

Traffic growth despite poor quality of rail network operation

Chiasso, 29.7.2014 In the first half of 2014, the Swiss combined transport operator Hupac posted growth of 3.8% in traffic. Construction work, accidents, technical faults and strikes exerted pressure on the quality of operation in the rail network.

Development of traffic

In the first half of 2014, the Swiss combined transport operator Hupac carried 339,725 road consignments in unaccompanied combined transport (UCT) across the whole of Europe. This is equivalent to growth of 3.8% as compared to the same period of the prior year. The trend for Hupac's traffic reflects the economic situation in Europe: the economy is still weak, and trade in goods with Italy in particular remains at a relatively low level. Managing Director Bernhard Kunz notes: "We almost achieved our budget targets in the first half of 2014." Hupac expects the demand situation to remain stable until the end of the year.

Quality of operation in the rail network

On the other hand, the quality of operation in the rail network is giving cause for concern. Punctuality decreased on all transportation routes as compared to 2013, although the extent of the decrease varied. Inadequate operating quality in the rail network is a killer factor for modal shift. "Punctuality targets of well over 90% apply in the logistics sector," Hupac's managing director Bernhard Kunz emphasises. "If the rail system fails to take countermeasures, we shall become detached from the market and we shall miss our modal shift targets".

As well as customer satisfaction, the economic efficiency of combined transport is suffering due to the inadequacy of quality. Every freight train that has to wait in a siding until it can continue its journey wastes the productivity potential of the resources that are deployed, such as staff, locomotives, rail waggons, trucks and transshipment facilities. The costs put the entire system under pressure, and they impede the market development of rail freight transport.

Strategic target: at least 90% punctuality

Hupac is adhering to its strategic target of a punctuality rate of at least 90%, and is making investments to minimise the consequences for customers. Reasons for delays include accidents and technical faults in the rail network, planned construction work with traffic diversions, strikes, resource bottlenecks at railway companies and irregularities at the terminals.

Customer-friendly infrastructure management is called for

The framework of regulatory conditions is responsible for the fact that operating faults in the network cause such massive quality problems. In many countries, freight traffic comes last in the existing order of priorities for the network. When disruptions occur, they cause delays that last for hours and - in individual cases - days. However, freight traffic is also reliant on compliance with timetables. Mr Kunz comments: "In many cases, freight transport is still regarded as a disruptive factor rather than a customer worth millions with potential for the future. This trend is moving in the wrong direction – all the more so as infrastructure prices are on the increase throughout Europe. In this regard, infrastructure divisions need to show greater proximity to the market also with regards to the freight sector."

One potential solution would involve compensation payments for delays; compensation of this sort is already known in the rail passenger transport and aviation sectors. Delays triggered by the railway infrastructure should also be charged to that segment. "If all the players in the logistics chain share responsibility, we can join forces to offer an attractive product and drive ahead with modal shift," Mr Kunz points out.

Traffic development in 1st half of 2014	January-June 2014	January-June 2013	in %
Number of road consignments			
Transalpine via CH	198,338	189,716	4.5
Transalpine via A	25,777	26,978	- 4.5
Transalpine via F	1,824	1,385	31.7
Total transalpine	225,939	218,079	3.6
Import/export CH	33,115	33,368	- 0.8
Domestic CH	1,628	1,667	- 2.3
Other traffic	79,043	74,252	6.5
Total non-transalpine	113,786	109,287	4.1
Total	339,725	327,366	3.8

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