

Summary of the 23rd meeting with the RFC North Sea – Baltic RAG & TAG

Date: 06.03.2024 10:00 – 15:00

Venue: Port of Amsterdam,
De Ruijterkade 7
1013 AA Amsterdam
Netherlands

1. Welcome and introduction.

Oliver Sellnick, Chairman of the RFC NS-B Management Board, Indrek Laineveer, Chairman of the RFC NS-B Executive Board and Marcel Tijs, Member of the Executive Board representing the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management welcomed the participants. Katarzyna Wachowicz, RFC NS-B Managing Director presented the agenda. All participants introduced themselves.

2. Presentation of Port of Amsterdam

Rob Smit and Jan Egbertsen, hosts of the meeting, presented information regarding the Port itself, as well as its vision and plans for the future. Port of Amsterdam, part of the multi – port ARA region (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Antwerp), is the 4th largest port in Europe, connected with the rest of the continent by 3 RFCs. It has 17 terminals with rail connections that are managed by ProRail and functions as an industrial hotspot, an international hub and a metropolitan centre. Looking into the future, plans are to stop transporting coal by 2030 and move towards non-fossil fuels. This challenging step comes with necessity to develop new ways of transporting those non – fossil fuels (such as hydrogen) further inland, as well as a need for further digitalisation of the Port. It is also important to increase the share of rail transport, with obstacles such as varying digital systems in different countries still to overcome. The Port representatives also called for more flexibility from the rail's side, especially when it comes to transporting goods in the summer months, when the water levels are lower, meaning more trains could be used.

3. RAG Slot

Paweł Wiechoczek, RAG Speaker, raised the following topics on which the Management Board replied:

- **Update of inclusion of Luxembourg in RFC NS-B – current status**

Oliver Sellnick confirmed that according to the final version of the TEN-T revision proposal, Luxembourg will not become a part of RFC NS-B. Nevertheless, this issue is solved as the Luxembourg is a part of the North Sea – Rhine – Mediterranean Corridor and capacity can be coordinated by the C-OSS.

- **The closure of the Nurnberg - Passau railroad line with possibilities to use lines belonging to RFC8 as detour alternatives.**

Oliver Sellnick pointed out that this particular segment is an upgrade in the frame of the high-performance network, especially Passau at the Austrian border. As this TCR is quite extensive with priority given to long-distance passenger and freight trains, replacement of regional

passenger traffic by busses has been tested on the Mannheim – Frankfurt route and received good feedback. The Office will be provided with a presentation on the topic that can also be shared with the RAG/TAG. It was agreed to keep this topic on the agenda for next year along with any updates that may occur. Paweł Wiechoczek pointed out the need for proper coordination of detour trains by infrastructure managers of neighbouring infrastructures.

- **Codification of lines at PLK**

Weronika Karbowskiak pointed out that codification will be required and mandatory once the new TEN-T regulation enters into force. PLK aims to codify not only the TEN-T lines that will be required, but the entire network. When it comes to removing the special permits to transport, especially the high-cube trains, there hasn't been much development, especially due to the situation in Ukraine. It was agreed to keep this topic on the agenda for next year along with any updates that may occur.

- **Future governance of the Corridor**

Oliver Sellnick informed that the TEN-T regulation revision is expected to be adopted in May. Its aim is to integrate the current RFCs and Core Network Corridors (CNCs) into European Transport Corridors (ETCs). This revision, focusing mainly on infrastructure development, gives the RFCs an opportunity to create an added value. The Capacity Regulation revision is still in the early stages of work, expected to come into force by 2026. Until then, we should focus on actively cooperating in the coming years.

At the end of his slot, Paweł Wiechoczek proposed to come back to the subject of having a joint meeting in Prague this autumn – he will discuss the matter during the next ECCO meeting in March and inform the Office on the outcome.

4. TAG slot

Erik Nieuwenhuis, TAG Speaker, raised the following topics:

- **Post TEN-T regulation transition period**

Erik Nieuwenhuis expressed his concerns regarding how quickly the rail is able to adapt to the new TEN-T requirements. He stated that terminals are the very first or the very last point on the rail map but should also be taken into consideration. He also indicated the need to standardize measurements – containers should be interchangeable and fit on trains, ships and trucks. There are no wagons to fit 55ft containers at all. Those mixed measurements result in lower capacity at terminals. TAG Speaker suggested to wait until Connecting Europe Days in Brussels, where more information on the revision should be given by the European Commission.

Oliver Sellnick recommended also to analyse Art. 29 of the Capacity regulation proposal published in July 2023 regarding jointly offering capacity.

- **Rail Facilities Portal**

Erik Nieuwenhuis stated that the terminals on the RFC NS-B lines need to update the date in the RFP by the end of the year. It should be promoted and used more widely.

Oliver Sellnick assured the RFC's ongoing support on the matter. Marcel Tijs proposed to invite freight forwarders to the table and listen to their perspective and their needs as well. Erik

Nieuwenhuis stated that there is a big push towards the rail transport with big companies like IKEA moving towards carbon neutrality.

5. Corridor analysis on extended RFC 8 – presentation of the final report conducted by SCI Verkehr

Bert Stingl of Captrain, presented an extract from the study requested by RLE in 2021. The aim of the study was to identify and define focus corridors for the group. Three corridors were selected, one of them being RFC NS-B. The scope of the study was long-distance freight operations (covering at least 3 countries) and the possibility for it to become a competitive player on the market. Forecast on extended lines of RFC NS-B (France and Spain were added) has shown a significant increase driven by container movement. It is important to note that the study assumed this increase will fit the network and no capacity related problems will arise. Simulation has shown there is a possibility for 243 roundtrips (crossing at least 3 countries) in 2032. The study has also shown that even trains from Poznań, Poland to Barcelona, Spain, can compete with the road traffic. Bert Stingl mentioned problems with Polish wagons, not UIC codified, not being able to enter France and therefore slowing the transit down and making it less competitive. Marcel Tijs confirmed that if a wagon does not have a P400 marking, it cannot enter France. He also stated that codification may require some legislative action and a compromise of some sort. Oliver Sellnick pointed out that the TEN-T codification compromise is based on a French system that is not widely used apart from 4 terminals. Guus de Mol questioned the limited scope of the compromise and asked what will happen with the rest of the terminals in Europe.

6. Presentation of Rail Baltica

Heigo Saare presented state of play and implementation of the project in response to the questions from the RAG:

- Construction has started, expected to become operational in 2030;
- No border stations planned for seamless travel with passenger services potentially subsidised by the state if market does not respond well;
- Operational readiness – understand RU’s needs, give clear technical specifications, ERTMS type, as well as pricing structure and access charges;
- Language – it is desired to have English speaking staff, but it might prove to be too expensive. Suggestion to stay with national languages and watch closely the development of real – time AI powered translation tools and services;
- Cooperation so far - clearly defined within the Company, easily adaptable to changing processes. Sector experience used to build up operational rules.

In order to answer the FAQs from the sector, a survey was conducted. RB clarified the following topics:

- Operational management – Railway infrastructure will be managed and owned by three different IMs, based on a model of joint cross- border corridor operations;
- No dedicated border stations are foreseen between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to ensure seamless travel;
- Language requirements – bilingual approach with a dominance of English as the common language;
- Technical requirements – preliminary specs were presented, with aspects of ERTMS baseline to be clarified;

- Rolling stock – expected to be fully TSI compliant, currently in the Baltic countries there are no predefined rules for 1435mm RST and operations.

RAG Speaker thanked Mr. Saare for providing the answers to RUs questions and expressed the willingness of presenting the state of play of the project in the future.

5. PaP Capacity offer TT 2025

Anna Difliff, the C-OSS Manager presented the offer and an update of the PaP Catalogue itself. It has now been organised around 2 categories – PaPs and separate PaPs (can only be booked in relation with an international path including at least one border crossing as PaP or Tailor-Made path). Short and Long distance PaPs have now been discontinued. The option to search for a PaP ID has been added, giving the ability to see the full stretch right in the catalogue. “NOTE” field now displays known TCRs. When it comes to the offer itself:

- 37 PaPs were offered in the E – W/S – N direction
- 39 PaPs were offered in the W – E/ N – S direction
- 20 separate PaPs (DB InfraGO/ProRail) were offered
- 82 PaPs in cooperation with other RFCs.

The published path kilometers on RFC NS-B will be impacted by the following TCRs:

- Emmerich-Oberhausen with a total closure from June-August 2025 (8 weeks).
- Hamburg-Berlin with split paths and total closures from December 2024-March 2025 and May-September 2025.

Anna Difliff presented Corridor’s KPIs and reminder the participants about the deadline to request PaPs for the TT 25 – 8th of April 2024.

6. DAC

Loukas Soukup presented the results of the Cost Benefit Analysis for DAC conducted by the Czech Ministry of Transport. As the rail sector was unsure of benefits presented on the EU level, Czech Ministry decided to conduct a study with 2 train types analysed:

- combined transport train, operating costs for operation on the SŽ network;
- SWL train with priority consignments with load changes at sidings.

Expected timeframe chosen is 2030 – 2059.

When it comes to methodology, the study consists of a financial and an economic analysis. Migration strategy was based on theoretical operational situation with both new rolling stock acquisition and retrofitting, without and with a 50% subsidies. Conclusions of the study were as follows:

- finding sufficient benefits from the DAC will be very difficult – there is no conclusive proof of financial and economic efficiency;
- it is difficult to estimate the investment and operating costs (CZ stakeholders are not willing to accept European DAC Delivery Programme (EDDP) figures);
- the best results show the variant with new vehicles, maximum automation and a long intermodal train (DAC+DPC);
- the variants with single wagonloads have potential, nevertheless the results depend on the operating technology and the possibility of saving number of staff and real labour costs;
- the results of the study are available for use in the next step of finalizing the CBA prepared for EC and ERJU by EY, if a similar study is prepared by some other member states.

Guus de Mol pointed out that it would be impossible to organise a long migration scenario in harbours that already have limited track availability as a lot of parking places are needed. He also pointed out that analysing block trains only may distort the results of the study as in reality, the traffic is not block trains only but often mixed with single wagon traffic for empty cars and processes at the begin and end to replace wagons for maintenance.

Dr. Fabian Wartzek from Deutsche Bahn AG presented the current status of testing DAC as part of the DAC4EU project. The current situation with the train coupling is a person- intensive operation and they are aiming for automatic coupling of pneumatic, mechanical and electrical connection without any manual intervention.

Benefits of the DAC are:

- all train information in one place – age, load, direction;
- automatic brake probe;
- wagon condition assessment – with the key obstacle being replacing an experienced staff with sophisticated sensors;
- faster, heavier, longer trains with higher breaking force and equipped with derailment sensors;
- ultimately – electropneumatic brakes, allowing even longer, heavier and/or faster trains.

The current project status is Phase IV – validating new solutions. Theoretically, this is the final phase but with more funding further testing and exploring new solutions can be possible. It is also important to point out that DAC is resistant to weather conditions and extreme low temperatures, it allows coupling at bends and turns, rotary loading can also couple with a screw coupler. Fitting wagons with DAC does not lead to an increase in noise levels. The biggest challenge now is optimising coupling process on humps.

Dr. Wartzek also invited the participants to see the test train at Connecting Europe Days in Brussels on the 2nd of April. Erik Nieuwenhuis asked whether the device can be powered by the loco – it can and is limited by the power you get from the loco. Lukas Soukup added that there's no possibility of a wireless connection, physical connection only. Marcel Tijs asked if DAC is set to have different baselines for different countries. Dr. Wartzek responded that this will not be allowed, all devices will be the same and fully interoperable. Guus de Mol pointed out that the project has many advantages but has there been any testing and research on derailments? Currently, buffers used prevent serious damage to the rolling stock. Dr. Wartzek confirmed there have been draft gear rig tests conducted as well as specific derailment tests. Guus de Mol asked what happens when a single wagon derails - what happens to the rest? He used an example of train derailments in the US. Dr. Wartzek assured stabilisation of wagons next to each other worked in testing but further tests are needed. Patricks Markēvičs asked whether DAC can be coupled with screw coupler – Dr. Wartzek confirmed it cannot. Oliver Sellnick thanked Dr. Wartzek for his comprehensive presentation, it was agreed to have a state of play update next year.

7. User Satisfaction Survey 2023 – results and action plan

Katarzyna Wachowicz presented the results of the USS. Based on 11 evaluations this year, overall satisfaction RFC NS-B was 82%. Most satisfactory topics according to our respondents were: information provided by the RFC and service of the C-OSS. The least satisfactory topic were the TCRs. Based on the comments from customers, RFC NS-B prepared the following action plan:

- continue to publish TCRs regularly and closely monitor the development of TCR tool;
- capacity shortage at Oderbrücke – C-OSS is aware of the matter and is working with the respective IMs;
- Rail Baltica – RFC NS-B has had regular RB presentations in the past and will continue to monitor and update on this matter;
- Commercial offer and differences in data between PCS and national systems –if such cases are known, RUs should contact C-OSS who will notify the IM;
- RFC Performance measures with additional paperwork required at Rzepin – Weronika Karbowskiak stated that this issue has already been address in QCOs, she will also conduct internal checks on the development of an IT tool to streamline the process;
- Information provided by the RFC with a proposal to have a common meeting of all corridors – Katarzyna Wachowicz stated there has been no response on who to organize a joint meeting with, awaiting feedback from RAG/TAG.

8. AOB

Oliver Sellnick thanked everyone for their presentations and questions. He proposed to discuss topics and ideas for the next meeting in Prague:

- Inviting freight forwarders to participate;
- Rail Facilities Portal – update;
- Feedback from the ECCO group meeting to determine what other Corridor to have a joint meeting with;
- Topic proposal: status of ERTMS roll out on Czech Republic (speaker TBC);
- Topic proposal: silent wagons and composite brake pads – to be presented by METRANS (TBC);
- Topic proposal: CZ – DE tunnel – state of play (TBC)

Oliver Sellnick thanked to all participants for the meeting on behalf of RFC NS-B Management Board. The meeting was closed.

List of annexes and presentations:

All the presentations and annexes are available on the RFC NS-B website in the Download area <https://rfc8.eu/downloads/>.

- 1) Agenda for the RAG-TAG meeting on 06.03.2024
- 2) Annex 1 RAG slot
- 3) Annex 2 Corridor analysis on extended RFC 8 – presentation of the final report conducted by SCI Verkehr
- 4) Annex 3 Rail Baltica presentation
- 5) Annex 4 PaP capacity offer TT2025
- 6) Annex 5 RFC NS-B DAC 2024
- 7) Annex 6 Testing the DAC – current status
- 8) Annex 7 RFC NS-B User Satisfaction Survey 2023 results and action plan