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FOT measures challenge rail freight transport

On 11 September 2025, the Federal Office of Transport in Switzerland (FOT) [specified](#) the [measures announced](#) to increase safety in rail freight transport. The federal authority is thus following up on the report of The Swiss Transportation Safety Investigation Board (STSB) on the accident in the Gotthard Base Tunnel. The measures must be initiated immediately and must be implemented by 31 December 2025 at the latest. They are shaking up the foundations of rail freight transport and the associated additional costs are enormous, especially for the wagon keepers. It is not clear, neither for the wagon keepers nor for the workshops, how they should implement these measures in such a short time. In the short term, economic distortions are a real risk and in the medium term, the competitiveness of the entire rail freight transport sector will be massively reduced.

Safety is the highest priority

On 11 September 2025, FOT announced the concrete measures in response to STSB's report. This followed FOT's two roundtable discussions with industry representatives after the publication of the STSB report. This dialogue aimed to define measures to further improve the current high level of safety in rail freight transport. The measures are to begin immediately and should be implemented by 31 December 2025 at the latest.

Safety is also a top priority for VAP members. Nevertheless, it is wrong and dangerous to suggest that absolute safety is possible. The benefits of additional and more restrictive measures must be weighed against the additional costs, and decisions must be made with a sense of proportion. It should be noted that the measures imposed by the FOT have the potential to reduce safety in freight transport as a whole. This is because the measures and the associated horrendous costs will lead in the medium term to a shift in freight transport from rail to road, which is many times more dangerous.

Proportionality, sustainability and feasibility fall by the wayside

VAP sees it as its task to assess these measures for proportionality, sustainability and feasibility for the industry in general and the wagon keepers in particular. Furthermore, the stakeholders in the rail freight transport sector should bear the costs of the measures as equally as possible. This primarily concerns the railway undertakings (RUs) in their role as carriers, the wagon keepers and the infrastructure managers. Only if they all fulfill their obligations can the high level of safety be maintained and improved. After all, it is not a single measure, but rather their multitude and interaction that make the system safe.

Capacity bottlenecks in the economy are likely to be severe

With the new measures, the Federal Office of Transport (FOT) places disproportionately high obligations on wagon keepers compared to other stakeholders. The substantial reduction in the maintenance intervals, in particular, will massively affect the availability of freight wagons and the profitability of operations. The maintenance intervals imposed by FOT will lead to an extremely significant, not yet conclusively calculable reduction in availability compared to current intervals. Accordingly, this measure will lead to short-term bottlenecks in the freight industry, which have the potential to jeopardize the country's security of supply. This

topic was frequently discussed in advance and at the roundtables but played a surprisingly minor role in the FOT's decision-making process.

In the medium term, these measures will further reduce the competitiveness of rail compared to road and significantly accelerate the shift from rail to road. And all this at a time when rail freight transport is already under severe pressure on many fronts. All this is also in great contradiction to the commitment for more rail freight transport, which was once again expressed in Parliament with the adoption of the Freight Transport Act. These measures prescribed by FOT run counter to this commitment.

Implementation raises major question marks

VAP cannot currently foresee how the measures will be implemented in the extremely short period before they come into force. Maintenance companies already lack capacities, resources and components. This situation will worsen as a result of the FOT measures. It is to be feared that freight wagons will not only be more often with the maintenance companies, but above all, for longer periods than before. In addition, the number of empty wagon transports to and from the workshops will increase significantly. This will primarily affect the freight companies, as they will have to purchase more wagons to transport the same volume of goods, which will substantially increase their transport costs. As a consequence, more and more shippers are likely to turn away from rail freight transport in the medium term and transport their goods by road.

European interoperability is undermined

As rail freight transport is integrated across Europe, the effects of the FOT measures do not stop at national borders. Wagon owners outside Switzerland can hardly determine whether one of their leased freight wagons is traveling on Swiss tracks, as customers are free to dispose of the available wagons in accordance with interoperability requirements. The measures imposed by the FOT are likely to result in wagon owners no longer serving the Swiss market, or if they do, only with fleets that are specifically maintained for Switzerland. This means additional administrative work, which will drive up costs and reduce the attractiveness of rail freight transport.

Burdens unevenly distributed among the market players

The wagon keepers must bear the financing of the costs almost entirely on their own, regardless of the significantly increased and as yet undefined additional organisational effort. The Federal Office of Transport (FOT) has not imposed similarly drastic measures on neither the railway undertakings (RUs) as carriers nor on the infrastructure managers. This is surprising because there is no plausible reason to hold them less accountable than the wagon keepers. Concrete measures for both actors were also identified on this topic during the round table discussions.

As is clear to all involved, VAP also recognises that after an accident like the one in the Gotthard Base Tunnel with massive - fortunately only financial - costs, one cannot simply return to business as usual. However, it is also true that wagon keepers have always invested a lot and continuously so in the safety of their freight wagons. In the past, the wagon keepers have already implemented effective measures amounting to 40 million euros annually. From the beginning, VAP, as the voice of the Swiss wagon keepers, has advocated for measures that would further increase the already high level of rail safety while simultaneously considering proportionality, sustainability, and feasibility.

Setting the course with long-term consequences

The measures will have a drastic impact on the shipping industry. It is not yet possible to make a definitive assessment of the consequences and costs for rail freight transport – the system is too complex and the measures imposed are too complicated. However, it is already clear today that rail freight transport as we have known it until now will be fundamentally changed.

The higher costs for maintenance and transport to workshops will have to be borne by wagon owners in the short term. In the medium term, however, the measures will have an extremely negative impact on rail freight transport. This is because rising costs will cause more companies to transport their goods by road instead of rail in the future. This will not increase safety; on the contrary, freight transport will become less safe overall due to the higher probability of accidents when transporting goods by road.