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**DETERMINATION OF RAILWAY INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY INCLUDING
ASPECTS RELATED TO THE FEE FOR THE USE OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE**

Report of the Informal Ad hoc meeting on allocation of railway infrastructure capacity for
international rail services and infrastructure management (22 April 2002, Geneva)

1. ATTENDANCE

Mr. J. Evans (European Infrastructure Managers – EIM), Mr. K-H. Lundström (Community of European Railways – CER), Mr. P. Jaeggy (Forum Train Europe – FTE) attended the meeting. The representative of the European Commission (EU) was unable to attend.

2. MANDATE

Following the request made by the Working Party on Rail Transport at its fifty-fifth session (TRANS/SC.2/196, para. 22), the secretariat convened an informal meeting to deal with (i) organizational problems of capacity allocation and infrastructure management at an international level, (ii) legal framework and existing practice in member countries, (iii) technical aspects of the optimization of railway timetables and their efficient use, and (iv) the limits of Governments' regulations in setting up international timetables, with regard to their social role and responsibilities and the commercial role of railway undertakings.

3. CONSIDERATION OF RAILWAY INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY FOR INTERNATIONAL RAIL SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE MANAGEMENT

The objective of the meeting was to identify areas where additional action by Governments may lead to further facilitation of allocation of railway capacity for European-wide international rail traffic, to review the current existing practice in member countries, and formulate suggestions that could facilitate the integration of other than EU and accession member countries into the railway capacity allocation procedures.

Participants noted that a large part of regulatory framework as well as technical details about capacity allocation have already been completed within the EU, but the issue remains relevant for a number of other UNECE member countries outside the area of the EU.

The Forum Train Europe (FTE) is the only pan-European organization for comprehensive international product planning, timetable coordination and harmonization of the train paths for passenger and freight rail traffic. International planning is not only limited to railways of the EU countries, but it also includes non-EU States and is open to all European countries. It respects both the valid EU Directives and relevant national regulations. There are currently about 70 members from 35 European countries in the organization. It remains open to all European railway operators and infrastructure managers and all organizations and companies participating in international railway traffic. Under the common FTE roof, tasks, competences and responsibilities are clearly defined between railway operators and infrastructure managers. The objective of FTE is to simplify and accelerate the whole timetable planning processes between European countries so that client enquiries could be handled faster and with the highest quality.

Apart from pure planning for international train connections, the FTE also deals with general issues such as: (i) definition of the rules for production and train path planning; (ii) improvement of interoperability; and (iii) fixing of the dates of the timetable change.

The EU Directive 2001/14 defines a legal framework for international cooperation between the infrastructure managers in the allocation of infrastructure capacity. The aim of this cooperation is to enable an efficient planning and allocation of international infrastructure capacities, or train paths, particularly on the “Trans European Rail Freight Network (TERFN)”.

When allocating capacity, the infrastructure managers must adhere to a formal schedule prescribed by the FTE. The responsibility for railway infrastructure capacity allocation lies with the (national) infrastructure managers since the used or available capacity on a specific line or in a knot does not depend on the national or international character of the individual trains. This responsibility includes not only the decision-making process both in regard to the creation of train paths but also the allocation of the train paths to the railway undertakings. There is no separation in the decision-making process between the allocation of infrastructure capacity for national or international services, or between passenger and goods transport.

Railway operators participating in the FTE make requests for infrastructure capacity from infrastructure managers. The necessary iterative planning to guarantee cohesion between the elaboration of timetables by infrastructure managers on the one hand, and the planning of products and of production (e.g. planning of rolling stock and train staff deployment) by railway

operators on the other, is an important argument for participation of railway operators in the planning process of the FTE.

Under the prevailing legal conditions for the allocation of railway infrastructure capacity, there is a danger today that not enough high-quality train paths would be made available for freight transport, because it is commonly placed behind other types of traffic in the order of priority. Without these train paths, vital for the freight transport operators, their business might be affected. With the integral regular-interval timetable in passenger traffic, in many instances where intervals are shortened and the passenger trains run out of schedule, the capacity has become increasingly scarce around agglomerations. In certain countries, following regionalization and devolution of transport planning, the recent increases in passenger traffic have made it more difficult to find slots for freight trains. Short-distance train paths for regional passenger trains could impede long-distance freight train paths.

With the liberalization of freight traffic on rail, operators will increasingly become active, particularly in point-to-point traffic. The market for freight traffic, therefore, needs more flexible solutions, for example a need-oriented train path planning.

As is well known, the infrastructure managers have to grant to railway operators a non-discriminatory access to the infrastructure. They allocate train paths by order of priorities according to their national legislation. In granting access to the network, the scheduled passenger services have priority in most countries.

Therefore, most infrastructure managers apply the following principles, or the following priority order when allocating the railway infrastructure capacity:

- passenger transport has priority over goods transport;
- scheduled traffic has priority over charter traffic;
- system traffic has priority on all railways;
- fixed interval traffic by its very nature is planned on a recurring basis whilst a “once only” train is fitted in round the regular interval pattern.

In order to further improve rail freight traffic and guarantee sufficient capacity, there is a need for an urgent action. One pertinent measure would be the creation of systemized high-quality train paths for freight traffic, with regard to an optimal use of the existing network. System train paths are train schedules set up and offered by the infrastructure manager in view of an efficient use of capacity of the network, without a specific request by railway operators. Construction parameters, starting and destination points and marginal conditions are being harmonized with major clients to safeguard marketability. This represents a fundamental change compared with the procedure as adopted until now in the sale of train paths to market the free capacities.

The main goal of systemization is an improvement of quality and stability of the freight train timetable and the whole timetable, and an optimal use of scarce infrastructure capacities. Quickly available system train paths, constructed according to market requirements, and mixed with one another, offer a chance for a faster, better and more client-friendly recognition of transport requirements by freight enterprises.

Reviewing some of the aspects of a current capacity allocation practice, participants noted that the most efficient way to increase freight traffic would be to increase the speed of freight trains. Increased speed of freight trains would lead to an important release of existing capacity that could be made available for additional traffic.

Another possibility for increasing the available capacity of existing networks would be through the establishment of dedicated freight and passenger lines. In order to homogenize traffic flows, the development of high-speed train networks would release conventional lines used for passenger traffic thus providing additional capacity for their conversion to dedicated freight traffic.

Allowing a greater flexibility in the creation of an international traffic timetable, and systemizing transport on an international level could also increase the existing line capacity and provide a larger number of free “slots” to be distributed.

Furthermore, giving higher priority to international passenger traffic over national passenger traffic, and consequently applying the order of priority in national passenger traffic (inter-city trains over regional and regional over local) would provide further flexibility in the creation of an international timetable. Very often the international passenger train can be fitted into the slot of and take up the role of the national regular interval passenger train, as if it were part of that pattern, thus saving the need for the extra path.

4. FUTURE WORK

Participants also felt that, in order to further promote a better understanding of the need for coherent railway capacity allocation procedures at the European-wide level, a Workshop on International Railway Infrastructure Capacity Allocation might be organized back-to-back with the next session of the Working Party on Rail Transport. The Workshop would be open to all participants of the Working Party session and other interested parties, with presentations provided by the Forum Train Europe, the European Infrastructure Managers, the Community of European Railways and the European Commission.

Potential topics to be covered in the Workshop could include:

- Harmonization of deadlines for train path ordering and train path allocation
- Flexibility regarding the order of priorities in train path allocation
- Harmonization of conditions of admission for locomotives, rolling stock and engine drivers (safety certificates)
- Reduction of border formalities in order to facilitate cross border traffic
- Transparent, client-friendly, harmonized and free of discrimination price system for train paths
- Timely implementation of the EU infrastructure package (EU-Directive 2001/EC/12-14)
- Government support for implementation of the interoperability: technical (e.g. vehicles, etc.), operational (e.g. safety, etc.) and legal (e.g. admissions, etc.)