

CREAM: Borderless West-East connection

In September 2010, at Innotrans, the CREAM project will be signed and the final conclusions will be presented, which would lead to the development of sustainable freight transport services that connect ports and logistics hubs in Western Europe with intermodal hubs in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor. Under the motto "Moving Europe", the project aims at improving and increasing freight traffic between Benelux and Turkey, as well as the Eastern countries that it crosses. The European Union provided financing of EUR 12 Million for CREAM and hopes that this project will help transfer around 200 million tonnes-km from roads to rails. This project reunites all national freight operators and many private freight companies and equipment suppliers.

The project called Customer-driven Rail-freight services on a European mega-corridor based on Advanced business and operating Models (CREAM) was initiated in 2007 and benefits from financing through the European FP-6 frame-program for research and development. The project was included in the objective "Re-balancing and integration of various modes of transport". The CREAM objectives are: elaborating a study concerning the development possibilities of railway freight transport along the following route: Belgium/Netherlands-Germany-Austria-Italy-Slovenia-Hungary-Romania-Bulgaria-Greece/Turkey; implementing a transport quality management system; improving transport services on the above mentioned route; improving cross-border procedures; developing a telematic solution to track transport, as well as new technologies for intermodal transport. The consortium in charge of implementing this project is led by German consultancy company HaCon and includes some of the largest freight companies in Europe. Frank Weppner, CREAM Project Manager at Deutsche Bahn, said that some of the novelties brought by CREAM include the participation of the industry and research organisations, with the help of which operators can implement new traffic development solutions, based on innovative technologies. At the same time, customers have become more and more involved in this project, as opposed to other projects like ZEUS. These efforts led to the elaboration of a joint platform for the development and promotion of intermodal freight transport services between Western and Eastern Europe, which will represent the basis for future initiatives regarding cross-border freight services.

CREAM identifies several solutions in order to enhance freight traffic: introducing interoperable multi-system locomotives, which significantly reduce costs; reducing the number of border crossings; introducing transport services on routes with less traffic (detour routes, sidings etc.), including other modes of transport (inland waterways); using, on a large scale, surveillance systems; implementing state-of-the-art solutions despite higher costs (they prove their viability in time).

Service for the largest copper supplier in Europe

As part of the CREAM initiative, in the last 3 years, several projects were developed, which involved various services that, following the implementation period, became regular transport services. DB Schenker launched a service for the transport of copper equipment for the largest copper supplier in Europe, AURUBIS. This service operates on the Pirdop (Bulgaria) – Olen (Belgium) route. Studies developed by the CREAM work group identified an efficient solution to reduce costs and travel time. Firstly, a shunting platform was built in Pirdop, which reduced by half the time necessary to load/unload the copper equipment; secondly, the equipment was no longer carried in open freight cars, but in vans and the operator switched to single load transport. Dirk Zender, CREAM Project Manager at DB Schenker, said: "We are very happy with the new changes. After introducing the new measures, traffic increased to 200 wagons per month, which means a total freight volume of 75.000 tonnes and we managed to eliminate 12 roundtrips Greece-Bulgaria". Another successful project was Skopje-Salonica, whose traffic increased due to the fact that all the customs formalities are filled out through mail before trains arrive at the Gevgelija/Idomeni border.

by Alin Lupulescu