



Railway Gazette

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Harnessing the benefits of high speed



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Briefing

The coronavirus pandemic is likely to have a wide-ranging impact on the **European** rail sector, according to a study by SCI Verkehr. Describing the possible re-introduction of lockdown measures in the event of a virus resurgence in autumn as a 'most likely' scenario, SCI Verkehr estimates that this would lead to a 40% slump in passenger traffic and a 20% drop in freight for 2020 as a whole. Business may not recover to pre-crisis levels until 2023 or 2024, the study predicts.

Test running has restarted in the 15.4 km Ceneri Base Tunnel following a shutdown of work during the pandemic. AlpTransit Gotthard, SBB and **Switzerland's** Federal Office for Transport are determining the impact of the revised testing programme on the planned inauguration of the tunnel in September and the scheduled opening to regular traffic in December.

KiwiRail has introduced new working protocols to reflect the impact of Covid-19, including reducing the size of its track maintenance teams and working in isolated groups to minimise the risk of person-to-person spread. Group Chief Executive Greg Miller said the national railway had 'shared our new processes with the government, because other industries will be able to learn from our experience when they come back on stream after this period of lockdown.'

New York MTA has suspended all-night operation on the New York subway, to allow time for intensive cleaning and disinfecting of stations, trains and other equipment between 01.00 and 05.00. It anticipates that overnight operation could resume with effective social distancing measures once the demand for public transport returns.

RENFE has introduced personalised tickets for passengers using high speed and other trains where seat reservations are compulsory. Passengers must provide mobile phone numbers and other information that will facilitate contract tracing if necessary.

Rail investment vital to recovery

EUROPE

Investment to 'make rail the core element of the European transport system', should be an intrinsic part of the EU's plans for stimulating economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic, suggest CER and UNIFE.


Writing to European Commission Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans, Transport Commissioner Adina Vălean and Cohesion Commissioner Elisa Ferreira on April 20, CER Executive Director Libor Lochman and UNIFE Director General Philippe Citroën argued for greater consideration of

rail in EU's next Multi-Annual Financial Framework.

The associations pointed out that 'as Europe has suffered under the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, railways have stepped up to provide essential services, while at the same time bearing the considerable financial impact of the collapse in regular passenger and freight numbers'. Committing to invest in rail would provide reassurance to both operators and users alike, they suggested.

'The changes to Europe coming from the Covid-19 crisis will be long-lasting, but we believe

that by looking at the economic opportunities and environmental benefits offered by a renewal and improvement of the European rail network, EU leaders can use this as a cost-efficient opportunity to meet several goals at once', they suggested. 'The new MFF should have the Green Deal at its core.'

'Policy actions need to ensure that low-emission passenger, freight and urban transport options are supported over less environmentally friendly modes. The EU should not be looking to return to the status quo, with all its accompanying environmental impacts.' 

Pricing highlights Eurasian savings


INTERNATIONAL

To demonstrate the potential cost savings of rail to shippers who have traditionally relied on air freight, Davies Turner has introduced a new pricing mechanism for its weekly rail-sea-road service from Xi'an to the UK.

Whereas surface freight is typically priced by volume, the

air freight sector quotes rates by weight. 'At US\$0.24/kg or 2000 cm³, with a minimum cost of US\$120, it is no surprise that our direct *Express China Rail* service is becoming of great interest to the air freight sector, which is facing sky-high rates out of China, with costs of US\$10 to US\$15 per kg now being seen,' explained the company's Head

of Supply Chain Services Tony Cole.

'Importers that traditionally move freight by air only need to factor in the slightly longer lead times for rail, to see what a massive cost saving they can benefit from. Importers that are able to remodel their supply chains to use the rail freight option may do so on a permanent basis.' 


Transporting disinfectant



EUROPE

With Polish disinfectant manufacturers facing a shortage of raw materials because of the high levels of demand during the coronavirus outbreak, Captrain and TankMatch Rail Hamburg rallied round with an urgent delivery of ethanol from the Port of Rotterdam to Pleszew last month. Around 1000 tonnes of ethanol were moved in 18-wagon train.

Pointing out that rail required fewer staff than road transport


to move a large payload, the operator said it had been possible to implement the cross-border service at short notice. 'If train and shunting services, wagons and infrastructure are optimally co-ordinated, the railway can fully exploit its strengths and get considerable transport volume off the road,' said Captrain Deutschland Managing Director Jérôme Méline. 

Restoring trust

INTERNATIONAL

UITP has sent a second open letter to the European Commission, Council and Parliament setting out its concerns over the impact of Covid-19 on the urban transport sector.

'The entire ecosystem of the sector will have to fight to survive this crisis, to rebuild trust in public transport and, ultimately, to come out stronger from this crisis', the association explained, emphasising that 'public transport systems are vital to the economic recovery and for keeping the climate change agenda on track'.

UITP is looking to the EU to take an active role in persuading potentially hesitant populations to return to public transport, the image of which has 'deteriorated' because of the crisis. 

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