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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

INLAND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Working Party on Combined Transport

Working Party on Rail Transport

Joint Meeting on the Working Parties on  
Combined Transport and Rail Transport

(First session, 19 April 2001,  
agenda item 3 (b))

**THE ROLE OF RAILWAYS IN THE PROMOTION OF COMBINED TRANSPORT**

**Problems encountered in combined transport operations**

**Transmitted by the Government of Poland**

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1. According to data available for the first half of 2000 combined transport in Poland as a share of the total railway freight carriages is only 1.1 per cent. Despite such minor performance railways play a dominant role on the combined transport market. Railways are in fact "principal operators" in inland transport and are a very basic transport mode in serving seaports.
2. In the Polish reality, one could consider the issue of the role of railways in the combined transport mainly in international freight transport market – international freight carriages being close to 96% of the total intermodal traffic of railways.
3. Local connections make no use of swap bodies and semi-trailers, while they are used in more than 14.4% of international intermodal freight traffic both in terms of carried tonnage and volume (TEU). In this context, a proposal to increase the role of railways in promoting combined transport addressed to all railway undertakings (both Polish and foreign) brings fruits in global scale.
4. The AGTC Agreement recommends railway administrations and railway operators to adopt technical and operational parameters, which would significantly increase quality of offered services and consequently boost demand for combined transport. Problematic however, is the fact that individual railway undertakings adopting the above parameters in their operations create favourable conditions only on one stage of combined transport process. Therefore, it seems advisable to undertake infrastructure investment programs, which cover the total length of a given connection and most of all specified pan-European transport corridors. Such actions, when concerted by all involved railway undertakings, would eliminate every traffic disturbance and in particular "bottlenecks". Importance of such actions lies in the fact that nothing other than individual traffic bottlenecks put railways on less competitive position than road transport and discourage potential users from using combined transport opportunities.
5. It is obvious that the financial standing of individual railway undertakings and the possibilities of governments to support infrastructure investment are different, and in the case of Central and Eastern European Countries are more limited than in the European Union member states. Therefore, construction of new railway infrastructure should go hand-in-hand with such possibilities, but nevertheless should choose the right directions and enjoy adequate financial support.
6. Such assumptions were adopted in Poland, where priority was given to modernization of principal transport corridor-railway line C-E 20, which now to a large extent conforms to AGTC Agreement requirements. It has been possible to implement the project thanks to an agreement of the German, Polish, Belarussian and Russian governments, national railway administrations, loans from international financial institutions, EU Phare grants and other arrangements. The results of co-ordination of actions on international scale brought the expected fruits.

7. In our opinion the principal task of railways, apart from extension of railway networks, should be to organise railway traffic and co-operate with individual participants of combined transport process such as: (a) combined transport operators, (b) customs authorities, (c) veterinarian and phytosanitary services, (d) owners of terminals, etc.
8. Indisputable advantages of combined transport should be time and reliability of services. Trying to meet such requirements railways are required to co-ordinate timetables of trains, which should be strictly adhered to. Decreasing transport times in competition with road transport is possible through, among other things, minimising waiting times of trains at national borders (see provision E(b) of Schedule IV to AGTC Agreements). In this case, the principal task of railways is to co-ordinate efforts with neighbouring railway administrations in order to develop train timetables taking account of maximum 30 minutes transit time for trains at national borders, enough to accommodate all formalities relevant to technical and administrative controls (border and customs). Different traction systems should pose no problem in this regard, since under relevant agreements with border services, time required for phytosanitary, veterinarian and customs controls is more than enough for a change of locomotive, brake checks, etc.
9. Recommended 30 minutes transit time at national border is possible to be met in case of Polish cross-border points with Germany, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic. It is only a question – as mentioned above – of willingness of the railway administrations to conclude relevant arrangements not only with neighbouring partners but also with relevant services. Support from combined transport operators in this regard is highly advisable.
10. The situation is very different on cross-border points with different gauge standards, and moreover – in the case of Polish Eastern borders – different, from legal point of view, systems of dispatching and carrying consignments.
11. We are of the opinion that in such circumstances all railway administrations neighbouring with railway network of Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic should take actions to minimise waiting times at cross border points. Relevant measures should be in particular of technical nature, to be more precise – to change system from reloading to non-reloading. It would significantly reduce the time consignments spent at border stations (far more than 30 minutes), which now includes re-forwarding operations (change from CIM to SGMS and the inverse operation) and border controls.
12. Polish authorities attempt to take such measures. The priority is very high since combined transport in transit through Poland constitutes 31.4% of international carriages in this system.

13. To be more specific, works on agreements of Polish and Belarussian railway administration are well advanced to launch Ro-La operations on C-E 20 railway line. Representatives of the German railways attend all the meetings. On the cross border point in Mackova, Polish and Lithuanian railways have been testing rolling stock with adaptable bogies. If the tests are successful and upon termination of the combined transport terminal in Kaunas, Lithuania, and the connection with Polish network through standard gauge link, chances are high to increase combined transport operations from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to Western Europe via Poland, It is worth mentioning that the only road cross border point for freight traffic between Poland and Lithuania located in Budziski serves some 40% of all traffic on the so-called Eastern Polish border (with Russia, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine) and some 80% of traffic is transit traffic performed by operators from the Baltic States.

14. Issues regarding railway operations in combined transport in the direction of Eastern Europe should, in our opinion, be one of the focus points in discussions at international level. It includes both technical aspects (financial support for non-reloading operations), and civil/legal relations related in particular to liabilities for safety of consignments in transport. Diverse regulations in this respect prevents combined transport operations from developing in connections with Eastern European countries. Until common practices of civil liability of combined transport parties are in effect, in particular - in case of railways – parties to the COTIF convention would stumble upon numerous obstacles in developing their operations towards Eastern markets. One needs to recognise that railway administrations with highest problems in this case are parties to CIM and SMGS (such as Poland) however results translate indirectly to all European railway administrations.

15. Having in mind such difficulties, Poland (as a member of the Railway Co-operation Organisation) as early on as 1993, undertook the lead in developing the Agreement on Organisational and Operational Aspects of Combined Transport Services between Europe and Asia (based on the AFTC Agreement) but going beyond close Eastern European relations. Taking due account of railways in such connections, Poland initiated also the invitation of Railway Co-operation Organisation representatives to participate in the work of WP.24. These first representations were made during the 1994 session of the working group.

16. The Agreement itself was signed in 1995 in Hanoi, Vietnam.

17. We consider, that European railways should not overlook the importance of developing combined transport in these connections. Cutting short transit times between ports in China and Germany from 20 or 30 days in maritime traffic to 11 days on rail tracks might, given that the relevant arrangements with Eastern European and Asian railway operators are in place, create conditions to take over large volumes of freight.

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