

Hit Rail ‘Interoperability in Practice’ Workshop shows the feasibility of interoperability in the European railway industry

Brussels event sets out solutions and practical experience of interoperability projects in passenger & freight services and infrastructure

Brussels 17 October 2014 – Greater understanding of a wide range of issues and outcomes facing the railway industry was fostered at last week’s “Interoperability in Practice” workshop. A number of practical examples of early implementation projects in passenger and freight services and infrastructure management were presented against a backdrop of information on new European Commission directives on interoperability.

Hosted by Hit Rail b.v., one of Europe’s leading players in the drive towards interoperability, and held at Belgian railway company SNCB’s headquarters, the event attracted over 50 attendees from railway organisations across Europe. Representatives from the European Commission’s transport directorate DG Move and from railway bodies such as CER (Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies), ERA (European Railway Agency) and Raildata also participated.

The aim of the conference was to discuss strategies and share experience from several European countries that are leading the way with early adoption interoperability projects in passenger, freight and infrastructure. Helmut Grohmann, Chairman of Hit Rail, welcomed the attendees and said: “The railway industry has changed dramatically as more competition has been introduced. We wanted to provide a forum where the solutions to these developments and experiences in implementing them could be shared and discussed by many of the main actors in the industry.”



Workshop audience as the event opens

As an introduction to the morning session, Hit Rail’s Commercial Manager, Ugo Dell’Arciprete, gave an overview of why interoperability is so important and urgent, looking at the background to

Hit Rail and the new European legislative landscape that will require the industry to work more closely together.

Practical examples of interoperability projects took centre stage during the morning, as participants were reminded of the pressing need to find interoperability solutions in the face of EU TSI (Technical Specifications for Interoperability) Regulations, namely the Telematics Applications for Passengers (TAP) and for Freight (TAF).

Michael Kistler, Head of Marketing Communication & E-Business at Swiss railway undertaking Rhaetian Railways (RhB) gave the first example. RhB has implemented a fully interoperable, XML-based passenger reservation system and was the first rail organisation in Europe to become interconnected to all other European railways using Hit Rail's new HEROS web services. HEROS provides translation services for fast and seamless communication between "old style" reservation systems and new Web Services/XML platforms, allowing RhB to have all its inventory on one system and thus enabling 'just in time' booking, optimising train occupancy, taking pressure off staff and avoiding booking errors. As Mr. Kistler pointed out at the Workshop, for RhB "HEROS is the key to Europe".

Hit Rail's technical manager, Enrique Ruiz, added more detail on RhB's new reservation system that currently handles over 270,000 transactions per year. "RhB is conducting business with partners that use different technologies and standards in a seamless way. This is interoperability in practice!" commented Enrique Ruiz.

A Raildata presentation, by Francis Bedel of SNCF Fret (Raildata Chairman) and Luca Marioreni of Trenitalia (Raildata ISR Assembly Chairman), demonstrated how an interoperability solution can help with wagon tracking and tracing across Europe using ISR. ISR answers the question "where's my wagon?" and provides a comprehensive exchange of movement information for wagons in international traffic through a central web-based platform.

Mick Haynes, on behalf of Network Rail UK, then described the programme for TAF and TAP implementation within the British rail system. The UK has adopted a common approach for freight and passenger traffic which is fully supported by the State bodies. Detailed implementation proposals have been developed and the TAF/TAP project will create a number of benefits, including a single way of working, compatibility with European partners, promotion of international services and improved operational and passenger information. Mick Haynes concluded: "It makes good engineering and financial sense for everyone to work on one programme."

Rail freight interoperability was illustrated with an example from the Czech Republic, by Petr Červinka of ČD Cargo, the freight company, and Miloš Futera of SŽDC, the Infrastructure company. The exchange of data between the two companies is now fully TSI compliant, and the benefits are already apparent, with integrated systems enabling reductions in staff time and standardised communications with all Railway Undertakings.

Afternoon sessions centred on panel-led discussions covering the strategic issues of interoperability in each of the three sectors of infrastructure, passengers and freight.

Antonio López, Managing Director of HIT Rail, also gave a presentation on the Hit Rail approach to interoperability, discussing the forces that are shaping the European railway market and the opportunities offered by new technologies, such as Internet or cloud computing, to support structural change and improvements in working together. He also described the HEROS platform, the family of solutions that enables interoperability between railway applications.



Antonio Lopez, Managing Director of Hit Rail, describes Hit Rail's positioning in ICT provision

Other speakers included Libor Lochman, General Secretary of CER (Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies) and Stefan Jugelt, Project Officer for Telematic Applications at the ERA (European Railway Agency), with a concluding keynote from Linos Voskarides, Policy Officer at the European Commission's DG Move, who talked about the Directorate's objectives for the next parliamentary session of the EU Commission.

"I think the day was a great success," concluded Hit Rail Chairman Helmut Grohmann. "We hope to make this a regular event within the railway industry and to continue our discussions with all participants in the coming weeks and months."