



The International Union of Road-Rail combined transport companies (UIRR) held its General Assembly on 28 April in Budapest. The annual gathering brought together **18 Combined Transport (CT) Operators from throughout Europe** to discuss the performance of this unique system of transport in 2009, as well as its outlook for recovery after the economic crisis which caused unprecedented decline in CT volumes.

UIRR's 2009 Annual Report, and the simultaneously published 2009 Statistics Booklet, paints a grim picture of substantial **losses of business for Combined Transport amounting to 17% in total** compared to a year earlier (the decline when including new member IFB was only 6%). CT's decline was exacerbated by fierce efforts of the road sector to hold on to business at whatever price, as well as the political decision-makers' stalling of the process intended to equalise the economic conditions for the various modes of transport. The implementation of electronic road toll collection schemes, to facilitate the "user pays" and the "polluter pays" principles, were put on hold in many countries, and long-planned road toll increases were also halted, while several State owned rail infrastructure managers were allowed to proceed with increases in track access charges.

CT Operators, however, have to no extent lost their faith in the unique product they offer, which efficiently combines the flexibility of road haulage on the first and last miles of a transport with that of the speed, reliability and environmental sustainability of electrified rail. **UIRR Companies introduced 21 new services** along all major freight corridors of Europe to further enhance their offering, and in anticipation of economic recovery.

When discussing the actions Combined Transport itself can take to return to the growth path of the past decades, it was quickly agreed that only **improvements in productivity and quality** can help. An extension in the allowed maximum train length, implemented homogeneously at least throughout an entire freight corridor, and increased maximum axle weights were mentioned most often as highly desirable.

UIRR members discussed also in great detail the difficulties they have began experiencing in 2009 when collaborating with their freight railway partners, and also as major users of the rail infrastructure throughout Europe. Reduced transparency, unexplained price increases, and a growing uncertainty surrounding rail traffic flows all marred the development of the CT product. Hence it was agreed during the General Assembly that UIRR will present a position paper in the near future on the **issues of CT towards the rail sector** with the aim of facilitating improvements on this front.

Rudy Colle, Executive Chairman of UIRR noted: "The mission of UIRR in the coming year will remain to continue to strive for a **level regulatory playing field among the competing modes**, and winning acknowledgment of the benefits of the Combined Transport system with decision-makers." **CT saved 2,25 million tons of CO₂ emissions over 2009** as compared to the case when all these shipments would have been made purely by road. Moreover, CT has a material role in incorporating electrified rail, the safest and most environmentally sustainable mode of transport into European transport-chains.

UIRR Members reported a rebound in progress since the beginning of 2010. They are rapidly reactivating wagons set aside during the downturn of the past 18 months.

Founded in 1970, UIRR today represents 18 Combined Transport Operators in Brussels, who offer their services throughout Europe and beyond. UIRR Members have shown an average annual growth rate of 7% over the decade preceding 2009, and though suffering a decline, still managed to deliver 61,5 million tons of goods translating to 40.7 billion tonne-kilometres during the past year. For more information on UIRR, or to **download the 2009 Annual Report and the 2009 Statistics Booklet**, please click on www.uirr.com.