RAIL TRANSPORT TODAY

Efficient, clean, safe and affordable land transport is one of the key policy objectives of UNECE member countries. Railways are one of the major inland transport modes which contributes to this objective.

Rail freight services play an important role to the production, trade, and distribution of bulk materials. Over sufficiently long distances railways can also provide efficient and effective transport alternatives for general freight, particularly, in the movement of international shipping of containers to and from ports.

Railways can also perform a valuable economic and social role in transporting passengers in dense intercity corridors, in major cities, and in rural regions. Often this function could only be transferred to road transport at a higher cost in road infrastructure, traffic congestion, vehicle emissions, and traffic accidents.

PROMOTING RAIL TRANSPORT

In order to promote international rail transport, in particular, in central, eastern and south-eastern European countries, the Trans-European Railway (TER) Project has been set up to develop a coherent and efficient international railway and combined transport system in TER member countries.

In view of the pronounced increase in trade between Europe and Asia and the completion of important rail infrastructure projects, rail transport along Euro-Asian transport corridors has received particular attention. The Euro-Asian transport links (EATL) project has identified main rail transport at a higher cost in road infrastructure, traffic congestion, vehicle emissions, and traffic accidents.

In order to allow efficient and seamless international rail goods transport, UNECE has initiated work towards establishment of a unique railway law at the pan-European-, Euro-Asian and global level.
In order to provide for efficient and seamless international transport, common conditions governing international transport have been developed during the last 50 years and are now applicable at regional and global levels for all modes of transport, except for rail transport.

Over the past decades, international trade, particularly between Europe and Asia, has exploded. So has containerized maritime transport reaching over 10 Mio TEU annually. This trend is predicted to continue.

Building adequate infrastructure to accommodate the increased traffic volume is, however, not sufficient to exploit the potential of long-distance rail freight transport along the Euro-Asian land bridge as well as between adjacent countries. Required are also transparent and harmonized provisions of transport law for all modes applicable in the same way in all countries along Euro-Asian rail transport corridors. Efforts are being made to do away with the disadvantages railways are suffering from the lack of a unique railway law for the international transport of goods. To that end, a strategy has been developed by UNECE to prepare, in close cooperation with OSJD, OTIF, CIT and the rail and freight forwarding industries instruments leading to the unification of international railway law.

As a first step, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on general terms and conditions for Euro-Asian rail transport contracts is planned to be developed by UNECE in 2012. Based on these experiences, model regulations for international rail transport might be adopted, including reporting and review procedures. In a final step, a convention on international rail transport may be negotiated following a careful review of the applications and experiences made with the MoU on private law contracts and the model rail regulations.

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The TER Project which was established in 1990 is a sub-regional cooperation among Central, Eastern and South-Eastern European countries. Its objectives are to improve the quality and efficiency of transport operations, to assist the integration process of European transport infrastructure systems, and to develop a coherent and efficient international railway and combined transport system in accordance with the UNECE Pan-European infrastructure agreements: European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC) and European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC).

One of the major products of the TER Project is the TER Master Plan (set up together with its counterpart for road – the TEM Master Plan) which reflects the priority transport infrastructure needs. As many as 491 projects with an aggregated cost of EUR 102 billion have been evaluated and prioritized.

UNCE is Executing Agency of the project.
To date TER has 17 member countries.