



UIRR position paper on the European Commission communications entitled “Towards a rail network giving priority to freight” and “Freight logistics action plan”.

The Board of UIRR s.c.r.l.* has in its turn read the Commission’s communications on a “rail network giving priority to freight” and the “Freight logistics action plan”. »

Like its Brussels Office, it is delighted at the common denominator which inspires these documents and which conveys the Community Authorities’ desire to support the development of rail freight by means of targeted measures designed at least to slow down the growing paralysis in terms of mobility.

- **“Towards a rail network giving priority to freight”**

By setting up a network of this kind, the European Commission (EC) is aiming to bring about a noticeable increase in the capacities available for the transportation of goods by rail and in a way which offers better guarantees. By implementing all aspects of the framework as set out, it would become possible to absorb the growth of rail freight, which is estimated at approximately 40% by 2015, and which would be sustained essentially by a doubling of Combined Transport.

This ambitious project comes with numerous deadlines and adhering to them will also call for real discipline by the Member States affected, which they would need to manifest by means of firm, appropriate commitments, together with close monitoring by the European Commission and Parliament.

Quality

Obviously the UIRR supports both any measure which is likely to encourage the railway undertakings (RUs) to improve punctuality and the establishing of procedures designed to determine the responsibilities for any delays without pointless challenges. Corridor level quality indicators are needed if this network is to set an example in terms of quality and these indicators could be established and communicated using a method drawing on the UIRR’s wide-ranging experience. This will be one of the keys to its success.

This network will not actually be able to fulfil all its potential in order to benefit the people for whom this system is in the end designed, i.e. freight customers

* Union Internationale des Sociétés de Transport Combiné Rail-Route (International Union of Road-Rail Transport Companies), a cooperative company bringing together 20 CT operators based in 14 European countries which handle about 2/3 of this traffic transferred to rail.



unless the increase in rail capacities goes hand-in-hand with quality-related stimuli - or even obligations – with regard to the RUs and infrastructure managers.

Priority rules

The proposals relating to the rules covering priority in the event that the network should become saturated need to be clarified. Although the target of “priority being given to freight in principle” as set out in the communication is heading in the right direction, those mentioned in appendix, in other words “the same traffic reallocation rules must be used throughout the corridor” (...) “penalise freight trains as little as possible”, are lacking in precision, to say the very least, as might have been expected from a network classified as “giving priority to freight”. This project should be accompanied by innovative rules which call for a process of joint discussions (on the applicability of the principle that the non-disrupted train retains its priority, for example).

Capacities

The UIRR encourages any relevant initiative aiming to deal with the problem of bottlenecks which could well intensify by 2020, and in this respect it will continue to take part actively in the relevant working group set up by the European Commission. It hopes that pragmatic, supportable solutions will emerge and will contribute to this process, but expects also a similar commitment from all sectors concerned, in particular the rail one.

Train paths/Liberalisation

Although rail liberalisation is a reality in legislative terms, in practice it is still very incompletely implemented. This is underlined by the appendix to the communication which says that “there is still a long way to go before we achieve an integrated European rail market”. This means that every measure should be supported which may help revitalise the railfreight market and that of example bodies other than railway undertakings should be entitled to obtain directly slots, as the DG TREN proposes, or that slots are at least acknowledged as attributed to those who bear commercial responsibility for a train (e.g. the CT operators)

Auxiliary rail services

Terminals and related marshalling yards are key elements in the modern rail freight chain. The EC wishes to encourage their development both by means of investments and by making access to them easier for all rail operators using the



corridors. The UIRR notes however that intermodal terminals are not expressly mentioned in the communication of the Commission. Although, these latter do have a considerable role to play in achieving the goal of better logistics in Europe.

- **“Freight logistics action plan”**

The UIRR supports the broad outline of the aims of the logistics action plan as set out by the European Commission. Indeed, there is an urgent need to improve both the economic and operational efficiency and the environmental viability of freight transport in Europe against a background of intensifying trade.

The UIRR has given repeated reminders of its point of view which is that the primary role of the authorities is to create/reinforce the framework conditions which will allow participants on the market to take up positions and to operate efficiently against a background of healthy competition. Within this optimised framework, operational and technical decisions must be left for these latter to assess sensibly.

Thus, the subject of the weights and dimensions of the vehicles and loading standards is a cause for justified concern. Having carried out pioneering initiatives in this field, the results of which have subsequently been confirmed by other studies, the UIRR is again warning the Commission against the disastrous effects of any amendment to directive 96/53/EC allowing the widespread introduction of longer and/or heavier lorries. The resulting traffic going back to the road to the detriment of rail would have damaging consequences for the environment, safety and road infrastructures whilst at the same time significantly accentuating the problem of road congestion, contrary to what is stated by industrial developers and other supporters of mega-lorries.

It is also an established fact that the development of a standard for one (or more) usable European ILU(s) on all surface modes would have damaging consequences for the logistics market if there was an attempt to make this standard compulsory, i.e. if free choice of the loading unit was restricted.

The twenty CT operators working together under the umbrella of the UIRR see these two communications from the Commission as offering considerable support for the efforts they are making at their own levels with a view to carrying more goods by rail. But these efforts will only be fully effective if the planned political measures are implemented soon. The will shown by the Member States will be one of the decisive elements, especially with regard to the necessary massive investments.