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The 4th UIC Global Rail Freight Conference (GRFC 2014) jointly organised with Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB) was held in Vienna from 23 – 26 June

(Paris/Vienna, 1st July 2014) The 4th UIC Global Rail Freight Conference (GRFC 2014) jointly organised with Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB) was held in Vienna from 23 – 26 June 2014. This international conference has become a reference at global level for exchanges on all strategic issues and best practices related to the development of rail freight and logistics services across the world.

The 2014 edition of the Global Rail Freight Conference was held under the main theme “Seamless transport chains through harmonisation” and is targeted at all stakeholders and actors involved in the development of rail freight. This worldwide conference brought together delegates from 30 countries from all five continents.

During this two-day conference, participants had the opportunity to learn about and discuss several themes. The debate and exchanges were very dynamic throughout the different sessions proposed. The trends and best practices in innovation in different countries were tackled with worldwide examples: automated inspection of tires, loading gauge, “Train Scanning System”, automated data collection of cars in the train rolling programme to increase axle loads. Spatial planning, logistics and integration were discussed for rail freight: rail and port links are a prerequisite for rail traffic – operating conditions must be carefully taken into account because of their impact as well as the terms of spatial planning as a framework for rail freight. Large specifications – transport strategy – must come from policy and not be decided at local level!

Participants were able to learn about different cases and how to gain market shares through the example of Rail Cargo Group in close cooperation with BALO a Turkish forwarder, or the case of DB Schenker extending its network throughout Europe. Participants learned about the MARATHON project, where the idea is to couple two trains very rapidly to have one MARATHON train with a very reliable radio link. The aim is to obtain longer and heavier trains with no major infrastructure investment.

To gain market shares in general we need real competition in markets, we need to improve punctuality, frequency and information, as well as sound management structures. Indeed, future rail must be thought internationally and not only nationally. The aim is not to gain market shares against each other but to work together. Then the intercontinental corridors were presented for Combined Transport through the examples of the Silk Road and the Transsiberian (objective: crossing this route in seven days) and finally the importance of standardisation to improve efficiency, which is an important role for UIC.

Mr Ferdinand Schmidt, ÖBB, Chairman of UIC Freight Forum, addressed his concluding words with a very positive vision for the future, as rail has always been driven by innovation, and with the perspectives of high speed in the future, rail will be part of the solution. He

emphasised the important role of the MARATHON project to improve competitiveness and efficiency, and the need to focus on quality improvement and the enhancement of international corridors.

Mr Miklos Kopp, Director of UIC Freight Department, expressed the need for harmonisation and interoperability in the rail freight business. It is clear that we need to take different steps towards this main objective on all levels:

- At governmental level, the law for unified railways is very important as well as the simplification of border crossing procedures;
- At the level of professional associations like UIC, we have to analyse the situation, the market trends, possible routes and corridors to define ways to interoperable solutions and prepare harmonised organisational rules and technical standards;
- At the level of Railway Undertakings we were informed about the new trends which are geared to create new custom-friendly products including logistical services for the full transport chain.

Mr Jean-Pierre Loubinoux, UIC Director General, addressed a video message explaining that “GRFC has always been important for the activity of UIC, for the networking of the members and this time was no exception, after Saint-Petersburg, Tangier, now in Vienna, you have had very important debates, very interesting ideas have been exchanged, and altogether you have actually sustained through the theme of seamless transportation through harmonisation, a very important and necessary vision for the future of freight in Europe and in the world.”

Mr Francesco Parisi, FIATA President, opened the Golden Chariot Awards Ceremony and presented the awards to companies with outstanding results in international cooperation. He rewarded CCTT, OTIF, CIT, RCA and UIC.

Technical visits in Vienna

On the third day, technical visits were organised for the participants. The first visit proposed was the New Vienna Main Station, in the Belvedere District, that will inaugurate in December, corresponding with the 175 anniversary of Austrian Railways. The work started in 2003 with the demolition of the old Südbahnhof, with funding from the City Government (1.5 million euros) and from the federal railways (2.5 million euros). Indeed it is not only a railway project but a city development project.

This is a 109 hectare project, 6km long, with 100 km of new tracks and 600 switches and crossings. The idea of having a main station came about 100 years ago, but because of new mobility there is a need to cross the city. This station will become the most important hub for national and international travel, and a central junction in the European railway network.

Nowhere else in Vienna offers such quick and easy access to destinations in Austria, Europe or anywhere in the world, with the main station, the inner-city public transportation systems, and the connection to Vienna airport.

The entire city development area will provide about 20 000 new jobs and a new building tower has been constructed for ÖBB new headquarters. The eye-catching visual feature of the new station is the folded, diamond-shaped roof, which extends over the platforms, and is covered with photovoltaic panels. With the aid of geothermal energy and solar energy systems, Vienna Main Station generates 13% of its entire energy needs.

The second visit proposed focused on the Modern Operational Management Innovative Traffic Control Centre of ÖBB Infra.

A national traffic management centre and five operational control centres (BFZ) ensure safe, punctual and cost-effective operational management for rail traffic. On average, a train starts moving every twelve seconds on OBB-Infrastruktur's rail network, which spans approximately 5,000 kilometres of track. Railway operators rely on it to transport more than 210 million passengers and 100 million tonnes of goods every year. ÖBB centralised the traffic management in term of dispatching drivers and locomotive, emergency management, customer care and press information in one place. The Austrian area has been divided into five zones and for each one a team of experts has been created with different tasks to manage all aspects.

CONTACTS

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