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Successful 5th UIC Global Rail Freight Conference organised in Rotterdam under the theme: “*Shaping together the Business of the Future*”

Rail Freight has a future if based on more customer-orientation, more corridors, more complementarity, more collaboration, more creative connectivity

(Paris, 24 June 2016) The International Union of Railways, UIC, successfully organised the 5th edition of the UIC Global Rail Freight Conference on 22 and 23 June 2016 in Rotterdam, which has become over the editions the reference at global level for exchanges on all strategic issues and best practices related to the development of rail freight and logistics services across the world.

This year, under the Patronage of the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, and with the support of UIC Member ProRail (Dutch Railway infrastructure manager), OTIF (Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail) and United Nations UNECE, ITF from OECD, as well as a number of international and railway associations such as BIC, CIT, GCU, UNIFE, UIP, ERFA, Rail Cargo, UIRR, etc, the Conference brought together around 250 participants from all the parts of the world and representing the whole freight and logistics supply chain. The Conference was also connected this year to the TEN-T Days organised by the European Commission earlier this week at the same place, at the Van Nelle Factory.

A series of high level speakers discussed about the theme “*Shaping together the Business of the Future*” and more particularly focused on “*From Shanghai to Rotterdam: the landbridge concept 10 years on*”, “*Strategies to deliver opportunities and enhance effectiveness*”, “*Rail Freight 4.0: innovation and digitalisation for global solutions*” as well as “*The workforce of the future: digital skills and human capital*.”

Mr Pex LANGENBERG, Vice Mayor of Rotterdam in charge of Mobility welcomed the participants and young professionals attending the Conference on behalf of the city of Rotterdam, by reminding the participants that the city has encouraged relationships between railways and ports since 1870 and explaining the benefits of the Betuwe route in the Netherlands. He also added that this week shows that arguments still have to be developed in favour of the development of rail freight.

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Other speakers during the official opening insisted on the importance of *“shaping together the business of the future, still in a context of competition, but with more cooperation, and thanks to the benefits expected from digitalisation”*. The future indeed could be a *“combination between robust and flexible approach of what you want to deliver”*.

Mr Salman BABAYEV, Vice President of Russian Railways (RZD), representing UIC Chairman Oleg BELOZEROV, declared that *“Russian Railways were ready for a continuous and constructive dialogue to be led with Member States and all relevant parties in order to sustain efforts to build through Russia the “landbridge between Europe and Asia”*. He insisted particularly on *“the importance to be more and more “client orientated”* – one of the main messages of GRFC this year – and to develop the international transport corridors. He said *“our profitability of cooperation is enormous”*.

Mr Paul BARRETT, the moderator of the Conference, also invited five young professionals to listen to all the debates. Their mission was to make sure, in a *“fresh blood approach”*, that the link between current and future generations who would be in charge of the future of rail can be made and share the important messages, embracing the new challenges for railways, and more particularly for rail freight.

Among these messages delivered by speakers during GRFC, several ones can be kept in mind:

- Rail freight actors and stakeholders must think the future of railways as a whole network and not only corridor by corridor: in this context, it is important to have both administrative and technical harmonisation, to continue to develop interoperability and facilitate cross-border operations, but also to have adapted regulations, to create a favourable legal and tax scheme to reduce the cost burden;
- Rail freight actors and stakeholders should not forget the key player: customers of this business who play a crucial role. If they take into account expectations from the market: regularity / reliability; if they develop more door to door solutions and adapted services in connection with customer needs, with the dimension of flexibility and price stability - not so bad in rail, adapted equipment, developing safe transport, based on operation excellence. If all these aspects are regrouped, *“there is room for rail between air and sea if we can match the market requirement”*;
- Rail freight actors and stakeholders have all the reasons to remain optimistic; there is still progress to make as the present business model is at risk. But digitalization offers opportunities and thanks to *“new blood”* and the introduction of young skilled people to new technologies and to new mobility, perspectives offer a great future to re-invent railways through new generations, characterised by digital skills, customer obsession, able to act with flexibility, accepting job mobility, new organisational models, procedures, processes.
- Rail freight actors and stakeholders finally have to continue their common efforts to improve the image of the sector, which is not what it should be.

Mr Jean-Pierre LOUBINOX, UIC Director General, concluded this two-day conference by thanking all the speakers and participants for these very fruitful exchanges, presentations and debates. He said: "We had visions, expectations, practice in a totally transparent manner.

Summarising these two days is impossible. But as mentioned previously, some salient key points from all can be several useful take away:

- Customers: without them, rail freight has no prospect for development;
- Corridors: they have become a self-evident fact shared by all organisations with TEN-T Days, not only in Europe but at a global, transcontinental level, including East-West and North-South connections; services will make the difference; we have come from vision to reality, we must go from policies to business cases;
- Centres: it was already the message in the GRFC organised in Vienna in 2014 and it becomes a reality: more and more logistics hubs are created, as interfaces which offer capacity to maximise loads and they offer possibility of added value services;
- Complementarity: rail is not at all, but the backbone of a new transportation mix that can also be fed and de-fed (example of the incubator of the Port of Rotterdam); partnership with shipping is progressing and Rotterdam was the best symbolic choice to share this evidence;
- Collaboration between all stakeholders, between associations and organisations, between shippers, forwarders, operators and major owners to better harmonise, to improve interoperability or legal aspects with common continental framework (through the General Contract of Use for Wagons (GCU) for example);
- Creative connectivity to boost innovation, to take best advantage of digitalisation and the introduction of very concrete ideas, respecting intrinsic drivers of railways such as safety, security, sustainability

Two technical visits were organised within the GRFC, to the ECT Delta Terminal and to the Kijfhoek Shunting Yard. An exhibition also gave participants the opportunity to discover new innovations and rail freight products.

UIC also participated in the GCU anniversary in Rotterdam and was pleased to see that this General Contract of Use for Wagons (GCU), a multilateral contract based on the international convention COTIF 1999 and Annex CUV, celebrates its 10th anniversary this year and that it has grown to an impressive network of more than 600 signatories across 20 countries, with more than 600,000 wagons currently declared in the GCU wagon database.

In the framework of GRFC, an award was also given to Mr Jean-Pierre LOUBINOX by the Bureau International des Containers (BIC) in recognition of almost 40 years of exemplary leadership in the international railway sector. *"Mr. Loubinoux has dedicated his working life to the sustainability of rail and intermodal trade. His commitment to promoting sustainability in transport, and increasing rail safety and security is a notable achievement and one that fully deserves the BIC Award,"* says BIC Board Chairman, Giordano Bruno Guerrini. BIC is an organisation that promotes the safe, secure and sustainable expansion of containerisation and intermodal transportation. The annual award honours the individuals, or organisations, that have made the most notable contributions towards these goals.

All the GRFC presentations will be available in the near future on the UIC website.

MEDIA CONTACT: UIC Communications: com@uic.org