The 2nd RBGC Transnational Roundtable Conference was held in St. Petersburg, Russia, on 23-24 October 2012. The Rail Baltica plans and visions of the EU were portrayed alongside the views of the transport sector in North-West Russia. The conference was opened by Alexey Lvov, Deputy Chairman of the St. Petersburg Committee on Transport and Transit Policy and followed by Deputy Mayor of Helsinki Hannu Penttilä, permanent secretary of the Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development and Environment Christian Gaebler, Chairman of the Committee on transport of North-West Association Eduard Slabikov and European Coordinator of Rail Baltica Pavel Telicka.

The governments of the Baltic States have set up a special Task Force mandated to carry out preparatory work for Rail Baltic.

In the year 2015, the new EU Sulphur Directive will come into effect which will significantly increase the costs of sea freight. What would be the future of cargo transportation by sea after the year 2015?
The high-level conference was the opening of the EU-Russia transport policy dialogue at a regional level. Deputy Mayor of Helsinki, Hannu Penttilä, stressed the importance of interconnectivity and interoperability of networks, modes of transport and logistic centres to the future of rail transportation. The cities of Helsinki and Tallinn have actively begun working together on these themes as the freight and passenger transport volumes between Helsinki and Tallinn continue to grow.

The historic importance of Rail Baltica in passenger traffic between St. Petersburg and Berlin was highlighted by Secretary of Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development and Environment, Christian Gaebler. Although the focus in developing Rail Baltica is on freight transportation, Mr. Gaebler reminded participants that after the modernisation has taken place it can again become a significant route for passengers and tourists between the Eastern Baltic Sea Region and Central Europe.

European Coordinator Pavel Telička gave an update on the recent developments in the structural and financial arrangements of the planned 1435 mm UIC standard gauge system — Rail Baltic. See Mr. Telička’s statement summary on www.rbgc.eu.

Russian speakers focused on the growing freight flows in North-West Russia. Head of the analytical department of the October Railway Center for logistics, Maxim Fischuk, highlighted the interaction of the existing railway network with regional harbours and settled on the issue of “abandoned” trains. Known for his advisory activity, Andrey Karpov presented the main development tendencies and some particularities of the transport system in North-West Russia. Vsevolod Morozov from the Institute of Regional Development and Transportation expounded the statistical data concerning international cargo transportation in North-West Russia and listed the key-players of international economic activities in the region.

The session on logistics development prospects included different stakeholders’ viewpoints. Aleksi Kukkarinen from Inno-rail Ltd., Sergey Skorik from TransSphere Group of companies, Oleg Krzhechkovsky from the off-dock container facility of St. Petersburg port “Logistika-Terminal” and Riivo Sinižārķ from Baltic Rail AS gave insight into private operators’ actions and visions on freight logistics in the Eastern Baltic Sea Region. Ernestas Vaitkevičius from Mockava Rail Cargo Terminal in Lithuania introduced the “ESTRaB — Efficient Semi-trailer Transport on Rail Baltica” project that supports the CargoBeamer company’s new technology for handling freight transport by loading semi-trailers onto trains. Outi Nietola from the Finnish Forest Industries Federation represented potential large customers of the operators and highlighted the logistics needs and challenges faced by the Finnish forest industries sector.
EU VISIBILITY TO RAIL BALTICA PROJECTS

The Rail Baltica Growth Corridor (RBGC) and RBGC Russia projects participated at the 14th BDF Summit and the 3rd annual meeting of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) in Copenhagen 18.-19.6.2012.


VISIBILITY FOR RBGC PROJECTS

RBGC and RBGC Russia gained important visibility and networking with the Summit participants. The RBGC stand was visited by Director General of DG Regio Walter Deffaa as well as Vice-President of the European Commission Siim Kallas and Head of his Cabinet Henrik Hololei who demonstrated the strong positive support to the projects. Later in his article in the Baltic Rim Economies (4/2012) Mr. Deffaa pointed out Rail Baltic as one of the topical projects for which successful dialogue between the Strategy, finance and planning is needed on all levels.

Support for Rail Baltic

The list of key-note speakers included Prime Minister of Denmark Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Prime Minister of Estonia Andrus Ansip, Commissioner for Regional Policy Johannes Hahn and Vice-President of European Commission and Commissioner for Transport Siim Kallas. The keynote speeches emphasized the potential of BSR to become the most competitive region in the EU. The economic and transport cooperation in the region is seen as an important tool for realizing this ambition. Particularly, Prime Minister Ansip and Vice-President Kallas mentioned Rail Baltica as an important aim to be achieved.

A few months earlier, Finnish Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen also expressed his positive attitude towards Rail Baltic projects. “A new and fast train connection via the Baltic states straight to the markets areas in the Central and Southern Europe would naturally serve the interests of Finland’s foreign trade and provide excellent opportunities for Finnish businesses in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to expand. Finland is committed to supporting and participating in projects like Rail Baltic as they significantly improve transport infrastructure in the EU’s northern regions and the Baltic Sea states”, said Mr. Katainen.

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RAIL BALTIC TASK FORCE

The Joint Resolution by the Baltic States’ Prime Ministers in November 2011 set the political stage for the Baltic States’ joint process to prepare the plans for the new European gauge 1435 mm Rail Baltic rail line from Tallinn to the Lithuanian/Polish border.

The governments of the Baltic States have set up a special Task Force mandated to carry out the preparatory works for Rail Baltic. The Task Force will work out detailed plans for the management structure, legal status, shareholders arrangements, financial matters and operational costs, and coordination of short and long term work plans.

The Task Force is comprised of representatives of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Representatives of Poland were invited to take part earlier this year, and recently Finland was invited to take part in the Task Force. Finnish participation is considered important from the point of view of the regional impact and the viewpoint of an important end-user of Rail Baltica. Also interest among Finnish shippers and industries is increasing.

After the common point of departure has been achieved the preparatory works can be forwarded to the Rail Baltic Joint Venture which will implement the Rail Baltic project. The reason for establishing the Joint Venture is to address the numerous cross-border issues which will arise in the construction of an international infrastructure project of this size and scope. The ambitious schedule of preparations is for the establishment of the Joint Venture by the end of this year. All preliminary planning and preparatory actions could then be completed in the following two years. The final decisions by the three governments on construction can therefore be taken by the end of 2015.

The creation of the Task Force and the strong political and financial support of the European Union and the partner countries illustrate that Rail Baltic has gained a new momentum which must be used now so as to conclude the preparatory stage as quickly as possible leading to the realization of the new railway.
BEYOND SULPHUR DIRECTIVE: WHAT HAPPENS TO BALTIC SEA CARGO AFTER 2015?

The first of January 2015 will fundamentally change shipping in the Baltic Sea. Thereafter, vessels travelling in the Baltic Sea can only use bunkers with a content of 0.1% sulphur. This will bring millions of euros of extra costs for the Baltic Sea shipping. The time of cheap transport is over. What is the future of the Baltic short sea shipping?

Current questions

The industrial companies around the Baltic Sea are presently calculating what the best option for transportation after 2015 would be. Can new technologies bring relief to these costs? Can vessels be fit with scrubbers or change their fuel to LNG (liquefied natural gas)? Or would it be enough to slow down the speed of the transport and decrease the bunker utilization per mile? Can the transportation in the Northern Sweden and Finland start using Norwegian Arctic ports? Are highways in Sweden and Baltic states able to carry also Finnish import and export cargoes?

Possible solutions

All of the solutions presented in the questions above will be used. Depending on the type of the cargo and its requirements, the industrial companies will take different actions. Low-value bulk products, e.g. coal and oil products; and even some industrial goods, can take slow speed vessels. Industries in Lapland can look for opportunities in ports nearby. Trucks are already driving through Baltic States and Sweden and their number will increase. Swedish cargoes are already using railways to the Western Europe. What about other cargoes?

For Finland, Poland and the Baltic States there is also a solution of Rail Baltica route. For the Eastern Baltic Sea countries Rail Baltica offers a new environmentally friendly solution that will link them to the Central and Eastern Europe, both for passengers and unitized cargo.

There are still multiple challenges along the way, questions concerning with spatial planning, infrastructure development and finding solutions for logistics service providers. Particularly, for Finland the focus is on how to link Southern Finland to Estonia and to the Rail Baltica route. Actions and decisions are required not only from the private sector but also from national and local level policy makers.

Rail Baltica Growth Corridor is a project that will change geography. The substantial shortening of transportation time from the Northern Baltic to Central Europe will increase the competitiveness of Baltic industries in an environmentally friendly way.

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MULTIMODAL TRAVEL PLANNER IN BALTIC SEA REGION

To communicate the accessibility of the Baltic Sea Region, the connectivity pilot will introduce an integrated door-to-door information service for the Rail Baltica region in terms of long-distance and local public transport, covering multimodal (road, sea, rail and air) time table information.

This service will make use of the EU-Spirit technology which is a network of already existing online travel information systems which share their travel information with each other. The pilot will be implemented for the route Berlin-Poznan-Warsaw-Helsinki in order to connect new (Poznan, Helsinki/Finland) and existing high quality (Warsaw, Berlin) travel information services for passenger traffic.

To achieve this, ferry and rail information services will be integrated into EU-Spirit. Therefore, a technical update of the EU-Spirit system infrastructure will be carried out to define the interfaces between different transport modes, especially in the area outside of the current EU-Spirit network. The major steps have been made here and a first demo server for integrated ferry and rail connections has been set up for testing purposes. Next, fine tuning has to be done (including checks for completeness of the integrated information).

The extension of the integrated travel information system to the whole Rail Baltica region will be explored by implementing feasibility studies investigating how to connect the missing regions to the integrated travel information system.

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