

The spoken word alone prevails

**Speech given by Jean-Pierre Loubinoux, UIC Director General
at UNECE Group of Experts on Level Crossing Safety Kick-off meeting**

20 January 2014, Geneva

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,
Good morning,

Just a few words regarding UIC to remind you that we represent all the railways and infrastructure managers around the world – 240 members in 95 countries. We represent one million km of infrastructure, seven million people working daily in the railways, 10,000 billion tonne km and 3000 billion tonne passenger km, and – because this is the focus of the today – approximately one million level crossings.

I'm very honoured and happy to be with you today, and to launch with Eva Molnar the UNECE Group of Experts on Level Crossing Safety. I see around 80 members here today from over 30 countries in Europe as well as outside Europe and also participants from non-governmental delegations, institutions and academia, which I think is evidence that this topic of level crossings is better acknowledged as a key concern in the progress on safety.

I am here with you today mainly for four reasons. First of all, there is a lot of cooperation between UNECE and UIC on a growing number of topics and may I remind Eva that you were our honoured guest at our UIC General Assembly and I am here with you today so this is also a very good spirit of cooperation.

From the very beginning, since its creation in 2009 when we launched the International Level Crossing Awareness Day we have had the support of UNECE in addition to other support in other topics in all our press conferences and round tables, because – vice versa – UIC participates in the UNECE Work Package 1 on Road Traffic Safety. As you know level crossings are a particular interface between road and rail; and because almost all accidents are due to the road sector – road users or pedestrians misusing level crossing mainly because of errors or deliberately through not respecting the Highway Code applied under the UN Vienna convention of 1968. May I remind you that according to this convention, rail has priority, and therefore road users and pedestrians must stop, which is not always the case, leading to collisions. It seems simple but this represents millions

of collisions or near-misses worldwide every year, and accidents at level crossings are perceived as a rail problem by the public and the media although, I will mention, it is not, because – for the fourth reason – even if fatalities at level crossings represent (at least in Europe) only 1% of all fatalities on the road – and this is the reason why we are so adamant about this – they lead to 28% of all fatalities on the railways, they cause disruption in our traffic, derailments, fatalities or injuries for our passengers, post traumatic effects on our staff, and so on. And this is mostly based on European statistics, so just imagine how the rest of the world can decrease these discrepancies between road and rail accidents.

According to the UIC Safety Database collisions at level crossings represent the second major risk of accidents on the railways: over 28% of all significant accidents. The large majority of collisions are caused by trespassers (third parties crossing the railways at unauthorised places). All together these collisions represent over 80% of collisions causing 93% of all fatalities and 72% of all very serious injuries.

We have had positive trends over the last few years regarding significant railway accidents in Europe (from 2371 in 2006 to 1887 in 2012 according to the UIC Safety Database), and the number of accidents, as well as fatalities and serious injuries have reduced by 20% between 2006 and 2011.

But level crossing accidents tend not to reduce as fast as “pure” railway accidents. According again to our database in 2012 accidents at level crossings decreased by 23% compared to 2006 but increased by 14% compared to 2011. Fatalities at level crossings decreased by 8% compared to 2006 but increased by 15% compared to 2011.

So given all these statistics and figures I think we have to remain humble and continue step by step to make progress on this issue all together.

Again, according to the UIC Safety Database which collects data from 21 European participating railway companies, 2012 saw 509 accidents at level crossings compared to 634 in 2007, but 2012 is more or less the average of the last six years.

Level crossing accidents in Europe at least according to our Safety Database represent 28% of all types of accidents: 19% are collisions with obstacles and 9% with pedestrians.

This is mainly due to road user and pedestrian misbehaviour and also to the continuous increase in rail and road traffic, and urbanisation.

In 2010 there were 123,000 level crossings in Europe and an estimation of around one million level crossings worldwide, with six million collisions and millions of near misses worldwide.

UIC would like through this group greater cooperation between the rail and the road sector, institutions and policy makers to better tackle this issue and find solutions together to decrease the number of accidents, fatalities and serious injuries. Numbers in Europe are quite low depending on the country considered, but much higher in other countries outside Europe.

We shall look together at the legal texts, road signs and signals, improve the education of children, professional drivers; propose enforcement measures to try to reduce the number of victims. Victims should be considered in the same way at this particular interface between road and rail as on any road crossing.

The best level crossing is the one that does not exist but it is not always possible to remove or upgrade them and it is also very expensive so we have to find engineering solutions, organise education campaigns and use enforcement measures to ensure that these figures will – slowly but surely – go down, because one fatality is one too many.

This is why UIC representing the railways would kindly request this group to work on these issues together to propose solutions to improve safety at this interface that we have in common with the road sector. And you can count on our support, on our work, on our presence to really try to improve this global situation which is becoming a major concern for modern societies around the world.

Thank you very much for your attention.