

RailRunner for Europe?

US bimodal system RailRunner could do well in Europe, according to a report by Studien Gesellschaft für den Kombinierten Verkehr (SGKV) in Frankfurt-am-Main commissioned by RailRunner NA, Inc.

Intermodal services using bimodal trailers have been tried before in Europe, and failed. However, SGKV believes that RailRunner, has certain technical advantages over the systems that were tried and, more fundamentally, conditions in Europe have changed.

In particular, SGKV points to the imminent unification of rail regulation across the EU, allowing new intermodal technologies access to a large, integrated market instead of grappling with many smaller, national ones.

In addition, liberalisation of the



The RailRunner service between Fort Wayne and Jaxport provides shippers as far north as North Michigan with a cost-effective way to export to the Caribbean

EU rail market has opened it to a wide array of "newcomers." Finally, the new members of the EU in Eastern Europe are growing fast and are not well-served by traditional, lo-lo intermodal transport.

Specifically, RailRunner is interested in introducing "niche" bimodal services for ISO containers. A niche container service (called RailReach) has been in commercial operation in the US

between Jaxport (Fla) and Fort Wayne (In) since 2004.

SGKV notes that under the RailRunner model, the same organisation owns the bimodal chassis and the rail bogies. When bimodal was tried before in Europe, the separate physical pieces were in different ownership and that led to technical problems and problems of interoperability.

Bimodal systems provide the lowest trailing load and highest live load ratio of all intermodal systems on a like-for-like basis. SGKV notes that a 31.7m twin car able to carry 2 x 45ft containers weighs about 70t, while two RailRunner chassis and the three bogies required together weigh 21t. RailRunner bogies are articulated and have automated steering.

According to RailRunner's own estimates, the investment cost for infrastructure and terminal equipment is no more than 20% of the investment required for traditional intermodal terminals.



Norway-based Autolink has become the first customer for a new type of railcar developed by Swedish manufacturer Kockums Industrier for the transport of vehicles. The order for 70 twin-coupled wagons, each loading 12 cars is worth SEK 175M. Initial units will be delivered this autumn and all the cars are scheduled to be in operation by the spring of 2009. The new freight cars differ from traditional wagons in several respects. Vehicles are protected by a new type of aluminium roof and sides that can be easily rolled back for loading and unloading. On the return journey, the upper level can be lowered to allow the cars to be loaded with general mixed cargoes on pallets. Autolink transports 75% of all vehicles that are sold in Norway. The new railcars will be used not only in Norway but also throughout Scandinavia for transport from the car plants and import centres to the dealerships as well as between car showrooms

CSCCL set to develop intermodal services

China Shipping Container Lines (CSCL) has formed a strategic alliance with China Railway Container Transportation Company to launch the first sea-rail intermodal transport network to cover the entire country.

Under a framework agreement signed by the two companies, CSCL will use trains to move containers to inland destinations at least 300 km from the major ports, CSCL managing director Huang Xiaowen said.

"Railway transportation is economical only over long distances," he said, adding that haulage costs could be cut by up to 30% by using rail instead of trucks for shipments to destinations more than 300 km from the ports.

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However, a senior Chinese port executive has voiced doubts over the deal, noting that railway infrastructure in the country is not comprehensive enough even to meet the needs of passengers. "Sea-rail intermodal is not mature at this stage," he said.

Huang maintained that the situation would improve after trains reached a speed of more than 200 km/hour next month.

He said huge investment from the central government would greatly increase capacity. China plans to add 90,000 km of tracks by 2010 and separate cargo and passenger networks thereafter. The government will spend US\$487B on transport infrastructure modernisation.

Unilog withdrawal sends message

Last month Unilog, the last of the three intermodal aggregators set up when the Channel tunnel opened, ran its last train.

The Belgium-based company, co-owned by Belgian Rail's Inter-Ferry Boats (IFB) and EWS (as successor to Railfreight Distribution) on a 55:45 basis, was forced to pull the plug on its daily Muizen to Daventry and Manchester shuttle services as a result of price hikes of around 24% in traction prices charged by the two Channel tunnel hauliers, EWS and SNCF Fret.

The railways' charges reflect

ending of the subsidised charging regime last December, which have pushed the train costs beyond what the market can bear.

Unilog had initially been able to "soften the blow" by getting an agreement from the traction providers to increase train trailing weight and length to 1790t and 19 twin wagons, but it still had to pass on some of the higher charges to the market.

It was subsequently hit by a second increase in charges and decided that it could not pass these on to customers and hope to retain business.

Unlike the other two

from Day 1 and its cessation now is all the more ridiculous given the congestion on the road routes to Dover and the fact that extra truck traffic will increase greenhouse emissions, flying in the face of government policy targets.

The UK's Railfreight Group (RFG) stated that Eurotunnel's charges are unsustainable, even with the payments from the UK Department for Transport agreed last November, and in breach of European regulations.

One of Unilog's customers, TDG, is transferring its business to ferry services between Zeebrugge and Purfleet, for on-

to accompanied transport.

Contrary to earlier reports, Italian intermodal operator GTS has not withdrawn its Bari/Piacenza-Manchester service, despite the higher charges. The much longer haul, compared to Unilog's, means that the charges can be spread out more but even so, GTS is understood to be reviewing its position, and one commentator described the situation as "precarious."

●The Railfreight Group has appointed Alan Bennett as director general, with effect from September this year. Lord