



European rail freight ETA data project up and running

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Ad Toet, Director of the Dutch rail freight employers' organisation KNV (Koninklijk Nederlands Vervoer) is now officially spearheading its tenureship of the European project on the 'real time' exchange of freight train arrival data. It is one of the key priority actions identified at the 2016 Rotterdam TEN-T days, and Toet hopes it will deliver tangible efficiencies for the European rail freight sector.



After 10 years as the general manager of KNV, Toet officially received the signed agreement to be coordinator of the Electronic Exchange of ETA information – known as ELETA – project from EU Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc at the EU Digital Transport Day in Tallinn, Estonia.

Practical benefits

"I really hope to demonstrate the practical benefits for the sector – ELETA must show that it can really be done – and to bring in the perspective of the rail sector customers in applying technical specifications for interoperability relating to telematics applications for freight," he said.

The Rotterdam TEN-T Day in June 2016 was potentially a landmark event for the future European rail freight, with agreement reached on a list of actions to boost the sector's development. One of the priority actions, said Toet, concerned the electronic exchange of data on the tracking and tracing of trains and their Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA). It was agreed, under the protection of confidentiality, that both national rail infrastructure managers and railway undertakings/operators would make available information on ETAs for handover points and final destination to partners, including terminals and intermodal operators. They would also provide freight forwarders and shippers with up-to-date information about the status of their freight and an ETA.

The project, which will last for two years, has a budget of 2.8 million Euros and is being coordinated by the KNV and the International Union for Road-Rail Combined Transport (UIRR). It aims to demonstrate the practical value of streamlining exchange of ETA data on 12 selected intermodal relations, which are operated by CEMAT (Italy), Hupac (The Netherlands & Switzerland), Inter Ferry Boat (Belgium), Kombiverkehr (Germany) and Rail Cargo Operator (Austria).

Real challenge

"The issue addressed by ELETA has long been discussed by the rail sector and its customers," said Toet. "Making an estimate for the arrival time of an international freight train is a real challenge due to the centrally-planned allocation of infrastructure capacity. Many actors in the sector have already embarked on efforts and projects to resolve the issue. This has resulted in many dedicated or company-specific software solutions, which are inherently expensive, while access to data remained restricted."



The entire sector, he added, was glad that the EU had given its support to the project, which saw the formal launch of its activities on September 1. “It should encourage the facilitate the work done by the sector, member states and the European institutions for eliminating legal, operational and technical obstacles in the electronic exchange of ETA information,” said Toet. The nine European [freight corridors](#) are the backbone of the trans-European transport network, connecting ports with Europe’s industrial heartlands.

‘Consistently worked’

Preparatory activities have been ongoing with Rail Net Europe and in liaison with the various terminals, infrastructure managers and railway undertakings. The next few weeks will see more stakeholders brought on board at events like the Rail Freight Day in Vienna on December 7, and the establishing of a 12-person expert advisory board. It will hold its first meeting in Frankfurt in February.

Toet also praised his own country’s Ministry of Infrastructure, Public Works and Water Management (until recently the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment), for its help in laying the groundwork for the ELETA project: “They have consistently worked on the European Rail Freight Corridors in preparation for, during and following on from The Netherlands’ EU Presidency in 2016, and that has been in the best interests of the entire EU rail sector and deserves credit,” added Toet, who will officially resign from his current post at the KNV on January 1.

The recent EU Digital Transport Days were an initiative by the European Commission and the Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG Move), and were held in the Estonian capital Tallinn, as part of the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The objectives are exploring the potential and addressing the challenges of the digitalisation of transport and mobility for both passengers and freight.

Tags: [Eleta](#), [ETA](#), [European Commission](#), [KNV](#), [Koninklijk Nederlands Vervoer](#), [rail freight](#), [TEN-T Days Rotterdam 2016](#), [Violeta Bulc](#)



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