Fourth railway package disappoints freight interests

The European Commission’s Fourth Railway Package, launched on 30 January, met with mixed reaction among trade bodies representing railfreight users and operators. CLECAT, which groups European freight forwarding interests, expressed its concern over the publication of the package but said it was disappointed with the fact that the Commission has “backtracked from its initial intention to impose separation of the infrastructure management (IM) and railway operations”.

The new proposal allows incumbent operators to keep their holding structures, making separation “optional”, said Nicolette van der Jagt, director general of CLECAT. “The Commission has clearly considered the political ramifications of its proposals and settled for something which falls far short of what we were hoping for, namely, full unbundling in all cases.”

Van der Jagt added that the separation of the infrastructure manager from railway undertakings would have represented “the quickest and most efficient way of revitalising the industry and creating a level playing field between rail operators”. This is the model that also applies to other modes of transport where the provider of the services is totally independent from the public party that is in charge of the infrastructure.

However, CLECAT does “fully support proposals to enhance powers for the European Railway Agency to establish a one-stop-shop approval process. Lengthy and costly procedures for approving railway rolling stock impede the creation of a single European railway area and add “unacceptable additional costs” for operators. A one-stop-shop type approval of rolling stock certified across the single railway area is needed,” CLECAT insists.

“We will study the Commission’s proposals in more detail, but, for us, making the railway sector more efficient through enhanced competition and quality is key,” van der Jagt concluded.

The European Rail Freight Association (ERFA) accused DB of effectively rewriting the Package. “The package illustrates the extent to which the original and excellent draft setting out a fully liberalised and competitive railway structure compliant with the principles of the internal market has been toned in the space of less than a month by the intervention of German Chancellor Angela Merkel into a German Railway Package for Europe, a ‘Europäische Weltreichsbahn’,” Merkel’s intervention, following the massive lobbying by Deutsche Bahn, forced the Commission to change its plans. This new package now allows the holding company model of the railway in Germany to be maintained, it permits hidden transfer of funds from the infrastructure manager via the holding company to the commercial activities of train operators, placing them in a competitive advantage over their competitors who do not benefit from such aid.

“It allows for subsidised DB companies to buy operators in other member states, unfairly competing with other companies; by a failure to provide full separation between infrastructure managers and railway undertakings, it will allow confidential IT and other information, as well as funding, to flow undetected between these companies, again to the detriment of fair competition,” he stated.

The new text gives member states, where a separated model exists, the right to refuse operators from a holding company onto their network. For Lord Berkeley, however, it however fails to explain how such a complex procedure would work in practice.

“In Germany, the Commission’s infraction proceedings have already demonstrated wide ranging failures to comply even with existing law, particularly on the issue of hidden transfers of profits from IM to the holding company. In France, Germany’s partner in this monopolistic exercise, SNCF, in spite of being fined over €60 million for anti-competitive behaviour, it and the French government are hanging towards the same integrated structure which is already seen by the Commission as illegal in other member states. “So here we have two of the largest member states already in breach of railway law, now having succeeded in getting the law changed so that they can carry on as they please.”

Lord Berkeley fears that the legislation will end up reducing the growth that rail could offer, deter potential investors “who fear that their investments will be threatened by a national monopoly” and lead to a situation across Europe where everybody puts more cars and trucks on the road. “It is now up to the European Parliament and the Council (of Ministers) to alter, improve and complete this package and achieve the objectives which business, customers and the industry know is necessary to create the internal market, investment and efficiency that the rail sector needs so badly,” he concluded.
From bulk bag to tanker – dust free

Food grade bulk logistics specialist Atchison Topeka has improved the efficiency of its UK operations by consolidating multiple food distribution centres into a single facility that transfers powdered food ingredients from bulk bags into bulk tanker trucks. The new closed-loop bulk transfer system, based at its Droitwich, Worcs base, consists of a bulk bag discharger integrated with pneumatic conveying equipment that blows bulk material into the trucks, while recirculating displaced air and recovering dust from the airstream. To meet food industry standards, the process was required to comply with BRC (British Retail Consortium) requirements in three areas: bulk tankers, warehousing and palletised distribution. While the facility would be handling a variety of food ingredients, analysis showed that most exhibited bulk densities of approximately 650 kg/ cbm. Most were also free-flowing or semi-free flowing, with an angle of repose of 40-60°s. One of the ingredients, however, was relatively hygroscopic and prone to bridging, so the equipment needed to prevent cavitation.

Bulk-out

At the heart of the bulk transfer system (manufactured by Flexicon) is a Bulk-Out Model BFC bulk bag discharger configured with a cantilevered i-beam, electric hoist and trolley, flow promotion devices and a hopper equipped with a rotary airlock valve. The dilute phase pneumatic conveying portion of the system consists of a positive displacement pressure blower, pneumatic conveying line and a filter receiver located downstream from the bulk tanker truck. Automated controls orchestrate operation of the flow promotion devices, rotary airlock valves, blower and filter receiver. All material contact surfaces throughout the system are of 304 stainless steel finished to food standards. To start the process, a forklift or pallet jack is used to place a bulk bag in front of the discharge frame, where an operator attaches four bag loops to clips on the unit’s bag lifting frame and, using a pendant, activates the hoist to raise the bag and the trolley to move it into the frame, and after which it is lowered onto the spout connection point. A Spout-Lock clamp ring, which is mounted atop a telescoping tube, securely connects the clean side of the bag spout to the clean side of the equipment, after which the telescoping tube exerts continuous downward tension on the bag spout. The operator then releases the bag spout’s drawstring, allowing material to fall freely into the hopper with no dusting. Flow Flexer plates raise opposite bottom edges of the bag into a steep ‘V’ shape, sealing compacted material, while constant downward tension exerted by the telescoping tube as the bag empties/everytime promotes complete discharge from the bag. Material in the hopper is fed through a rotary airlock valve and pneumatic pick-up adapter into a pneumatic line that runs horizontally for 1m and at an incline before penetrating the exterior wall of the building to discharge material into a tanker trailer. The air stream provides sufficient force to blow the material the full length of the trailer’s interior. A return line vents displaced air and dust to the filter receiver that collects any carry-over material for later reintroduction to the pneumatic conveying system.

Modular design

The design of the bag-to-truck solution uses modular components that allow the distributor to repurpose its process for other applications, such as transferring powders from trailers to bulk bags, or new materials with varied handling characteristics.

Along with consolidating operations, the dust-tight bulk bag discharger with totally enclosed pneumatic conveying prevented contamination of the product and plant environment, eliminated the need for a clean room, and simplified quality control procedures. The Droitwich facility builds on Atchison Topeka’s record of clean, safe handling of food materials and maintaining rigorous standards for public health and safety.

Cimbria Bulk Equipment

• Bulk handling equipment for efficient and reliable transportation and loading of dry bulk material
• Clean environment and working safety in one product

Cimbria Bulk Equipment A/S
Drejervej 10
DK-7451 Sunds
Denmark
Tel: +45 72 42 24 00
Fax: +45 72 42 24 99
E-mail: cbe@cimbria.com
www.cimbria.com

One pneumatic line discharges into the tanker’s inlet port, while a second line vents an outlet port, leading to a filter receiver where dust is separated from clean air vented to the atmosphere.