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UIC, the worldwide railway organisation, brings its members together for its 97th General Assembly

Key issues discussed include cooperation with partners, the “new normal” project, standardisation, sustainable development and digital technology

(Paris, 17 December 2020) UIC, the worldwide railway organisation, brought its members together virtually on 15 and 16 December for its Executive Board and 97th General Assembly. The meetings were chaired by UIC Chairman Mr Gianluigi Castelli, Chairman of Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane (FS). A keynote speech was given by Mr Philippe Citroën, Director of UNIFE, the European Rail Supply Industry Association, who said that “The transformation of European rail transport will rely on the successful digitalisation of railway transport through ERTMS. It is necessary to underline that the Future Railway Mobile Communication System (FRMCS) will be a key enabler for ERTMS and rail digitalisation. UNIFE is pleased to work with UIC on the design and future implementation of FRMCS. We have, notably, reinforced our cooperation in this field with the recent launch of the European research project 5GRAIL [...] It will be key to support first market application and pilot projects for the introduction of 5G FRMCS technology. This will help rail telecommunications manufacturers industrialise the right FRMCS solutions and ensure readiness for a commercial rollout in the coming years”.

Report from UIC Chairman

Mr Castelli stressed the need to improve regional cooperation by reinforcing collaboration through joint projects. These include the Future Shape of Mobility project, which is an international initiative. Mr Castelli reiterated his solidarity and support in these difficult times, and highlighted the importance of partnerships. “The recent **UIC - Shift2Rail JU MoU** is a tangible example of our will to open new paths of innovation and international cooperation on the one hand, and to promote dissemination and positive research and development spillovers on the other. I am sure that such MoUs will enable a major upgrade of the whole railway system, while enhancing digital integration and interoperability”.

Mr Castelli also commended the work of the **UIC Covid-19 Taskforce**: “We have already published a document on potential measures to restore confidence in rail travel following the Covid-19 pandemic, and we will definitely continue this good work as a result of work with partners. Such a taskforce could not be as effective as it truly is without the proactive cooperation of our members and relevant partners and stakeholders (UNECE, ERA, CER, IATA, etc.). Here I wish to praise all of them and express deep satisfaction for the valuable output that they constantly provide”.

2021 will also mark the centenary of the foundation of UIC, the anniversary of many railway events around the world and – of course – the **European Year of Rail**. Mr Castelli said “This is a unique initiative supporting the European Green Deal objectives in the transport field. As we are well aware, a series of events, campaigns and initiatives in 2021 will promote rail as a sustainable, innovative and safe mode of transport. It will highlight its benefits for people, the economy and the climate and focus on the remaining challenges to create a truly integrated rail and mobility network. UIC is fully involved in planning a wide array of events and initiatives and welcomes the contribution of any member and stakeholder. [...] We are envisaging tailor-made initiatives in the sustainability field as well as technological innovation; the most prominent could be a **coordinated “Train to Glasgow” campaign** together with CER and EIM, which will bring delegates including national governments, NGOs, decision-makers and journalists from across the world by train to Glasgow for the next COP 26 United Nations Conference on Climate Change. Our effort to confirm

and promote as many events and meetings as possible speaks clearly about our will to pursue all challenges and deliverables we had previously set up, as well as to ensure the best continuity”.

In terms of **research, innovation and digital transformation**, new 5G networks offer fully-fledged solutions for all aspects of the railways: operations, maintenance and renewal, and passenger and freight services. Effective cooperation with telecommunications operators is also beneficial for the **deployment of CCS Technologies** (ERTMS, FRMCS, PTCS in the US, ATACS in Japan, and KLUK in Russia, in China and India), which is now at the very core of UIC’s technical strategy.

Standardisation

This year has been pivotal for UIC’s standardisation workstream. One of the key achievements is the shared workspace for UIC standardisation, which will improve readiness and transparency for the IRS framework. For the first time, experts’ contributions will be immediately available to the entire sector in the most efficient possible way. “Technical Solutions for the Operational Railway” has also been published, delivering on a further commitment, and is an important additional tool for harmonising rail transport and serving UIC members effectively.

Mid-term report from UIC Director General

UIC Director General Mr François Davenne said “We used this period to implement the Covid-19 taskforce, which gathered information and was a very powerful tool to increase cohesion. The work of the Covid-19 taskforce allowed us to edit five guidance documents that have greatly helped our community to implement sound solutions. This was truly international work: more than 71 UIC members and 18 partner associations have been involved with regional declinations in Africa and South America. It made clear externally and internally the added value of our association.

While we are continuing to share information within the framework of the Covid 19 taskforce, we decided, during a seminar at management board level organised in September 2020, to launch a process called the “**new normal**”. We will address there how rail mobility may evolve in the future. In particular, we will study how Covid-19 will affect global trends for railway: will the pandemic accelerate existing trends or create unexpected bifurcations? We have signed a MoU with Roland Berger in order to be sure that our understanding of societal and economic issues is accurate enough to deliver sound analyses. The first recommendations are due at the end of this month. The crisis has also been an occasion to realise that we needed more coordination and ambition among regions”.

He added “As you know, one of the key priorities for our association is to be seen as the place where key specifications for the operations of the sector are produced. The success of the 5G process with FRMCS specifications and our work of influence in the telecoms sector has been quite remarkable”. Mr Davenne also emphasised “the very promising start of our new ticketing product, the Open Sales and Distribution Model (OSDM), which is a landmark in our progress towards multimodality”.

He also noted that UIC is creating innovation through projects. The entire UIC team has been highly motivated to continue these crucial activities, in particular in order to win European project calls. The prospects for 2021 are promising, particularly due to:

- the success of 5GRAIL;
- the highly efficient management of the OSDM (Open Sales and Distribution Model) dedicated to developing common IRSs and IT solutions with ticket vendors and enabling multimodal functions;
- participation in the DAC (Digital Automatic Coupling) delivery programme within Shift2Rail;
- the endorsement of a milestone plan to move the freight sector in the direction of digital platforms.

Appointments

The General Assembly approved the nomination of Mr Ali Chegini (RSSB) as Chairman of the Safety Platform, the nomination of Mr Michel Kunz (SBB) as Chairman of the Rail System Forum, the nomination of Mr Laurent Schmitt (SNCF) and Ms Asako Togari (JR-East) as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Standardisation Platform, respectively, the nomination of Mr Stefano Pierini

(FS Group) as Chairman of the Finance Platform, and the nomination of Mr Robert Moffat (ACRI) as Vice-Chairman of the International Rail Research Board (IRRB).

Regional reports

The six UIC regions presented their achievements in 2020 and activities planned for 2021. In respect of regional governance, the General Assembly took note of the nomination of Ms Barbara Klein Barr (FRA, USA) as the new Chair and of Mr Timothy T. Tenne (Amtrak, USA) as the new Vice-Chair of the UIC North America Region, effective 31 March 2021.

Cooperation with third parties

The principle of a MoU was agreed with the Shift2Rail JU management and a first version of the text was presented at the June 2020 General Assembly. It is hoped that the MoU will be signed by the end of the year.

Research and innovation

The General Assembly approved the IRRB strategic plan 2020-22. Mr Davenne welcomed this new plan as a key element for promotion of the railways at global level.

Standardisation progress

The annual standardisation report was presented to the General Assembly. It contains detailed information on the 34 IRSs published since January 2020 (16 references). Twelve IRSs have been reviewed and published as second or third editions which is a very positive sign.

Sustainable development

The SDG Rail Index (eco-scoring tool) was presented to the General Assembly. The SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) rail index will provide UIC members with a unique rating system and a supportive tool based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to assess the performance of each railway based on a selection of key performance indicators (KPIs). It will provide members with a system for reporting on contributions to SDGs, improving access to sustainable finance instruments.

Quality management system

UIC renewed its AFNOR certification this year. A global quality management approach was also presented to the General Assembly.

Digital Platform

The objective of the DIGIM II project is to design and evaluate a Proof of Concept to safely stop connected cars before level crossings. The DIGIM II-POC was designed in partnership with Dassault Systèmes. The deliverable is expected by December 2020. DIGIM III is dedicated to the design and testing of a pilot for Blockchain as a Service on international long freight corridors and evaluation of the potential added value for the rail sector. The Eurasian corridor has been identified as the test case for this project.

Finance

The UIC General Assembly approved the 2021 budget.

New members

The General Assembly approved the application of CRRIC SRI (Qingdao Sifang Rolling Stock Research Institute) for affiliate membership of the UIC Asia-Pacific Region.

The next Executive Board and 98th General Assembly will be held in hybrid format (in Paris and online) on 7 July 2021.

UIC outputs shared with UIC members during the General Assembly:

- New UIC video on the “new normal”: <https://youtu.be/splfrVbwYDg>
- Brochure explaining challenges, achievements and opportunities in respect of FRMCS and 5G for the railway sector: <https://uic.org/?action=telecharger&arg=3283> (use Chrome for this document)

- Document focusing on UIC's technical solutions: <https://uic.org/about/about-uic/#UIC-Technical-Solutions-for-the-operational-railway>
- "Save the date" for a webinar on UIC's technical solutions to be held on 5 February: <https://uic.org/events/webinar-on-uic-technical-solutions-for-the-operational-railway>
- Visual summary of UIC's technical solutions: <https://uic.org/IMG/png/irs-uic-solutions.png>

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