

Transport development 2024

Hupac keeps volumes stable and invests in resilience

Chiasso, 10.2.2025 In 2024, the Hupac Group transported around 949,000 road consignments in combined road/rail transport. The transport volume has thus remained largely stable. Hupac is countering the critical performance of the railway infrastructure in some areas with several measures.

Hupac takes a positive view of Switzerland's leading role in the newly created TEN-T North Sea-Rhine-Mediterranean corridor and the assumption of joint corridor responsibility by Switzerland and Belgium. The merging of the two Swiss transalpine corridors is another important step towards more efficient management of international rail freight transport.

Traffic development 2024

Last year, the Hupac Group transported around 949,000 road consignments or 1,818,000 TEU in combined road/rail transport and maritime hinterland transport. This represents a decrease of 2.6% or 26,000 consignments compared to the previous year. In its core business of transalpine transport through Switzerland, Hupac was able to keep traffic stable despite the capacity restrictions in the Gotthard base tunnel (-0.2%). The interruption of the Modane line and network adjustments in north-east Italy led to a sharp decline in transalpine traffic via France and Austria. Non-transalpine traffic with the markets of west, north-east and south-east Europe remained largely stable with a slight decrease of 1.2%.

Freight-friendly construction – here's how

In addition to the cyclical decline in demand for transport, the problematic condition of the rail network is the main reason for the below-expectations development of traffic. The precarious performance of an ageing rail infrastructure, particularly in Germany, is a burden on transport reliability. However, the recently completed refurbishment of the Riedbahn line between Frankfurt and Mannheim shows that freight-friendly construction is possible. The key factors:

- sufficient capacity on the alternative routes in terms of available train paths, also by thinning out passenger traffic through the establishment of rail replacement services
- electrified diversionary routes with few additional kilometres
- identical production parameters for the trains in terms of profile, train length and train weight
- good technical quality of the alternative lines thanks to preventive maintenance
- no major simultaneous works on the international corridor concerned
- sufficient time for the railways to prepare.

Hupac invests in resilience and stability

These criteria should be taken into account not only for the major corridor renovations, but generally for all construction sites, for example also for the upgrade of the Rhine Valley line. The focus must be on performance and economic viability for rail customers. "A diversion capacity of 80% is the absolute minimum to prevent freight traffic from migrating to the roads," says Michail Stahlhut, CEO of Hupac. "If there are

significant additional costs, we expect the infrastructure managers to make concessions. After all, the current performance crisis is the result of structural neglect and underfunding in the past.”

Hupac itself is taking a number of measures to increase the resilience and stability of its services. On the occasion of the complete closure of the Rhine Valley Railway in August 2024 due to construction work, Hupac initiated a pioneering project of Franco-German-Swiss cooperation. By setting up a diesel shuttle through Alsace, 20 freight trains per day in each direction were able to avoid the closure. The service was provided by SBB Cargo International and Captrain on a non-discriminatory basis.

“Since the beginning of 2025, we have been routing some of our traffic Belgium-Italy traffic through France instead of Germany. This enables us to counter the risk of irregularities and increase the reliability of our transport operations,” says Stahlhut. Other diversion concepts are in the pipeline. Operational measures include the provision of reserve compositions, the use of reserve locomotive drivers and the planning of additional capacity at weekends to deal with the backlog of train services cancelled during the week.

In addition to these internal efforts, Hupac expects the highest level of commitment from all parties along the transport chain in order to guarantee capacity in line with market requirements. On the infrastructure side, Hupac advocates the installation of storage sidings along the north-south corridor through Switzerland, for example in Basel, Karlsruhe, Offenburg and Chiasso. “This is an important measure to reduce the impact of disruptions and maintain the flow of traffic.”

Hupac's strategy for the future of combined transport

Despite the current difficult economic situation, Hupac is sticking to its strategy for the further development of combined transport. The focus is on expanding terminal capacities together with partners. “This year we expect the new terminals in Piacenza and Barcelona to come on stream, followed next year by the Milano Smistamento terminal,” says Hans-Jörg Bertschi, Chairman of the Board of Directors. Hupac sees great potential in digitalisation. “Together with representatives from the entire value chain, we are working on standardising and optimising core processes. This will enable us to reduce complexity and operating costs and thus contribute to the competitiveness of climate-friendly combined transport.”

International cooperation for an efficient rail infrastructure

Cross-border corridor management is a decisive factor for the future of intermodal transport in Europe. 90% of combined freight trains cross national borders – a clear indication of the urgent need to internationalise infrastructure policy and management in Europe. “The joint engagement of Switzerland and Belgium in the North Sea-Rhine-Mediterranean freight corridor is a step in the right direction. For a sustainable modal shift policy, we expect further improvements in corridor management, in particular greater coordination and reliability of international infrastructure measures”, Bertschi continues.

One concrete step would be the long-discussed widening of the Antwerp-Metz-Basel corridor to a 4-metre profile. The Commission's proposal, adopted by the Swiss Parliament in 2023, provides for the co-financing of the upgrading of the Vosges tunnels on the left bank of the Rhine. Bertschi: 'We support the dialogue with all parties involved in favour of pragmatic solutions in the interest of Europe's competitiveness as a business location.

Profile of the Hupac Group

With a transport volume of around one million road consignments per year, the Hupac Group is the leading network operator in combined transport in Europe. Hupac offers 130 trains per day between the most important economic areas, thus making an important contribution to the modal shift to rail and to environmental protection.

Founded in Chiasso/Switzerland in 1967, the Hupac Group today has 700 employees, 8,500 wagon modules and 12 terminals in the main European hubs.

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