveries in April 2026, with the fleet having covered more than 22 million kilometres (13.7 million miles). Retail is expected to remain the largest single area of application for autonomous last-mile delivery by 2035, and short-range journeys under 20 kilometres will continue to dominate volumes, since this is where robots and drones offer the clearest cost advantage over a human courier and a van. ^[2]

By 2030, a delivery robot trundling along a pavement, or waiting patiently at a front gate for a resident to come and collect a parcel, should feel unremarkable in many towns – the droid equivalent of the bicycle courier a decade earlier.

2.3 The driverless delivery fleet



Sweden's Einride has developed AI-autonomous electric trucks for final mile deliveries that are being approved for US and EU operations. (Courtesy Einride)

Beyond the pavement, autonomous vans and trucks are moving from trial to limited commercial service on longer, more predictable routes: motorway trunking between regional hubs, rather than the unpredictable stop-start of a residential street.

For example, in the US, Aurora has been operating driverless customer deliveries between Houston and Dallas along the I-45 since 2025. Similarly, as Parcelhero's recent report, Putting the AI in Supply ChAIns, revealed, Einride's Autonomous Trucks are already approved and operational on roads across Europe and the United States.



In the US, Aurora has been operating driverless customer deliveries between Houston and Dallas along the I-45. (Courtesy Aurora)

Self-driving trucks and vans are the third main vehicle category that is expected to grow steadily – even though ground robots and drones will likely outpace them in percentage terms over the next decade. [2]

The likeliest 2030 picture is therefore a hybrid one: autonomous or driver-assisted vehicles handling the long, predictable middle mile between fulfilment centres, with robots, drones and human couriers competing and co-operating over the final few hundred metres to the front door – the genuinely difficult, variable part of the journey that has resisted full automation for the longest.

Your say:

In August 2026, we asked Parcelhero's LinkedIn followers 'By 2030, what will handle most of your last-mile deliveries?'

- Delivery drones: 27%
- Pavement robots/droids: 5%
- Autonomous vans & trucks: 11%
- Human couriers (still): 55%

2.4 The gig economy grows up



Will gig economy workers be starting to be replaced by robotics in the near future or will humans continue to play a role? (Copyright iStock)

Crowd-sourced, platform-based delivery – riders and drivers picking up jobs through an app rather than a traditional employment contract – is not about to disappear. If anything, it is likely to be the human complement to automation for the messiest, least predictable deliveries, such as the flat with the broken buzzer, the rural address a satnav cannot find, or the parcel that needs signing for by a specific person.

Ziegler Group's review of logistics trends heading into 2026 points to a shift in the nature of automation itself: not replacement of the workforce, but what it describes as 'cognitive human-machine orchestration', in which warehouse and delivery staff work alongside AI and robotics, with augmented-reality-guided picking and human planners overseeing fleets of AI-driven tools as system orchestrators. ^[3]

Applied to home delivery, that points toward gig platforms increasingly being directed by software that reallocates jobs, prices and routes in real time, rather than by a human dispatcher.

The same report describes AI moving from merely predictive to genuinely 'agentic': supply chain systems that do not just flag a problem but renegotiate freight rates, reroute shipments during a port closure or adjust inventory levels without waiting for a human decision – described as 'self-healing' supply chains. ^[3]

Your say:

In August 2026, we asked Parcelhero's LinkedIn followers: 'Is the gig economy the future of delivery, or just a stopgap until automation catches up?'

- It's the permanent backbone: 0%
- A stopgap, gone in a decade: 0%
- It shrinks to niche deliveries: 28%
- A blend of human + automation: 71%

2.5 The fridge that shops for itself: The Internet of Things

Research by IoT Analytics indicates that the number of IoT-connected devices will reach 39 billion in 2030 and 50 billion by 2035 ^[4]. The idea that a smart fridge might reorder milk before the household even notices it is running low has been a staple prediction for years. What has changed is the plumbing behind it: cheaper sensors, ubiquitous connectivity and, increasingly, AI models that can forecast a specific household's consumption pattern rather than relying on a blunt subscription schedule.

The same forecasting logic is already reshaping the warehouse end of the chain. Consumer-facing convenience will only work if the stock is already close to where it is needed, and retailers are increasingly using AI to position inventory before demand is fully expressed, rather than reacting once an order has been placed.

The practical 2030 version of the Internet of Things prediction is therefore less about a chatty fridge and more about invisible, continuous replenishment. Subscription and repeat-purchase categories – such as nappies, coffee, cleaning products and pet food – will increasingly arrive on a predictive schedule set by an algorithm rather than a shopping list, with the explicit 'order' step disappearing from many everyday purchases altogether.

2.6 Greener, quieter, closer: Micro-fulfilment and the last mile

Perhaps the single clearest trend shaping delivery speed by 2030 is not a vehicle at all, but a change in where stock is kept. Large, centralised warehouses on the edge of town are increasingly being supplemented by small, automated urban hubs – micro-fulfilment centres and ‘dark stores’ – that hold a curated, high-demand range close to the customer.

Rising customer expectations for speed, combined with higher transport costs, are driving logistics networks towards hyper-local hubs. Micro-fulfilment centres and urban ‘dark stores’ are increasingly used to shorten last-mile delivery, and by the end of 2026 the emphasis is expected to shift further away from large centralised warehouses towards flexible, automated urban units that use AI to position high-demand products closer to consumers, reducing both lead times and emissions. ^[3]

The UK Warehousing Association’s (UKWA) long-range forecasting predicts warehouses will also become larger and taller, making better use of the space assigned for industrial development. Roof space will be carefully divided between solar panels, skylights to improve natural light levels and perhaps even landing strips for drones, while the space below ground may be used more often, with automated storage systems sunk deeper into the landscape to reduce noise and visual impact. ^[5]

For the customer, the effect of all this by 2030 should be a genuinely shorter, greener last mile: stock physically closer to where it will be consumed, moved on foot, by bike, by robot or by electric van rather than diesel lorry, and increasingly delivered within a window measured in minutes rather than hours.

2.7 The Law of Unintended Consequences

Faster, more automated delivery brings a familiar shadow: new opportunities for new kinds of crime and new social divides. A 21st-century highwayman intercepting an automated parcel drone or droid is a vivid image, but the more mundane version – porch piracy, parcel theft, and increasingly sophisticated

fraud targeting delivery notifications – already represents a significant cost to the industry, and one that better tracking and secure drop points are only partially solving.

More significant, potentially, is a widening gap between well-served and poorly-served areas. The economics of automated delivery favour density: it is far cheaper to run a drone corridor, a fleet of pavement robots or a micro-fulfilment hub in a dense urban or suburban area than across a scattered rural population. Left unmanaged, that could harden existing geographic inequalities – well-connected postcodes gaining ever-faster, ever-cheaper delivery, while remote or lower-income areas are left with slower, costlier service, echoing longstanding concerns about a widening urban-rural divide in access to services more broadly.

Cybersecurity is the other unglamorous but critical unintended consequence. As warehouse management and delivery systems move further into the cloud and become more interconnected, they become more attractive targets, and logistics professionals are increasingly expected to collaborate directly with law enforcement to share threat intelligence and coordinate responses to attacks on this newly critical infrastructure.

With warehouse management and other data-rich systems increasingly operating in the cloud, new crimes will become possible. Cybersecurity strategies will need to evolve to address increasingly sophisticated threats, including ransomware, advanced persistent threats and attacks targeting Internet of Things devices, with logistics professionals expected to collaborate regularly with law enforcement to share intelligence and coordinate effective responses to cyber incidents. ^[6]

2.8 Location, location, location: Delivery and property values



Will living on a drone delivery route become as important as good transport and wi-fi networks are today when choosing a house? (Copyright iStock)

As drone delivery moves from trial to routine operation over quiet suburban streets, early commentary from surveyors and property analysts suggests the flight paths themselves could start to matter to buyers.

A property with reliable, fast, low-cost delivery access – within easy reach of a micro-fulfilment hub, on a well-served drone or robot corridor, in an area with dependable broadband for the smart-home ordering systems described above – could plausibly command a premium over a similarly located but poorly served address. It's the equivalent of fibre broadband availability and mobile signal strength already being quietly factored into how estate agents and buyers assess a property today. By 2030, "what's the delivery like round here?" may sit alongside school catchment areas and transport links as an ordinary question for house-hunters to ask.

Conversely, living under a busy delivery drone route could become the new equivalent of living near pylons or an airport flightpath. A few occasional medical drone flights over open countryside may have little or no measurable effect on value. But a high-frequency commercial delivery route over residential gardens is different: properties directly under repeated low-level routes, homes near delivery hubs, fulfilment centres or launch pads, and houses near approach, descent, hover or drop zones

could all be affected, particularly in rural or quiet suburban settings where drone noise stands out, and in higher-value properties where peace and privacy form a significant part of the price. ^[6]

Your say:

In August 2026, we asked Parcelhero's LinkedIn followers: 'Could being on a drone delivery route actually add value to your home?'

- Buyers will pay more for faster delivery: 80%
- Only in towns & cities; not rural areas: 0%
- Noise & privacy issues cancel out the advantages: 20%
- Being on a drone path will lower house prices: 0%



Underground cargo transport networks and dispatch centres could be part of the future of deliveries by 2060. (Copyright iStock)

3. Predictions for 2060 and beyond: How soon is now?

Predicting the next four years is hard enough. Predicting the next forty is a different exercise altogether, and the organisations that do it professionally are admirably honest about the limits of the enterprise.

Rather than offering a single forecast, the most rigorous long-range works on the future of logistics – notably Deutsche Post DHL’s landmark Logistics 2050 study – first published in 2012 but alarmingly prescient today – deliberately sets out multiple, starkly different scenarios, precisely because the point of the exercise is to stretch thinking and stress-test strategy, not to predict a single winning outcome.^[7]

3.1 Five different worlds: The DHL Logistics 2050 scenarios

Deutsche Post DHL’s Logistics 2050 study, developed with foresight specialists Z_punkt alongside experts from bodies including the Fraunhofer Institute for Material Flow and Logistics and Greenpeace, sketches five deliberately divergent pictures of the world in 2050, each with sharply different implications for how goods – and by extension, parcels – move around.

Scenario 1, ‘Untamed Economy – Impending Collapse’, looks at a world characterised by unchecked materialism and consumption. A global transportation supergrid ensures rapid exchange of goods between centres of consumption, but as massive climate change inches closer, natural disasters occur more often and disrupt supply chains frequently.^[7]

Scenario 2, 'Mega-Efficiency in Megacities', by contrast, imagines highly automated, green-growth cities running their own underground cargo transport networks and dispatch centres, with dominant logistics providers effectively becoming city utilities – running deliveries the way a water company runs pipes today – while rural areas are comparatively neglected.

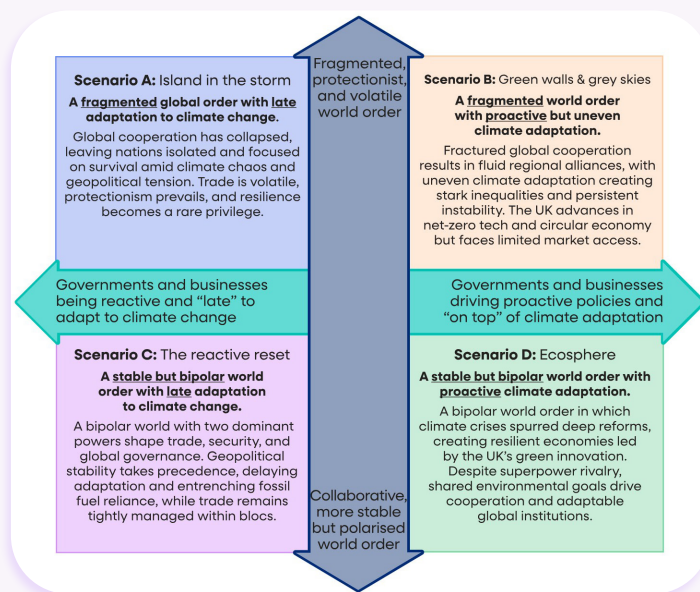
Scenario 3, 'Customized Lifestyles' imagines a world where 3D printing and home 'fabbing' have become so pervasive that consumers design and manufacture much of what they consume at home or in local 'FabShops', dramatically shrinking the need for long-distance transport of finished goods, even as logistics providers pivot to moving encrypted design data and raw materials instead of parcels.

Another vintage but still highly credible prediction, which appears in Parcelhero's own 2015 report on the future of Amazon – 'Amazon's Prime Ambition' – also forecast the eventual growth of 3D printing in the supply chain, following Amazon's move to patent 3D devices that will manufacture items while the vehicle was en route to the consumer.

The remaining two scenarios from DHL's 2050 report are less optimistic: Scenario 4, 'Paralyzing Protectionism', describes a fragmented, deglobalised world in which logistics becomes a strategic, government-controlled industry navigating hostile trade blocs. This scenario seemed incredibly far-fetched in the heyday of globalisation when the DHL report was written, but now the use of tariffs to enforce political and strategic objectives, rather than simply as an economic tool, has become all too familiar.

Finally, scenario 5, 'Global Resilience – Local Adaptation' imagines a world so battered by climate disruption that resilience, not speed, becomes the industry's guiding principle, with huge regional warehouses acting as buffers against repeated supply failures rather than the lean, just-in-time model of today.

It is worth noting how directly these fifteen-year-old scenarios anticipate developments already visible today: underground automated storage and hyper-localised urban fulfilment now feature explicitly in the UK Warehousing Association's 2050 forecasting, while the UK Government Office for Science's own 2040 scenario work for global supply chains is built around strikingly similar axes of geopolitical fragmentation versus co-operation. ^[8]



In its June 2026 report 'Global Supply Chains: A Foresight Report on Risk and Resilience', the UK Government outlines what it describes as four 'plausible yet deliberately stretching geopolitical and climate futures for global supply chains'.
(Courtesy Government Office for Science)



One of DHL's potential scenarios for the world of logistics in 2060 is titled 'Global Resilience – Local Adaptation'. It imagines a world so battered by climate disruption that resilience, not speed, becomes the industry's guiding principle, with huge, green, regional warehouses acting as buffers against repeated supply failures. (Copyright iStock)

3.2 Tunnels, supergrids and the Physical Internet

Several of the more ambitious ideas floated for the far future of delivery share a common theme: taking traffic off the roads entirely, whether by going underground, overhead, or by treating physical goods more like packets of data. Amazon's published patents have, at various points, described an underground freight network broadly comparable to a much earlier concept nicknamed 'the mole', alongside drones that dock with moving trucks to make satellite deliveries beyond their own battery range, and drones that link together to combine their lifting power for heavier loads.

The DHL Logistics 2050 scenarios go further still, envisaging city-wide underground cargo transport systems running automated freight in circular routes around urban centres, with dispatch hubs on the periphery and loading points built directly into the basements of shops and factories – in effect, a metro system for parcels rather than people, and a natural complement to the rooftop drone strips and sub-surface automated storage that UKWA sees as a realistic feature of British warehouses well before 2050.

A related, and rather elegant, idea is the 'physical internet': a long-term ambition to transform how physical goods are handled, moved and used by applying the logic of internet data transfer – standardised containers acting like data packets, routed dynamically through shared, interoperable networks of hubs – to global logistics, in pursuit of far greater efficiency and sustainability than today's fragmented, company-by-company freight networks allow.

Whether any of this arrives by 2060 in quite the form imagined depends heavily on which of the DHL scenarios, or something closer to the UK Government's more sobering 2040 risk analysis, turns out to be closer to reality. That analysis is a useful corrective to unbridled optimism: it finds that global supply chains behave as dense, interconnected networks rather than simple chains, that systemic risk is heavily concentrated in a small number of critical hubs, chokepoints and 'nexus' suppliers, and that climate change and geopolitical fragmentation are likely to act as risk multipliers on each other well

before mid-century, regardless of which emissions pathway the world ends up on. ^[8]

3.3 Floating warehouses and vans that print your order

Among the more eye-catching ideas to have emerged from patent filings and speculative design work are floating, moving warehouses served entirely by drones, and delivery vans fitted with onboard 3D printers so that certain items are manufactured en route, arriving finished at the customer's door rather than being picked from existing stock. Both ideas point toward the same underlying shift: decoupling 'delivery' from the assumption that a finished product must already exist, sitting in a warehouse, before an order can be fulfilled.

The UK Warehousing Association's own long-range thinking backs this trajectory from a different angle, predicting that 3D printing will increasingly be used within warehouses themselves to create bespoke solutions on demand – automating the assembly of a gift pack, say, or replacing a missing button on a garment – stitching together off-the-shelf components to meet increasingly specialised orders, rather than holding every conceivable finished variant in stock. ^[5]

Whether floating warehouses or airborne printing vans ever become commonplace by 2060 is genuinely uncertain – these remain closer to patent filings and thought experiments than committed engineering programmes. But the underlying direction of stock and manufacturing capacity moving progressively closer to, and eventually onto, the vehicle making the final delivery, is consistent with everything else in this report: the last mile keeps shrinking, and the definition of what counts as 'in stock' keeps loosening.

3.4 The ‘fabbing’ revolution: When the factory comes to consumers



By 2060 ‘fabbing’ could be at the centre of home deliveries. 3D printing is currently in its infancy but could be a key part of urban supply chains within 30 years. (Copyright iStock)

If DHL’s ‘Customized Lifestyles’ scenario, or something like it, does come to pass, the entire premise of home delivery changes. Rather than a parcel travelling from a distant factory to a front door, individualised products – clothing, tools, toys, even parts of vehicles – would be designed by, or for, the consumer and produced close to, or inside, the home itself, using home “fabbers” or local FabShops for more complex items.

Today, not only can most products be customised, but in this scenario they can also be self-designed and printed in 3D, either at home or in so-called FabShops. Acquisition costs for a 3D printer have declined to the point that home fabbers may be found in around 2 billion households by 2050, similar to the proliferation of washing machines at the turn of the century. ^[7]

This does not eliminate logistics so much as change what it moves: raw materials, cartridges, and above all data – design files, licensing information, quality and safety verification – rather than finished goods travelling long distances. The couriers and warehouses of 2060 in this world might spend as much effort managing secure data transfer as they do managing physical parcels, a shift already visible in embryonic form in today’s digital product passports and blockchain-based provenance tracking for high-value goods.

It is worth being candid about how uncertain this particular strand of the future is. UNIDO’s 2050 industrial foresight work, published far more recently than the original DHL study, takes a notably more cautious line on additive manufacturing, arguing that altering global production hubs would require 3D printing to become cost-effective at producing complex final products at commercial scale, and that this is not currently on the horizon – global trade in 3D printing equipment remained under \$2 billion in 2023, a modest figure against the scale of global manufacturing. ^[9]

The honest position, then, is that home fabbing remains a live and plausible long-term scenario rather than a settled prediction – one of several futures worth planning for, not the one the evidence currently favours most strongly.

Your say:

In August 2026, we asked Parcelhero’s LinkedIn followers ‘Which “far future” delivery idea do you actually think we’ll actually see by 2060?’

- Underground freight tunnels: 44%
- Floating/airborne warehouses: 11%
- Home & in-transit 3D printing: 44%
- Something else entirely: 0%

3.5 Beyond delivery: The far edge of instant

If the entire point of a delivery is to close the gap between wanting something and having it, the theoretical end state of that trend is not a faster van, a smarter drone or a cleverer warehouse – it is the elimination of transit altogether. It's an unusual topic to end a supply chain report on, but it is where the logic of 'ever more instant' ultimately leads, and physicists have taken the question seriously enough to test it.

Researchers at Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands have shown, for the first time, that it is possible to teleport information encoded into sub-atomic particles between two points three metres apart with complete reliability, exploiting the way entangled particles share a merged identity regardless of the distance between them. The demonstration was described as an important first step towards a quantum internet, with secure communication as the most immediately realistic application.^[10]



Experiments in moving sub-atomic particles are already being carried out in laboratories today. Far into the future, what impact will the 'quantum internet' have on transporting goods? (Copyright iStock)

The physicist leading the experiment was careful to frame the wider possibility honestly: if a person is nothing more than a collection of atoms strung together in a particular way, then in principle it should be possible to teleport that arrangement from one place to another, but in practice this remains extremely unlikely for the foreseeable future – while stressing that no fundamental law of physics rules it out entirely, and that ruling it out completely would itself be a dangerous claim to make.^[10]

Nobody serious is forecasting that a parcel, still less a person, will be teleported to a doorstep by 2060. The nearest practical application – a secure, unhackable quantum communications network – is itself still some way off, and the researchers involved were candid that scaling the original three-metre experiment up to distances of even a few hundred metres remains a formidable technical challenge, let alone the vastly greater leap required to move genuinely large, complex objects. But it is a useful marker of the outer boundary of the question this report set out to answer. Somewhere between a ten-minute grocery delivery and instantaneous teleportation lies the entire, unfinished project of modern logistics – and everything in between is, in the end, simply a matter of degree.



The city of 2060 may have its delivery and freight networks built into the core of its infrastructure. (Copyright iStock)

Conclusion:

How far away is instant gratification?

For everyday, low-value, locally available goods, instant gratification is not a future prediction at all – it is close to arriving already, in the form of ten-minute grocery apps, pavement robots and increasingly predictive replenishment that removes the need to place an order in the first place. For most other goods, the honest answer by 2030 is “within the hour, in most places, most of the time”, powered by a hybrid of autonomous vehicles on the long legs of the journey and drones, robots or gig couriers over the final few hundred metres.

Beyond that, the picture necessarily becomes a set of possibilities rather than a single forecast. Whether 2060 brings mega-efficient green cities running deliveries through underground tube networks, a fragmented and protectionist world where logistics becomes a strategic national asset, or a genuinely decentralised economy where the ‘delivery’ is really

just a data file sent to a 3D printer in the spare room, depends on choices about climate adaptation, trade policy and technology investment being made largely in the current decade, not the coming ones.

What does seem reasonably certain is that the infrastructure built to serve this appetite for speed – drone corridors, delivery hubs, robot depots – will increasingly become a visible, physical feature of where we live, not just an invisible process happening behind a warehouse wall.

That, in turn, is precisely why delivery access could become a genuine factor in how a property is valued: the speed and quality of the parcels arriving at a front door may end up mattering almost as much to a future buyer as its number of bedrooms, garage access and internet speed.

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Delivering the future, how close are we to instant delivery?

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15 minutes is now the target for some urban grocery deliveries

23%+ annual growth projected for the autonomous last-mile delivery market

\$228 billion projected global autonomous last-mile market by 2035

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