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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

INLAND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Working Party on Combined Transport  
Working Party on Rail Transport

Joint Meeting of the Working Parties on  
Combined Transport and Rail Transport  
(First session, 19 April 2001,  
agenda item 3 (b))

**THE ROLE OF RAILWAYS IN  
THE PROMOTION OF COMBINED TRANSPORT**

**Problems encountered in combined transport operations**

**Transmitted by the Chairman of the Working Party**

**Note:** In accordance with the decision of the Working Party during its thirty-third session (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/87, para. 28) “..to analyse a few selected international AGTC rail lines taking account of information to be provided by combined transport operators with a view to highlighting operational and administrative problems faced by international combined transport services”, the UN/ECE secretariat reproduces below information transmitted by the Chairman of the Working Party on this issue.

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## **THE ROLE OF THE RAILWAYS IN THE PROMOTION OF COMBINED TRANSPORT**

1. At the previous session on 10-11 April 2000, the Working Party on Combined Transport (WP.24) had decided to continue its investigations, with the help of all the partners in the combined transport chain, with a view to identifying the origins of the decline in quality of railway services.
2. WP.24's concern arises from observing an important drop in rail traffic since late 1998. The gravity of the situation can be measured in relation to the constant increases in combined transport of earlier years which suddenly stopped, bringing about a de facto loss.
3. The matter became urgent in the face of the new expansion of demand for continental services to cover the container movements generated by the future 8 to 10,000 TEU vessels with limited stopovers but handling large volumes of concentrated flows.
4. WP.24 is required to go beyond mere surveillance and through the medium of its members tackle and participate in the improvement of this quality without, however, taking the place of the competent structures nor still less taking action which would duplicate ongoing activities. On the contrary, WP.24 must encourage them and be attentive to results.
5. It may be noted that for some time now a mobilization has become apparent, all the way from the operator level to the heart of the European Union, taking the form of assessments of all kinds relating to the railway offer and combined transport in particular, in the context of research programmes.
6. For its part, WP.24 has requested the attention and collaboration of its colleagues in the UN/ECE Working Party on Rail Transport concerning the development of the combined transport market and the inadequate contribution of the railways. In principle, an informal meeting, mainly concerned with border crossings, should have taken place in June, but was postponed for various reasons.
7. The office of the Chairman and the secretariat of WP.24 made every effort to continue their contacts and official steps to clarify the case as far as possible and identify proposals for initiatives.
8. Originally, observation of the situation was to involve AGTC (European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations) routes Berlin-Moscow, Sopron/Budapest-Istanbul/Thessaloniki, Belgium-Spain and United Kingdom-Hungary.

9. Unfortunately, in view of the very short deadline (with a holiday period in the meantime), the relevant information is proving difficult or even impossible to obtain. The office of the Chairman and the secretariat have therefore not waited but have concentrated their approach on individuals and organizations more readily available during the period preceding the session.

10. Combined transport is particularly sensitive to the quality of railway services but any improvement it undergoes has repercussions on other traffic flows and demonstrates the attractiveness of the railways. While the secretariat has concentrated on the work of the International Union of Railways (UIC) and the managers of the Trans-European Railway (TER) Project, the office of the Chairman has taken on the task of working out what actual railway services are provided.

11. Initially, the office of the Chairman had provided itself with a schema for its observations (annex) but in the course of informal meetings other considerations have been superimposed, bringing into play the realism and even the confidence which needs to be maintained among all parties, and can be interpreted as greater stringency and closer partnership.

#### **A. STRINGENCY**

12. Combined transport is the result of the services of a group of agents of which the railways (and inland waterways) are the key element for the longest overland sector. The logistic chain also depends on the services provided by the railways.

13. This is a major stake for the railways which furnish an offer of some weight in an expanding market where the unitization of goods relies heavily on intermodal transport units (ITU (containers, swap bodies, ETC)).

14. The quality of the railway offer, however, is unstable and even inadequate. It seems that railway companies in a constant process of restructuring for many years now are encountering problems, particularly in their share of ITU forwarding.

15. The fundamental question concerns the capacity that the railway operator can really make available. It is not easy for offers defined by agreement to be permanently guaranteed. The flimsy level of dependability is mainly a question of traction, in other words, the timely availability of locomotives and even more of drivers. It seems that train paths and routes are not really sources of irregularities; these would seem to come from traction.

16. An appeal should be made to railway companies to draw up realistic and stringent diagnoses of traction capacities and to concentrate on means of reinforcing them, perhaps by assigning separate resources to goods, including combined transport.

## **PARTNERSHIP**

17. Since itineraries are international, railway operators need to get together to identify causes and seek solutions. Quality committees by route or itinerary are being established. A positive angle is emerging from the results obtained by some of them but it is up to all the companies concerned to apply their share of the commitment stringently.

18. The stringency and partnership efforts will progressively re-establish dependability, and once confidence is restored, new niches for combined transport using the railways can be developed.

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**Annex**

**Diagnosis of dysfunctions and proposals for possible initiatives  
in relation to the quality and efficiency of the railway offer:**

**Observation schema**

Transport equipment: Greater availability of the wagon fleet (rotation, maintenance, repairs, ...)

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|--|---|--|
| Traffic - forwarding - routes                        | * | “competition” passengers-goods<br>determination of priority cargo routes                             |
|  | * | infrastructure capacity (including nodes, investment programme)                                      |
|  | * | driving or equipment change-over   |
| - traction   | * | continuity - aptitude of drivers<br>(and availability)   |
|  |   | - polyvalence of locomotives   |
|  | * | locomotive combination/reciprocity<br>see creation of pool/approval                                  |
| - organization of dedicated trains:                  |   | - block trains and intermodal shuttles   |
|  |   | - service of terminals/frequency   |
| - crossing network “borders”                         |   | - see traction above   |
| Technical innovation - daring to use<br>new formulas |   | - follow-up (GPS, temperatures of ITUs ...)  |
|  |   | - swap bodies  |
|  |   | - double-deckers?  |
|  |   | - road railer  |
|  |   | - light combi carrier (see service shuttle in Sweden<br>comprising a wagon with a platform elevator) |
|  |   | - cooperation railways and other modes: ports,<br>inland waterways                                   |

Tariffs: increases and price differences between countries (impact of costs and user duties)

transparency of costs, in particular linked to the use of the infrastructure to be obtained

Partnership - communication \* restructuring of companies - organization of infrastructure (access)

- choice of single negotiator by route?  
network?

\* dialogue - consultation associating actors/authorities linked to the organization of the combined transport chain

- contractual aspects - conferring of responsibility through penalties/compensation

- drafting of criteria/parameters (including deadlines, ...)  
(see AGTC Agreement)

- alternative in the event of social movements

Development of permanent cooperation between networks and between operators:  
conclusion of inter-company agreements, quality committees, ...

Call for: Improvement of performances of the current offer (productivity reserves, including traction change-over, frequency of offer).

Acceptance of recourse to new technologies, including follow-up of changes by clients.

At stake: Restoration of confidence and development of new transport capacities.

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