



Container boom in Rotterdam

Rotterdam is one of the world's largest and most important ports. However, rail's share of hinterland traffic has been minimal up to now. In the near future a new freight line will correct this situation.

The year 2002 was a record year for Rotterdam. The port's General Director Willem Scholten and his staff have good reason to be pleased. The port handled over 322 million tonnes, thus improving on the previous year's turnover and just missing the absolute record set in 2000.

Hinterland traffic

Approximately half the freight arriving at the port is then transported by smaller ships on

sea routes and by barges on rivers and canals. One fifth flows to the hinterland through pipelines, one quarter rolls on by road, and then there is very little left for the railway.

Rail's low share, Willem Scholten explains, results from the traditional importance attached to inland navigation. In the past The Netherlands, in itself a small country, only considered rail traffic from a limited national viewpoint. And lorry transport is much less bureaucratic compared to rail transport: "Once you load a

Dear Readers,

This issue of Cargo Magazine contains an interesting mixture of news, reports and interviews all bearing on rail freight traffic.



There is a report on SRC Köln (Cologne), our new German subsidiary on the Rhine, which has already achieved a notable breakthrough in the chemicals and mineral oil sectors. More background is provided on the road-use tax to be introduced soon in Germany and on the working day in our company.

Work in the rail freight business is both varied and challenging, however, it is also not without its problems. In recent months cross-border traffic with Italy has been severely hindered through closure of the Monte Olimpino II tunnel between Chiasso and Albate. I know that the resulting diversion has resulted in disadvantages to some of our customers. As far as it depends on us, we are doing our utmost to ensure that cross-border traffic continues to your satisfaction. We have drawn up a new timetable to accommodate diverted traffic as reliably as possible. Throughout the whole company our operational staff are being as flexible as possible to accommodate customers' needs.

Finally, I'd like to tell you about the poll of our customers conducted at the end of 2002. In this survey, an independent institute analysed customer satisfaction by evaluating the answers obtained in telephone interviews with 300 randomly chosen customers. The result: customer satisfaction with SBB Cargo has improved slightly compared to last year. This response serves as encouragement for us to continue improving our services. We would like to thank you for the honest feedback.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Kellner
Head of Customer Relationship
Management

container onto a lorry in Rotterdam, you don't need any further paperwork all the way to Bilbao or Verona. Things are more complicated on the railway."

A spokesman for the port, Mico van Heezen, estimates that, in 2002, 24,000 tonnes of freight were transported by rail, corresponding to a modal split of 7 percent. According to Willem Scholten this is due to the liberalisation of rail traffic and to the appearance on the market of new providers such as Shortlines, ACTS and ERS, all of whom compete with Railion Benelux.

Growth in container traffic

In 2002 container traffic increased significantly. Over 6 million TEU were transhipped at Rotterdam last year. Similar to the development of oil tankers, bigger and faster container ships are being built. Today, one giant 300-metre long ship can accommodate 7,000 containers.

Carriers only stop at a few principal ports on their round-the-world routes. Rotterdam is number five in the world for container traffic after the four Asiatic ports Hong Kong, Singapore, Pusan and Kao-hsiung. In Europe, Rotterdam is still the most important hub for container traffic. However, transhipments by competitors such as Antwerp, Bremen or Hamburg are increasing.

The new freight line

In 1993, the Dutch government took the decision to build a 160-kilometre long railway line specifically for freight transport. By 2006, the Betuwe line, a twin track railway with no level crossings, will cross the Netherlands connecting Rotterdam to Germany. Estimated cost: about 5 billion euros. More than any other, this last point led to much controversy. Today, the line is being financed with public funds and a small subvention provided by the EU.

Stephan Dietrich

SERVICE VEHICLE

Freight traffic's breakdown service

Freight traffic also has its own unique breakdown service. Mechanics on SBB Cargo's Mobile Repair Units repair locomotives and rolling stock on the spot. Day and night they ensure that the rolling stock is used to the best possible advantage.



Monday, 4 o'clock in the morning. Franz Studer, one of the Mobile Repair Unit's staff based at Olten, gets a phone call. The head of a marshalling team has called to inform him that a shunter seems to have developed an electrical fault. On a siding near Wangen, wagons loaded with fresh goods are standing stock still. Nothing is moving and time is short. The goods are due at 5 o'clock on the dot at the wholesaler's warehouse.

Only 40 minutes later Franz Studer and his colleague are on the scene. They are able to drive the Mobile Repair Unit's service vehicle directly to the siding. Soon the expert mechanics diagnose the fault: a starter relay is defective and the locomotive's engine cannot be start-

ed. Tools and spare parts are quickly brought from the service vehicle. After only a short time the fault has been repaired and the train rolls into the wholesaler's warehouse on time.

On-the-spot repairs

SBB Cargo has set up a broad network of mechanical repair teams, Mobile Repair Units, to fix faults and repair defects as quickly as possible. Fully equipped service vehicles are based at nine locations throughout Switzerland: Basle, Olten, Biel, Zurich RBL, Rorschach, Lausanne, Brig, Bellinzona and Chiasso. Since last year the base at Busto Arsizio has been operational. SBB Cargo's travelling workshops offer service similar to the breakdown services for cars run by the Swiss TCS or Germany's ADAC. Max Roth, head of the Mobile Repair Unit at Olten, reports: "The greatest advantage offered by our service is that locomotives and freight wagons and also track construction vehicles don't have to be towed to distant workshops for repair."

"Repairs were always carried out outside workshops," says Max Roth. "The mechanics grabbed their tools and took the next passenger train to the station nearest to where the breakdown had occurred." From there they tramped along the tracks till they came to where the repair was to be done. Railwaymen

always repaired rolling stock on the spot, however they lost a lot of time on the train journey and they could not take so many tools with them.

For this reason in the 1980s cars were purchased. The service vehicles, fully equipped with tools and loaded with spare parts, could then easily be driven to where they were needed. Since 1 July 2001 the travelling workshops have been called Mobile Repair Units and the whole system is being extended and improved systematically. Simpler repairs can be done on the track. So that through traffic is not held up defective trains are driven onto nearby maintenance pits (covered tracks for parking locomotives).

Cost saving

The travelling workshops have proved their worth. Costly and unproductive transfers to workshops are avoided and no longer necessary. Above all, customers benefit from the Mobile Repair Units. Priority is given to an optimal infrastructure and staff training. Thus repairs can be done on the spot and as cheaply as possible. For customers that means quicker and safer.

Judith Vogel

By container barge to Basle

One seventh of Switzerland's total imports enter the country through Basle's harbour on the Rhine. In recent years the percentage of freight carried by rail has grown substantially. For this reason, SBB Cargo is a major user of the Rhine harbour.



Rhine harbour signal box, Kleinhüningen, nine in the morning. Looking at the head of Crew Duty Christine Leuthold you wouldn't notice that she's already been on the job for six hours. Even if things don't go quite according to plan, she still keeps a cool head. Spread in front of her she has sheets of paper with the day's wagon orders. Whether it's rolls of sheet steel for transport from Germany to Italy or recycling glass from Switzerland to Germany, she directs all operations by radio instructing shunters to bring wagons to the loading ramps and to collect them when they are complete.

Last year, in three daily shifts from 3 in the morning till 10 in the evening, Christine Leuthold and

her staff sent out 8,000 trains composed of nearly 100,000 wagons with a net weight of 2.5 million tons.

Christine Leuthold enjoys her job despite the hectic pace and the irregular hours. "The equipment is perhaps a bit old fashioned. The signal box is still mechanically operated and many of the points have to be switched by hand, especially on the quays. However, we do have a good degree of independence." Indeed, compared to the rest of Switzerland things run a little differently here, although to refer to this as a romantic harbour is stretching things.

The Rhine a lifeline

To see what's actually going on, Christine Leuthold occasionally takes a look through her binoculars. From here she can only see a small corner of the Rhine. Warehouses and tanks block her view of the river on which all movements in the harbour depend. Sometimes, if the Rhine is in spate or there has been an accident, no barges can enter the harbour. However, as soon as the river is free for traffic they stream in again. This surge in traffic is what Daniel Meier, head of Wagon Services, notices. By nine in the morning, customers have to place their next day's orders with him. As an exception to other services in Switzerland, clients contact the team

in Kleinhüningen directly and not through the central Customer Services office in Fribourg.

At the moment special wagons, Shimmns type, which convey rolls of sheet steel, are in demand. 358 wagons need to be assembled for tomorrow. Meier orders them by intranet from his head office in Basle.

The future of the harbour

The future of Basle's oldest and smallest harbour, the St. Johann harbour, is in the balance. Nearby Novartis is building its new research campus and to complete the project the planners wish to construct a new park along the Rhine.

In contrast, the harbours at Muttenz and Birsfelden are not threatened by closure. The huge tanks are evidence of this: here, in addition to dry goods such as fertiliser, clay or cereals, the main transshipment product is oil for transport or heating. Up to 2001, when the proportional road-use tax (LSVA) was introduced, the modal split for continued transport was 30:70 to rail's disadvantage; today, it's exactly the opposite. The LSVA's impact has been apparent in this sector more than any other. The tracks available are barely sufficient to cope with traffic growth and train drivers and shunting staff sometimes have to work round the clock. Stephan Dietrich

CARGO PRODUCTION

A small team and cement from the Jura Mountains

Reuchenette, the base of SBB Cargo's production team, is not far from Biel, but in another world completely. Eight men in this remote Jura valley ensure that every year 38,000 railway wagons reach their destination.



If you travel from Biel by train through the narrow Taubenloch (Pigeon Hole) Gorge in the direction of St-Imier, there is no hint in the surroundings of the pleasant high altitude valley which comes into view a few kilometres further on. Here, in this inhospitable part of the valley permanently shaded by towering cliffs throughout the winter months, you would also hardly expect to find an SBB Cargo production team. Freight trains – up here? The surprise is complete when the Vigier Cement Works looms into view – there it stands in all its might occupying almost the whole of the valley floor. At least now it's clear why there is

an SBB Cargo team station at Reuchenette-Péry, high up in the St-Imier Valley: cement works are one of rail's most important customers.

Eight railwaymen

Since 2000, eight rail employees have been working here. The team is composed of former passenger traffic staff who sought new employment after the closure of the other stations served in the valley. All but one member of the team are aged between 30 and 40 and in the meantime all have been trained as rail

tractor drivers for the local stretches. Of course, they're all skilled shunters. And they can also do the paperwork needed for rail shipment. For this reason their manoeuvres are not restricted to the tracks, they are also able to manoeuvre within the Cargo Information System CIS. "We all had a lot to learn but the variety of tasks we now perform makes our work much more satisfying," admits Gilles Fridez, the team leader.

Cement, cereals, cattle and chocolate

The Reuchenette production team's most significant client is the Vigier Cement Works. Annually 23,000 wagons – mainly for cement and occasionally carrying raw materials and fuel – come and go from the works. Another important customer is the Co-op which runs a major distribution centre at La Chaux-de-Fonds. Wood is also loaded from the surrounding forests and the mill at Tavannes sends cereal products by rail. Cattle transports are an unusual but welcome branch that

is currently expanding; one of Switzerland's largest cattle exporters is now domiciled at Sonceboz, a town further up the valley. This live cargo – each year around 3,500 head – is destined for the Balkans or Eastern Europe. The freight transported in the ultra-modern refrigerated wagons from Courtelary is less striking, but certainly more enticing: chocolate manufactured at the Camille Bloch factory, destined for Japan and the USA.

Ursula Homberger

POLITICS

Germany makes heavy vehicles pay up

After much debate and a great deal of controversy, Germany finally intends to introduce road-use taxes for heavy vehicles. Whether this will encourage shippers to transfer freight to rail remains to be seen. Axel Russell, manager of Swiss Rail Cargo Köln (Cologne), answers our questions on this topic.



Cargo Magazine: Mr. Russell, what edge in competition will the road-use tax give the railways?

Russell: The introduction of the tax on heavy vehicles has led to a broad discussion of all the alternatives open to freight traffic. If there is any advantage to be gained by rail transport, then this will result more from the publicity than the higher prices for the road. The concept underlying services is the most important point, and this is what has been revealed in our discussions with shipping agents. If the railways really want to be successful, they can't just limit their service to carrying freight between railway stations.

Cargo Magazine: Nevertheless, costs are a decisive factor, aren't they?

Russell: Certainly, but it's not just the price factor that leads to traffic being transferred to other forms of transport. Shippers want their freight to be conveyed to its destination quickly and reliably at a realistic price. The road-use tax will certainly encourage them to consider the alternatives. That's where we come in – for example with our one-stop shopping system; even leaving the road tax out of consideration, we offer a number of advantages over road transport. Our regular hourly timetable is a valid alternative to traffic jams, road repair sites and exhausted lorry drivers.

Cargo Magazine: Yes, but the tax will make more money available for road construction. In the long term won't this be another disadvantage to rail transport?

Russell: No, I don't think so, because roads need to be maintained and their capacity has to be enlarged too, so the funds will be used to this end. Another aspect interests us more: the volume of road traffic is continually increasing. Because of the jams, road repairs, diversions and other unforeseeable circumstances, lorry journeys will take longer. Our customers can avoid all these obstacles by

transferring freight to the railways, in particular where it has to be sent over longer distances. The Combined Traffic system has already been well accepted by our customers because it links the advantages of all modes of transport, road, rail and even waterways, to the client's benefit.

Cargo Magazine: Is the road tax more or less the last chance for rail transport? Are the policymakers saying: We've done our homework, now it's up to you; if you don't take this chance, that's it?

Russell: Germany is an exporting country so the politicians have a vested interest in a freight transport system that really functions. The state of North Rhine-Westphalia even supports private railways so that traffic is transferred to them. Of course, we are neither in a position to rely on political support, nor can we permit ourselves to do so. Rail's main opportunity is not created by the tax, but rather by the policy of liberalisation. We are in competition with the others, so we have to differ from them and assert ourselves as competitors. We accomplish this through the excellence of our products, not by political subventions.

Interview Caspar Heer