

MORE POWER TO THE RAILWAY UNDERTAKINGS

What changes with the updated General Contract for the Use of Wagons?

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EXCLUSIVE



A group of rail freight wagons in Ferencvaros, Hungary. Image: Shutterstock. © Kurka Geza Corey

The General Contract for the Use of Wagons (CGU) was updated at the beginning of 2026, making some procedures more efficient and less time consuming. The main focus was on clarifying the assignment of responsibility during wagon custody. Railway Undertakings (RUs) have clearer authority to act i.e. they can commission wagon repairs “without waiting for feedback from a distant keeper”, the International Union of Wagon Keepers (UIP) explained to RailFreight.com.

“Empowering RUs to commission repairs enables faster response times and prevents costly downtimes”, UIP added. This does not mean that RUs will be now tasked with the maintenance of the wagons, they are just able to set it up faster on-site and have more clarity on when responsibility needs to be transferred. Other than speeding up processes, the new CGU provides clearer guidelines in case of ambiguous legal situations, the association specified. The role of Wagon Keepers, on the other hand, will essentially remain the same along the whole maintenance chain.

‘Release to Service’ and ‘Release to Operation

“The amendments to the protocols ‘Release to Service’ and ‘Release to Operation’ clarify who is responsible for what, when responsibility transfers, and what information needs to flow between parties., UIP said. What is new is the explicit inclusion of Entities in Charge of Maintenance (ECM) “as the entity responsible for the outcome of maintenance”. Thus, there is a continuous and clear chain of responsibility from the ECM all the way to the RU using the wagons.



UIP's head Gilles Peterhans. Image: © UIP

GCU Broker Platform

UIP, together with the European Rail Freight Association (ERFA) and the International Union of Railways (UIC), developed the GCU Broker Platform in 2019 and are continuously improving it. Its objective is to digitalise and optimise the obligatory exchange of data on defects and the outcome of repairs processes, UIP underlined. “The platform replaces what were often fragmented, paper-based or bilateral processes with a standardised digital exchange”. This, together with the clarified on-site maintenance rules, is expected to make the maintenance of rail freight wagons seamless and efficient.

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