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THE ROLE OF RAILWAYS IN THE PROMOTION OF COMBINED TRANSPORT

Problems encountered in combined transport operations

Transmitted by International Union of Railways (UIC)

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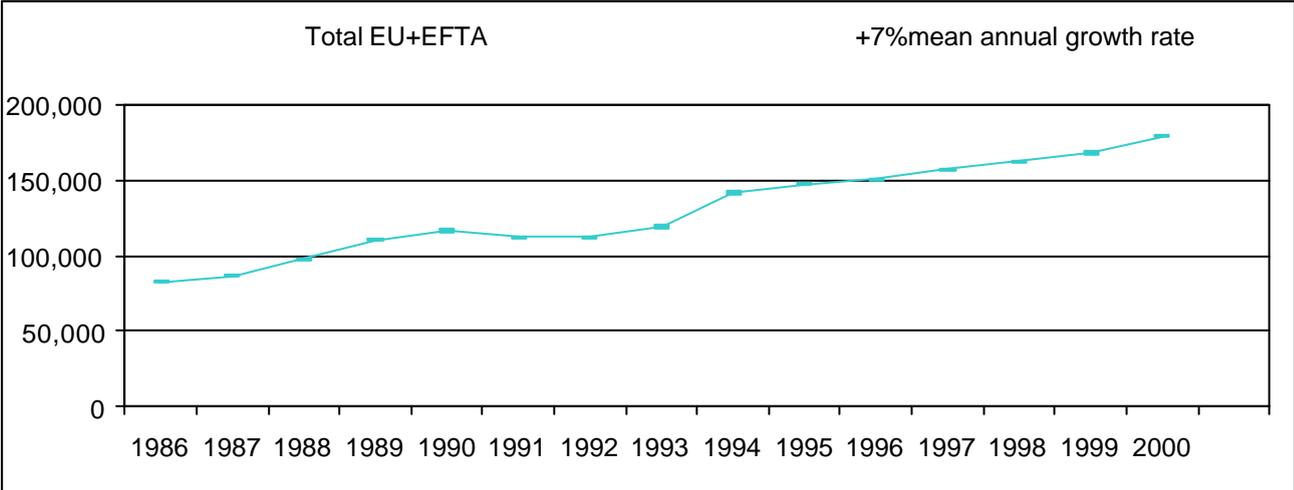
The role of railway companies to promote combined transport
January 2001

In its work to promote combined transport, the secretariat of UN/ECE WP24 asked railway companies to send it their ideas on the subject.

The UIC Combined Transport Group (CTG) would like to thank WP24 and hopes that the document it has drawn up will contribute to a better appreciation of the specific features of the rail business and the efforts undertaken by railway companies to promote combined.

Combined transport has experienced an uncontested surge in Europe in recent decades. The slowdown in economic growth at the end of 1998-1999 affecting some of the combined transport routes to a greater or lesser degree, gave way in 2000 to an economic recovery reflected by strong demand for transport.

Combined transport growth (in thousand tonnes)



Nonetheless, combined transport growth conceals a more subtle reality and a fragile situation. The combined transport product cannot develop over the long-term unless the quality of services improves. It is through quality that combined transport will succeed in securing its place in new market segments and exploiting the strong demand to the full.

The economic and commercial consequences of quality in the railways are detrimental to all the stakeholders in the combined transport business. Longer wagon turn-around times and organisational disruptions in transshipment yards and terminals are aggravating factors in addition to sub-optimal use of traction resources.

The poor standards today are due to a series of factors caused to a greater or lesser degree by the different parties involved in the combined transport logistics chain.

One of the main causes is the shortage of traction resources and of drivers. The problem of resource availability is felt by most railway companies in Europe and has an adverse impact on the international transport product. Railway companies are aware of the situation and the measures they have introduced to overcome these problems will be mentioned subsequently.

It is clear that capacity allocation on the infrastructure network has an impact on the quality of railway services. The place given to freight traffic in general and to combined transport in particular in train path allocation is one of the main concerns of railway companies. It is decisive for the development of freight traffic and combined transport in Europe.

Saturation on certain lines of route of the infrastructure network is another impediment to the development of combined transport. Long-term development of combined transport cannot be achieved without a concerted effort on the part of the different players. Efforts undertaken by railway companies must be supported by public authorities and European bodies through both investment efforts and a legislative context that takes account of the aspects specific to the rail mode.

Combined transport operators, too, have an important role to play. Most international combined transport is conveyed in block trains. Operators buy these trains from railway companies and it is up to them to use the capacity purchased and to manage it. Efficient management of this capacity is important for smooth combined transport services. Frequent short-term changes in railway operating patterns as well as incomplete use of the capacity purchased weaken the entire system.

A series of measures have been taken to regain a standard of quality capable of restoring the market's confidence in rail transport. Railway companies have invested in traction resources and are setting up driver recruitment and training programmes.

Dedicated management of tractive stock is gaining sway in Europe. Some railway companies have gone even farther and placed management of a locomotive fleet in the hands of certain lines of route.

Apart from these individual measures, a series of joint initiatives to improve quality have been launched by railway companies.

The UIC Combined Transport Group (CTG) has applied a quality programme to key international rail transport routes. This involves creating a chain of information and setting up a system to measure quality based on regular statistical records. The systematic monitoring of forwarding has made it possible to identify the main reasons behind poor services and to take corrective measures. The process requires participation and cooperation on the part of operators and railway companies and enables them to review relevant measures for improvements jointly.

This initiative began in 1996 and today five European routes are involved. The efforts made by the CTG are focused currently on extension of the quality system to other routes, particularly those between central and eastern Europe. The CTG has also undertaken to up-date its quality system and has drawn up a manual for quality management. The purpose of this manual is to assist railways in developing quality management systems and to promote the introduction of new quality management systems.

Some railway companies have also developed monitoring initiatives such as those introduced at Modane, Chiasso and on the Brenner route, for example. For several years, Trenitalia Spa., DB and ÖBB have deployed resources by creating a "service unit" on the Brenner route. The service unit is an inspection team dedicated to monitoring trains on that route. It is run by bilingual staff from the railway concerned who are able to intervene in production plans in the event of a problem.

Similar initiatives have been taken at Tarvisio and Villa Opicina for traffic with SZ. The Swiss and Italians are working on setting up a team in Luino.

Agreements have been signed between railway companies to simplify border crossing. Examples are the Belgium - Switzerland, Rotterdam - Antwerp and Muizen - Fréthun routes which have uniform production systems. In addition, agreements for interoperability have been signed between SNCF, CFL and SNCB to optimise the use made of their new multi-current locomotives.

The Combined Transport Group is also concentrating its efforts on preparation of contracts for sub-contracting and joint operation of railway services. This work is designed to define more clearly the obligations and responsibilities of the parties concerned and hence to improve service reliability.

Another area of work for the Combined Transport Group is the relationship between railway undertakings and infrastructure managers. The terms of reference setting out the expectations of railway undertakings in respect of infrastructure managers as well as proposals for allocation of infrastructure capacity have been drawn up and sent to the relevant bodies (appendix 1).

Lastly, the Combined Transport Group, and UIC more generally, support and take an active part in work to set up a trans-European rail freight network (TERFN). An initial seminar took place on the subject at UIC in May 2000, the conclusions of which are given in appendix 2. A second seminar will be held in February 2001.

All the parties in the combined transport chain have a role to play to improve the current service offer and to make it even more competitive. This will be achieved through joint initiatives.

Railway companies and operators have decided to do battle together and have prepared a joint action plan in the framework of Interunit (the joint forum for railways and operators). Together they must defend the place of combined transport on infrastructure. They must develop quality initiatives for traffic jointly and the players must also convey this message to decision-makers in unison.

ABOUT UIC AND THE COMBINED TRANSPORT GROUP

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF RAILWAYS – UIC

The International Union of Railways was founded officially on 20 October 1922 at an international conference in Paris. The statutes were approved by 51 railway companies from 29 countries in Europe and Asia. The purpose of the organisation was initially to deal with all technical and operating matters relating to the development of international rail transport. Subsequently, the field of cooperation expanded to include all key disciplines of importance for the future of railway companies, i.e. policy-making, strategy, commercial, management and financial aspects.

The latest revision of the statutes took place in 1993. The objective consisted of adapting international cooperation structures and decision-making mechanisms to the new challenges, particularly liberalisation of the transport market in Europe and the development of railway cooperation at world level.

In recent years, a large number of new members have joined UIC including railway companies from all the continents and new railway operators spawned in the wake of company restructuring.

Today UIC has 152 members from 87 countries on 5 continents.

Combined Transport Group - GTC

In order to develop and promote combined transport, a joint body had to be created, common to Railway Undertakings, with the task of encouraging and coordinating the work conducted in this field and centralising the results obtained.

This special group, known as the Combined Transport Group (CTG), comprises the following Railway Undertakings:

BLS,	CD,	CFF/SBB,	CFL EuroLuxCargo,	CP,	DB AG,
DSB,	EWSI,	Trenitalia spa	GySEV/ROeEE	HZ,	MAV,
NSB,	ÖBB,	PKP,	RAILION,	RENFE,	SNCB,
SNCF,	SZ,	ZSR.			

As part of its remit, the CTG shall be responsible for fostering exchanges among its members on technical, commercial and legal subjects. The CTG shall also conduct public relations work and assume a representative role on behalf of its members.

a) The technical subjects shall include

- infrastructure, rolling stock, harmonisation of standards, standardisation, carriage of dangerous goods;
- operational matters (border crossings, etc.);
- information and data exchanges (coding, EDI);
- research and new technologies.

b) The commercial subjects shall cover

- market research and general-interest statistical surveys;
- creation of quality labels;
- cooperation with customs and taxation authorities;
- new forms of marketing.

c) Legal issues

In the field of combined transport and in liaison with the CER, the CTG shall contribute to the drafting of international texts and update UIC leaflets in cooperation with the various bodies of that Association.

The CTG may also investigate the form and extent of public aid granted by States.

d) Public relations

The CTG shall foster the relations that are necessary to its work with operators, shippers, railway undertakings that are not UIC or CTG members, government authorities and international organisations.
