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MODAL SHIFT - Hupac and the Public Transport Association (VöV/UTP) give their views



Hupac Rolling Road.

As part of the revision of the new Swiss Act for modal shift in freight transport, Hupac, the market leader in transalpine intermodal transport through Switzerland, is clearly in favour of a continued focus on unaccompanied combined transport even after the end of the subsidy in 2010.

In view of the successes of the measures to shift the transalpine transport through Switzerland from the roads to the railways - a 14 per cent reduction in heavy goods vehicles crossing the Alps through Switzerland since the year 2000 and at the same time a 50 per cent increase in the use of combined transport - Hupac believes that a reduction of the subsidies would jeopardize the results to date and stand in the way of the long-term development favoured by the Swiss people. "Europe's freight transport business is currently in the process of adjusting to combined transport," points out Hupac Director Bernhard Kunz and goes on to add that, "halving the subsidies from 2011 to 2017 as it is recommended in variant 2 of the report, would be sending the entirely wrong

message. This is the only way that we will be able to succeed in achieving the ambitious shift target that we have laid down in the constitution." (until the Gotthard Base Tunnel reduces rail's operating costs)

Hupac is sceptical of the Alpine Transit Exchange (ATA) that is a part of all three alternative proposals. This measure requires the renegotiation of the overland transport agreement with the EU. Hupac considers the pushing forward of the liberalisation of the railways and the opening of the railway market in Europe, as well as the reform on train path rates to the benefit of freight transport and the promotion of European interoperability, to be far more important than the introduction of the recommended Alpine Transit Exchange. Flanking measures such as the timely provision of the feeder routes from the north and south to the Gotthard Base Tunnel, the funding of terminals in busy regions abroad and the intensification of controlling for heavy transports are of essential significance for Hupac, as the most important provider of combined transport across the Alps.



Hupac Road to Rail transfer

Hupac rejects the substantial expansion of the Rolling Highway through Switzerland, as envisaged under the variant 3 of the act: "The Rolling Highway is and shall remain a supplementary offer," emphasizes Bernhard Kunz. "The limited track capacities would be used for a system which, in comparison to unaccompanied combined transport, requires subsidies that are three times as high and is four times as expensive to maintain when it comes to the rolling stock. Furthermore, the environmental benefit of the shift hardly makes sense with regard to the short distances between the Swiss borders."

The Public Transport Association (Verband öffentlicher Verkehr/Union des Transports Publics – VöV/UTP) agrees with Hupac and wishes to safeguard Swiss domestic rail freight and stick to a maximum of 650,000

annual truck transit journeys. The VöV/UTP is the National Association of Public Transport Companies. Its members are 137 transport companies and 161 companies from Industry and the Economy at large. The VöV/UTP was established in 1889 to:

- Represent the interests of its members regarding policy, public authorities and third parties;
- Co-ordinate Transport Companies for national tasks;
- Exchange ideas and best practice
- Promote customer friendly public transport

The VöV/UTP strongly believes the Government goal of 650,000 annual truck transit journeys by road through the Swiss Alps is still correct. This goal is expected to be achieved, despite indecisive modal shift policies in neighbouring countries, within 2 years of the opening of the Gotthard Base tunnel. In order for this to happen, state subsidy will continue to be required to promote a shift to rail. The VöV/UTP, like Hupac, strongly opposes the introduction of an Alpine Transit Exchange (ATA). The VöV/UTP believes it would lead to a relative reduction in the price of domestic road freight and jeopardise domestic wagonload freight. It would require a levelling rail subsidy and not encourage a shift to rail.

In general the VöV/UTP supports the need for Alp Transit. It is also ready for Government subsidy to assist the situation in neighbouring countries to help achieve the target number of road transits across Switzerland. Like Hupac, the VöV/UTP's experts are against a major expansion of Rolling Road services (Rola), as the services do not use rail capacity as efficiently as unaccompanied services; the amount of freight transferred from road compared to a train carrying containers, swap bodies and trailers only would be less per train. 200,000 lorries per annum by Rola, against a current annual total of 130,000, is seen as an acceptable upper limit, given the level of subsidy required.

The debate will continue....

Editor - Hugh has based this article on Hupac and VöV/UTP press releases.