1st UIC Forum on Tourism Opportunities for Railways successfully held on 20 April 2018 in Barcelona

(Paris, 23 April 2018) The 1st UIC TopRail Forum, jointly organised by UIC (International Union of Railways) and FGC (Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya) under the theme “The Business of Rail Tourism”, was held at the Fira de Barcelona congress centre as part of the B-Travel Trade Fair.

The TopRail project is an initiative of the International Union of Railways (UIC) dedicated to Rail Tourism at international level. Its primary objective is to bring together rail and tourist-related stakeholders – from the railway industry (operators, manufacturers) and the tourism industry (tour operators, wholesalers) to international, national and regional policy makers, international organisations and academia, to the final customer – to discuss the business opportunities in the rail and tourism sectors.

The Forum was created with the aim of establishing itself as the ultimate benchmark for sector professionals and is intended to be the meeting point of all the stakeholders involved. The approach is very broad encompassing different areas: train-cruises, panoramic trains, railway heritage, etc.

This first edition, attended by around 60 participants from 15 different countries (from Ecuador to USA and Russia to most of the countries in Europe), consisted of single intense day of morning and afternoon sessions, complemented by a technical visit on the following day to the new Railway Museum of Catalonia in Vilanova i la Geltrú (near Barcelona).

The Forum was opened on 20 April by Mr Pere Calvet, Director General of FGC and President of UITP, Mr Jean-Pierre Loubinoux, UIC Director General, and Mr Enric Ticó i Buxadós, President of FGC.

Pere Calvet expressed his gratitude on behalf of UITP (International Union of Public Transport) for having been invited to open the first TopRail. He said: “UIC and the UITP share many common goals and have to deal with similar technical, social and regulatory issues and we are working to strengthen this links and develop common working schemas … the business-oriented approach,
customer satisfaction, modal transfer, ticketing, are part of TopRail and also part of the daily challenges for urban public transport providers all over the world. In a world with an increasing urban population, public transport has a key role to play. Without an efficient public transport system, it would be impossible to achieve liveable and sustainable cities.”

Jean-Pierre Loubinoux began by thanking Pere Calvet, the team at FGC and Carles Casas, Chairman of TopRail, for their commitment to the project from the very beginning. He said: “Tourism and transport are inherently and historically linked. TopRail is a commitment to address the challenge of facing the future of railways not only from a nostalgic point of view that special trains can provide, but also to support tourist experiences on railways as a strategic framework for ensuring an attractive and positive image of the railways in the generations to come.”

Enric Ticó i Buxadós said it was a pleasure and honour to welcome everyone to Barcelona on behalf of FGC. He added: “I wanted to start by thanking the UIC for choosing Barcelona to celebrate the First TopRail Forum because it not only gives us the opportunity to express and strengthen our commitment with TopRail group, but it will give you the opportunity to experience, first hand, our wide range of services. We are responsible for a wide range of tourist-related services going from rail services to mountain resorts … so tourism for us is not just an exotic traveller that randomly appears on our lines but is part of our core business, and we want to keep it this way. This approach goes all over the company and we are continuously looking for ways to attract the tourist market to our services, all of them.”

Three panel sessions then addressed the issues of railways in relation to sustainable tourism, regional development and the preservation of heritage. Participants discussed how the railway industry can contribute to fostering well managed tourism, sustainable development, job creation and trade by looking at issues such as:

- The impact of increasing tourism on current infrastructure
- How rail tourism can contribute to sustainability
- Examples of good practices in rail tourism
- How to make the most of rail heritage and to make it an income generator

Highlights included presentations by the following guest speakers, among others:
Peter Haxton, Policy Analyst, OECD
Tim Fairhurst, Director of Policy, ETOA
Supinder Singh, President, Palace Tours
Jordi Tresserras, Director, LABPATC, Barcelona University and Advisor for UNESCO
Urs Wieser, Sales Manager, Stadler Rail
Partners and sponsors included: Renfe; Stadler; OECD; ETOA; OBB; Rodalies; Fundación de Ferrocarriles Españoles.

Renfe, as the company sponsoring the event, gave a presentation that was delivered by Amador Robles as representative in Toprail of the General Directorate of Development and Strategy. The presentation consisted of a general explanation of all the tourist trains operated by Renfe, but with special attention paid to the historical ones: the Strawberry Train and the future potential of the Historic Steam Train.

The closing session was delivered by Marc Guigon, Director of the UIC Passenger Department. He said that UIC started TopRail to meet the demand for sustainable tourism. On behalf of UIC, he was pleased to co-host this event with FGC, and thanked them for their excellent organisation. He thanked the panellists, moderators and participants for the interesting discussions, and extended a special thanks to Vanessa Perez for her efforts in making the event a success.

During the second day of the First TopRail Forum, the participants enjoyed a visit to the Railway Museum of Villanova i la Geltrú run by the Director of the Museum, Pilar Garcia; She explained to the participants the past, present and future projects of this particular Museum that aims to show the contribution of the railways to the economic and social development of the area, emphasising the importance of people at all times.

At the end of the conference, it was announced that the second TopRail Forum will take place next year in Italy, kindly hosted by the Italian Railway Foundation.

Website: [http://toprail.org/](http://toprail.org/)

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