

Creating a European rail network

RailNetEurope discusses simplifying and harmonising international rail transport for the benefit of the entire rail industry across Europe

We all know that rail's market share of the international transport market in Europe is low, when it is not declining. This is particularly true in a period of financial crisis and economic uncertainty, which makes it all the more urgent to revitalise the railways of Europe.

Efforts to promote international rail transport have, however not waited for the current crisis. Since 1991, the European Commission has issued a number of directives and regulations as part of the three 'railway packages' and the TEN-T initiative (Trans-European transport networks). All of these aim, directly or indirectly, to create an integrated European railway area. The companies managing railway infrastructures both in European Member-States and non-EU countries – in particular Norway and Switzerland – have

not remained inactive either. A few years back, a number of rail infrastructure Managers and Allocation Bodies (IMs/ABs) wished to establish a common, Europe-wide organisation and got together to this end.

IMPROVING QUALITY

It is against this background that RailNetEurope (RNE) was created in January 2004. As a non-profit making association of IMs/ABs, its aims are to provide support to Railway Undertakings (RUs) in their international activities and increase the efficiency of the IMs' processes. Together, the Members of RailNetEurope are simplifying and harmonising international rail transport for the benefit of the entire rail industry across Europe.

Currently, RailNetEurope is a partnership

of 35 IMs/ABs (including those of the largest EU Member States and some non-EU countries), whose rail networks add up to around 230,000 km (over 140,000 miles).

RNE's mission is to create the conditions necessary for a major improvement in the quality and efficiency of international rail transport in Europe (both freight and passenger), and for easier access to the European rail network. Within the framework of the ongoing liberalisation of the rail sector and the gradual establishment of a common framework for rail interoperability, the main tasks of RNE are to:

- coordinate the harmonisation, simplification and development of international rail infrastructure products, services, tools and processes
- improve the quality and transparency of these products, services,





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- promote legal, technical and commercial information about international products and services provided by IMs/ABs.

These tasks are carried out by five standing working groups and by ad-hoc project groups coordinated by the RNE Joint Office, which is based in Vienna, Austria.

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When talking about interoperability, most people will think about technical standards: type of power supply, which varies from country to country, safety systems, etc. But interoperability is much wider than this, also covering Europe-wide timetable planning, digital information exchange in real time across borders, administrative procedures linked to international path applications, and after-sales services (monitoring, reporting),

to name but a few. It is precisely these aspects of interoperability that RailNetEurope deals with in its daily work.

The way to interoperability is the harmonisation of the above elements and the establishment, where necessary, of common frameworks (e.g. in the legal, operational, IT fields). This is described in greater detail in the sections below.

COMMERCIAL CONDITIONS

The adoption of common commercial conditions is a pre-requisite for a smoothly running internal rail market. Customers in this market need a reliable, transparent and economical system that meets their needs. In order to encourage a more customer-oriented approach across Europe's borders, RNE provides, amongst other things:

- a homogenised structure for national rail Network Statements
- harmonised information on international rail corridors and national networks ('country information') on its website
- harmonised information on infrastructure charging.

ONE-STOP-SHOP NETWORK

One major task of RNE is operating the One-Stop-Shop (OSS) system. Under this system, established in 2004, customers can deal with a single person, who coordinates the requirements of the IMs who will carry the traffic in question – in this way, both access to information and to the rail network are made easier for the customer. When applying for an international path, customers only need to contact one OSS, who will initiate the complete international path allocation process and, in close cooperation with the concerned IMs, offer the following services:

- customer support and information on the full product and service range of the relevant IMs
- the information required to gain access to the network of any IM who is a Member of RNE
- handling applications for any international train path within the 'RNE network'
- train path offers for the whole international journey
- ensuring that requests for the next timetabling period are duly taken into account in the annual timetabling process
- information on infrastructure charges and train movements, including quality monitoring.

The aim of the OSS network – jointly managed by the RNE standing working groups for Timetabling and Marketing & Sales – is to provide competent and efficient assistance across borders, based on transparent, confidential and non-discriminatory procedures.

INTERNATIONALISING OPERATIONS

Within the field of operations, RNE deals with quality measuring and quality analysis of international rail traffic. Experts from the RNE Operations working group have described the processes currently governing international operations, defined measures for operational improvements together with Corridor Managers, and are contributing to the creation of a European Performance Regime (EPR).

Another major part of the process harmonisation is to agree on common guidelines, legal documentation and procedures. All working groups are concerned by this: Legal Matters, Network Statements, Marketing & Sales, Operations and especially Timetabling. They have initiated the creation of several handbooks, guidelines, templates and forms to simplify and promote international rail transport, such as:

- a customer handbook for international timetabling
- a handbook for OSS customer care
- a Common Access Contract
- a Common Network Statement Structure
- a Glossary of network statement-related terms.

In 2004, RNE took charge of international timetable planning and management (formerly managed by Forum Train Europe). The Timetabling group's customer handbook is designed to increase transparency as regards international route capacity planning, timetabling deadlines and the duties of involved parties.

It is a step towards easing access to the European rail network for rail customers.

Another step to this end has been the adoption and revision in 2004, 2006 and 2009 of a common structure for national rail network statements. This increases transparency, makes the comparison of several network statements easier for customers and creates a clearer view on the conditions to be found on different networks. In 2009, this work was completed by the online publication of an English-language Glossary (450 terms and their definitions), which adds a standardised vocabulary to the common structure.

TRANSPARENT TOOLS

All together, the Members of RNE act as a single virtual rail network for international traffic – a network of over 140,000 miles. This poses a considerable challenge, given that historically the national parts of this virtual network mostly grew in isolation from each other, pursuing divergent objectives with different means – not to mention the geographical differences in climate (from Helsinki to Malaga) and topography (compare the mountainous Swiss terrain and the flat Low Countries). The management of such a heterogeneous group of networks requires both high-performance IT tools and

the right approach, based on the promotion of integrated European rail corridors and on trans-European cooperation. These are described in the sections below.

A COMMON SET OF IT TOOLS

RNE's harmonisation work can only be achieved by using an appropriate toolkit. The RNE IT experts provide three IT tools which significantly simplify the work of all involved parties in the European rail sector: EICIS, EUROPTIRAILS and PATHFINDER. Much work has been done in developing interfaces between national – pan-European IT systems, improving the quality of data input at national level and facilitating cross-border data flows.

The first tool run by RailNetEurope is called EICIS (European Infrastructure Charging Information System). It provides indicative information on charges for the use of the European rail network. A web-based umbrella for the national charging systems, EICIS calculates the price for the use of international train paths within seconds, 24 hours a day – and the use of EICIS is

free of charge. EICIS calculates charges station fees and shunting fees

as well. Thus this tool allows financial pre-planning, cost estimation or ad-hoc financial requests.

EUROPTIRAILS is another web-based tool, run by RNE since 2007. It supports international traffic management by delivering real-time data concerning international passenger and freight trains. This

data enables the viewing of complete international train runs. Through its reporting function, EUROPTIRAILS also serves as a source of information for international quality analysis within the EPR and corridor-oriented Train Performance Management (TPM). The relevant train data is processed directly from the national IMs' systems.

Thanks to EUROPTIRAILS, problems stemming from non-harmonised national processes and messaging formats were detected and have been tackled. The EUROPTIRAILS data exchange function is being used by some IMs as a pilot for the implementation of the European Union's TAF TSI (Telematic Applications for Freight/ Technical Specification for Interoperability). EUROPTIRAILS data exchange will be adapted to TAF TSI standards in 2010 and will be used for the TAF TSI Common Components pilot project.

Since the TAF TSI could have a deep impact on international rail infrastructure business processes, RNE is trying to stay ahead of this development and has already implanted it into its current tools. This gives the users of RNE applications the opportunity to get acquainted with the new requirements ahead of the implementation deadline (2014).

Another feature that RNE plans to introduce into EUROPTIRAILS in 2010 is ETA (Estimated Time of Arrival). This is another

major step forward in the organisation of logistic chains involving rail transport.

Finally, the third IT tool run by RNE, Pathfinder, is also a web-based application, provided to IMs/ABs and Path Applicants. It handles the communication and coordination processes for international path requests and path offers. Furthermore, Pathfinder assists RUs and Applicants in their pre-coordination tasks related to train path studies and international train path requests.

Currently, Pathfinder is being used for approximately 95 per cent of all international path applications in the passenger business. For freight trains the percentage is around 10 per cent. This difference can be explained by the differing nature of the traffics: passenger traffic is characterised by a high degree of rigid planning whereas most freight traffic is of an ad-hoc nature. RNE has taken this difference into account with the most recent release of Pathfinder (November 2009), which for the first time incorporates ad-hoc path requests. It is expected that this new functionality will lead to a much higher usage of the system for international freight traffic.

EUROPEAN CORRIDOR APPROACH

All of these developments come to life on international rail corridors, supervised by RNE Corridor Managers, which have been set up to:

- deliver a more reliable forecast of the available capacity for rail customers
- apply harmonised deadlines for planning international train paths
- shape corridor capacity according to the market's requirements
- simplify the capacity request procedure by providing pre-constructed international train paths
- improve train punctuality thanks to regular performance monitoring.

This will help rail freight customers to plan their consignments more efficiently and become more competitive. In this area, RNE closely cooperates with European Economic Interest Groupings (EEIGs, that have been set up on a number of rail corridors) to create synergies and improve efficiency for the customer.

In addition to all the activities presented above, RNE puts strong emphasis on cooperation with other European organisations – such as the Community of European Railways (CER), the European Infrastructure Managers (EIM) and the International Union of Railways (UIC). In this way, RNE seeks to reduce redundancies and eliminate double work. This has a positive effect on developments in the rail sector, which in turn improves the situation for customers as well as Infrastructure Managers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Joint Office of RailNetEurope publishes all relevant information, documents and maps on its website: www.railneteurope.com. Please address your inquiries to mailbox@rne.at

