

Interruption of the corridor Rhine-Alpine in Rastatt: economy and modal shift at risk

Service interrupted on the main European corridor until 7 October

On 22.8.2017, the Deutsche Bahn has informed that the line closure of Rastatt near Karlsruhe will continue until 7 October, much longer than originally expected. The consequences are dramatic. The closure affects 200 freight trains per day. The diversion options and alternatives offered will not be anywhere near sufficient to cover demand for conventional and intermodal traffic.

Rastatt will become a European problem

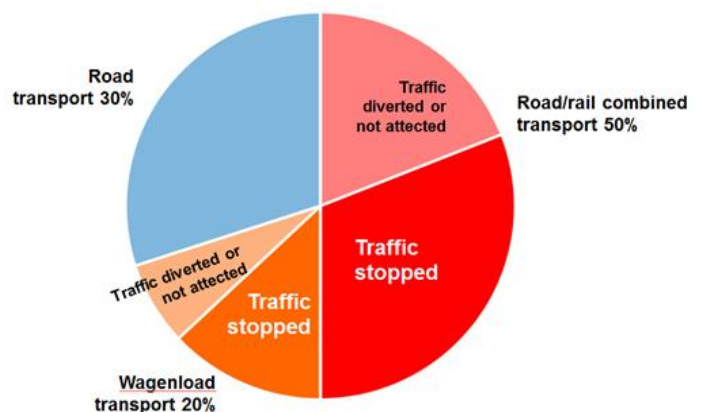
The Rhine-Alpine corridor has the highest traffic volumes of any rail corridor in Europe. Rail has a market share of 70% in trans-Alpine freight transport between northern Europe and Italy via Switzerland. Combined transport accounts for 50%. By way of comparison: combined transport accounts for less than 10% on the Hamburg–Munich corridor.

The Rastatt closure on 12 August led to an abrupt interruption of traffic on the combined transport corridor which connects northern Europe to Italy, via Switzerland. In the first two weeks, combined transport operators managed, just barely, and with delays, to handle freight volumes: they diverted trains via Stuttgart/Singen and Brenner, used a road bridge between Mannheim/Karlsruhe and Basel, and introduced a barge bridge to Basel, in each case organising onward carriage by rail to Italy.

The holiday season is coming to an end in Italy, however, and volumes are expected to rise sharply in September. The alternative capacity currently available will only be able to cover just under half of combined transport demand. This will cause major disruptions in European trade and could potentially lead to a complete breakdown of the traffic system.

Road transport will not be able to handle the very large additional volumes in transport with Italy. Roughly 15,000 trucks and drivers would be needed, and 20,000 additional trucks would need to travel through the Swiss Alps each week – twice as many as now.

Raw material deliveries would either not be made or be seriously delayed. As a result, a large number of production plants in Italy, Germany and other European countries would have to stop all or part of their production. Moreover, there is a risk of supply bottlenecks in certain cases.



Modal split on the north-south corridor via Switzerland, and the effects of Rastatt (Basis: Swiss Federal Office of Transport, 2016)

Markets affected: UK-NL-BE-DE-DK-SE-IT

Despite diversion and alternative options, up to 45% of total freight volume normally transported between Europe and Italy via Switzerland cannot run.

How to prevent traffic collapse on road and rail

In order to prevent the imminent traffic collapse on road and rail, close international crisis cooperation is needed.

In Germany, diversion routes via Singen are already in operation and fully utilized for around 60 trains per day. For diversions via Austria and France, line capacities are available for about 100 trains. These cannot yet be fully utilized because of different technical obstacles, for example suitable locomotives and train drivers with the required language and line knowledge.

Further alternatives to the overcoming of the interrupted section are the inland shipping via Rhine and the establishment of train connections Germany-Italy south of Rastatt.

If we succeed to activate all these capacities in a timely manner, and to use them efficiently, the market requirement of 200 freight trains per day can be fully met. The central prerequisite is the willingness of all stakeholders to cooperate internationally.

Rastatt interruption: options of traffic diversions

