

Building a corridor from the bottom up

CORRIDORS An EU-funded research programme to investigate international freight flows with potential for transfer to rail has resulted in the launch of regular services linking the North Sea and the Black Sea.



The first Retrack train awaits departure from Köln on February 27.

Inset: From left to right, Central European Railway Transport, Trading & Service Co Traffic Manager Imre Kocsis, LTE's representative Botond Varga, Michael Roggenkamp of Transpetrol and CERTS General Manager István Bárány.

Earlier this year a weekly freight train began running between Köln and Győr, carrying automotive products, bulk agricultural commodities and chemicals. Operated by VTG Group's logistics subsidiary Transpetrol, the train was a pilot for the Retrack project to develop new international rail corridors based around market requirements. The pilot train was an immediate success, leading to the introduction of a second weekly service in July.

The development of international corridors has become a key element in the European Commission's strategy to forge the continent's railways into a single market. The past few years have seen the designation of Trans-European Network routes, Crete corridors, ERTMS corridors, and the emergence of the putative freight priority

network.

But according to Gerwin Zomer of Dutch research institute TNO Mobiliteit en Logistiek, these are all 'top down' approaches, where the corridors are identified centrally and imposed from above. 'We wanted to try something different', he says. 'We felt it could be a better approach to look at the potential for rail freight and existing traffic flows out in the market, and then try and put together an international rail corridor with independent operators providing an improved service offer.'

Hence Retrack: the Reorganisation of Transport Networks by Advanced Rail Concepts. Launched in May 2007,

this four-year research project is being funded from the EU's sixth framework programme. The project consortium brings together 13 organisations, ranging from academic institutions and train operators to shippers and service companies (p146).

The project is designed to contribute to the Commission's sustainability and modal shift aspirations, which would see rail achieving a market share of 15% by 2020. These targets are also supported by the European





The Retrack partners intend to develop 'a commercial trans-European rail freight service' along a new corridor that could reach the port of Constanza in Romania.

Rail Research Advisory Council. Retrack says it is 'applying an innovative service concept to the movement of rail freight through the design, development and implementation of a commercial trans-European rail freight service' along a corridor linking Rotterdam with the Black Sea port of Constanza in Romania.

The aim is to create 'an effective and scalable rail freight corridor between high-demand regions in Western Europe and new high-growth regions in Central and Eastern Europe'. The project is also looking to develop links with other emerging corridors augmenting the TEN-T network.

Market testing

According to Zomer, the first step in the 'market-driven' approach was

to assess the market and identify those shippers who were already moving traffic between eastern and western Europe which could potentially be switched to rail. By starting from the shippers' actual requirements, it was possible to design a service pattern that met their specific needs, rather than trying to fit the traffic flows into an existing timetable.

Thus the pilot train launched on February 27 departs from Köln every Wednesday, arriving in Győr just 21 h later. The return trip gets back to Köln on Friday. By mid-August the Retrack partners had operated 22 trains, with a second weekly service running to Sopron on demand; this is expected to operate more regularly

Mainz and Nürnberg to Passau and Salzburg, crossing Austria to Hegešhalom and then Győr. Use of a Siemens ES64 multi-system electric locomotive avoids unnecessary locomotive changes at the borders, helping to ensure a seamless service.

As more customers have been identified, Retrack has added supplementary calls en route, picking up and setting down traffic at Worms, Nürnberg and Linz. Trip workings are also envisaged to serve customers in Belgium, Hungary and the Netherlands. With trains now running on the central section, services will gradually be expanded until the full corridor is operational between Rotterdam and Constanza.

'Former incumbent railways can use their dominant position to keep out competitors'

Min Zhang Consultant, TNO Mobiliteit en Logistiek

as traffic builds up following the summer break.

Train operation is the responsibility of Austrian consortium member LTE Logistik und Transport and Hungarian open access operator Central European Railway. The German operations are managed by Transpetrol, and were initially outsourced; the company expects to obtain its own operating licence as a railway undertaking by the fourth quarter of this year.

The core corridor runs from Rotterdam to Köln Eifelort, then via

In the longer term, the route will be expanded to serve the emerging Bratislava-Budapest 'central European logistics hub'. Retrack says further corridors are also envisaged, connecting Bratislava and Budapest with the Nordic and Baltic states to the north and with Turkey and Ukraine in the east.

One of Retrack's biggest concerns is access to terminals. According to TNO's Min Zhang, 'a terminal along the corridor may be ideally located to serve the customers' origins and final destinations. But trains operated

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The initial corridor will eventually link Rotterdam with Constanza via Austria and Hungary. The Retrack partners are examining possible extensions to Turkey, Ukraine and the Baltic states.



Feeder trains are planned to serve customers in Belgium and the Netherlands, but access to terminals remains a problem.

by private undertakings might not be able to gain access, because the terminal is owned or operated by one of the former incumbent railways which can use its dominant position to keep out competitors. As an alternative, Retrack has sometimes needed to look for another terminal in the same hub region, where the location or access might be less than optimal, but at least it makes it possible to operate a service.'

IT and training

The Retrack partners see considerable scope for removing operational,

Retrack consortium members

TNO Mobiliteit en Logistiek (Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research)	Netherlands
NewRail (University of Newcastle upon Tyne)	UK
DeltaRail	Netherlands
Transportøkonomisk Institutt (Norwegian Centre for Transport Research)	Norway
TCI Roehling (Transport Consulting International)	Germany
Central European Railway Transport, Trading & Service Co	Hungary
Soptim AG	Germany
LTE Logistik und Transport GmbH	Austria
Transpetrol GmbH	Germany
SC Servtrans Invest SA	Romania

institutional and technical barriers through the standardisation of IT systems under TAF-TSI. As part of the project, German IT specialist Soptim has developed a modular software package to manage block train and wagonload operations. Soptim RMS (Railway Management Suite) is used by the operators to coordinate train movements, whilst CIC (Customer Information Centre) provides real-time status information to the shippers and project partners. Communication with other railway IT systems is handled by the RIPS module (Railway Integration Platform Services). Soptim

envisages using internet-based cloud computing concepts to ensure that information is available wherever and whenever it is needed.

To support the introduction of RMS, DeltaRail has been developing a series of training modules, as well as simulation scenarios to test the operating plan against a range of possible disruptions. DeltaRail is also developing a prototype 'Language Code' for international operations, allowing drivers and signalling staff to exchange messages about safety-critical events or procedures and overcome current language barriers to cross-border operations. 

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