

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT

Rail freight standstill in the Rhine Valley - rail infrastructure needs better crisis management

(Berlin/Brussels, 13 April, 2021) There have been no trains running between Kaub and Kamp-Bornhofen in the Rhine Valley railway line south of Koblenz for a month, whereas in just a single week in February there were 1,108 freight trains there besides the local public transport. After a rock fall near Kestert, the route was closed on 15 March and thus the main artery of rail freight traffic on the right bank of the Rhine between the Northern ports and Southern Germany as well as towards Germany's southern neighbours has become inoperational.

"Contingency management in the event of disruptions in rail traffic must be put to the test," concluded freight railway undertakings to secure the fallen rocky hillside "was apparently the only construction site that was being worked on during the two Easter weeks."

As early as the end of March, freight railway undertakings asked DB Netz AG, as the infrastructure operator in charge of the line, to work with local and long-distance passenger railway operators to create more capacity on the railway line on the left bank of the Rhine. This would have been needed so that many freight trains would not be forced to take long detours every day through the Hessian mountains or along the Moselle or to redirect even further away lines in some cases. The diversions are not only costly but, above all, bring the timetables for the industrial customers of the freight railways under immense pressure.

Westenberger of NEE stated: "Apart from the slightly smoother creation of diversion timetables for the individual freight trains in the region by DB Netz, nothing else happened." At the same time, DB Netz still can not reliably predict when the start of operations can be expected and blames the slope stabilization work without offering further details. Westenberger added: "The rail freight sector asks how can the reopening of federal highway 42, which is 15 meters behind the railway line and also affected by the landslide, can be announced for next Monday in the media?"

The freight railways have now asked the Federal Network Agency to explain how it intends to enforce the German Railway Regulation Act to ensure the legally guaranteed network access for the freight railways and a temporary, efficient distribution of rail capacity along the left-bank lines of the Rhine Valley. Westenberger pointed out: "The regulator reacted quickly and initiated proceedings, but in three weeks only a few documents were sent back and forth between Bonn and Frankfurt. There are no suitable provisions in the Railway Regulation Act for rapid crisis management in the event of major disruptions."

The freight railways have therefore also raised the matter on the European Union level. Similar to the closure after the Rastatt tunnel collapse in 2017, traffic flows in five countries are seriously affected by a rock fall affecting a single railway line in Germany.

„The International Contingency Management procedure¹ should be automatically triggered in such severe cases of Pan-European disruption. “ – pointed out UIRR President, Ralf-Charley Schultze.

Whereas passengers can relatively easily transfer from a train to a bus to bypass a troubled section of a railway line, the same option is not available to freight trains. Therefore, all available bypass train paths should be made available to freight customers. Neighbouring Rail Freight Corridors should be alerted, and a concerted effort made to enable the flow of rail freight traffic with the least amount of disruption.

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¹ https://rne.eu/wp-content/uploads/International_Contingency_Management_Handbook_final_v1.5.pdf