

EU Agency for Railways prepares for new role



Keith Barrow meets Josef Doppelbauer in Valenciennes.

With recent approval of the Fourth Railway Package, the process for authorising new rail vehicles and certifying train operators is set for a radical overhaul. European Union Agency for Railways executive director **Josef Doppelbauer** tells **Keith Barrow** how these processes will be streamlined, harmonised and centralised in just three years.

ON April 28 the European Parliament formally adopted the technical pillar of the Fourth Railway Package triggering a fundamental shift in the management of railway safety approvals in Europe. The technical pillar, which came into effect on June 15, centralises responsibilities for the authorisation of new locomotives and rolling stock as well as the certification of train operators with

a single pan-European body, the European Railway Agency, which has been renamed the European Union Agency for Railways in recognition of its extended mandate.

In July, the agency published an update of its strategic vision, outlining how the organisation will transform itself within the framework of the Fourth Railway Package. With only three years before it takes over many of

the responsibilities of the National Safety Authorities (NSAs), preparations for this transition are already well underway.

“We have a formalised strategy in place for the agency with two key drivers,” executive director Dr Josef Doppelbauer told IRJ at the agency’s headquarters in Valenciennes. “We have created a dedicated unit for strategic topics including research and

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standardisation and at the same time we have prepared our structure for the needs of the Fourth Railway Package. We have combined all rulemaking in one unit - the interoperability unit - and everything to do with safety certification and vehicle authorisation in the safety unit. In the future we will continue to develop TSIs and we will continue to evaluate national rules, but this needs to be separated from that part of the agency that will issue certificates and authorisations."

Three phases

The transition is divided into three phases. The agency is currently in phase 1, which covers planning and implementation, and workstreams have been established to steer different elements of the process.

A core objective is the creation of the so-called one-stop shop (OSS), an IT tool which will channel all applications for safety certificates and vehicle authorisations through a single online portal. The functional specification of the OSS must be approved by the agency's management board, which is composed of representatives of the European Commission and the 28 member states. This means that if the specification for the IT tool fails to meet the requirements of the member states it will not be approved by the board.

"This forces us to work closely with the NSAs and try to come up with the best possible solution," Doppelbauer says. "Practically all of the NSAs have their own system and we need to have an efficient interface with those systems. Of course, every NSA wants the OSS to be as close as possible to their respective current processes. As these processes are different this will not be possible, but we need to find the best solution for the whole of Europe, while also ensuring that we capture any best practice from the NSAs that the agency can capitalise on."

The OSS also needs to interact with the agency's existing registers and

ERTMS: safeguarding stability and compatibility

As the systems authority for ERTMS, the agency is responsible for ensuring the European Commission's vision of a fully-interoperable European signalling system is realised. The strategic vision sets out the agency's three priorities for ERTMS, which include:

- Fully compatible products available from a number of suppliers
- delivering a breakthrough programme with European governance in place, and
- ensuing real interoperability of onboard systems, with no extra checks for member states.

This issue is high on Doppelbauer's agenda. "The Fourth Railway Package is the most important task for the agency, but if I evaluate the time I spend on certain topics, ERTMS comes a close second," he says. "The problem with ERTMS - and we are back to fragmentation - is that progress is very uneven. When we go from one member state to another we see countries with significant deployment, countries with national rollout plans that are partly materialised, and there are other countries which are lagging behind."

In this context, the agency will play a key role in coordinating the rollout of ERTMS across the European Union, with a focus on ensuring the EC's interoperability aspirations are achieved by enforcing compatibility between deployments and solutions. With the agency acting as the guardian of the specification for ERTMS, Doppelbauer is adamant that the rules must be followed wherever ERTMS is

adopted. "If we want to remove the barriers, we need to have a European Rail Traffic Management System with a capital 'E'," he says. "This means we should be able to run compatible onboard units on any compliant infrastructure. The Fourth Railway Package gives the agency more teeth in this regard, and we will require strict compatibility and full compliance with the official specification for ETCS."

Doppelbauer acknowledges that vendors need stability and he is confident that this will be achieved through the recently-published Baseline 3 Release 2 specification and the ERTMS Stakeholder platform, which was launched last December as "a vehicle to drive collective resolution of problems."

The agency plans to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at InnoTrans this month with the European Commission and rail industry stakeholders, which will commit signatories to ensuring compatibility while protecting their respective investments in the technology. "An MoU was signed in Copenhagen in 2012, but as Baseline 3 Release 2 is delivered - and it has been legally in force since July 5 - we will need a new agreement," Doppelbauer explains. "This MoU should provide a basis for individual arrangements in the form of letters of intent for individual companies, which then become members of the [stakeholder] platform. This means it is important to have stakeholders directly at the table, including infrastructure managers as well as suppliers."

databases. A review of the agency's data architecture is planned to ensure the system is structured in a way that improves efficiency. This means that all data will be stored centrally and applicants will only need to enter their data once.

Phase 2 will test the integrity of the

OSS with a year of shadow running, which will begin in mid-2018, allowing final debugging of the system before it goes into full operation. "We believe the OSS can harmonise processes for European approval and national applications as they go through the same tool, while also improving

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transparency in the system,” Doppelbauer says. “At InnoTrans we will present the core elements of the OSS to a larger audience and show the basic functions of the interface.”

Phase 3 is due to start on June 15 2019, when shadow running concludes and the agency takes responsibility for authorising locomotives and rolling stock for operation in more than one country.

This means that in less than three years the agency will need to be ready to issue vehicle authorisations for any train used in more than one member state and safety certificates for train operators anywhere in the European Union. “All of this happens quickly in railway terms and we have to compare this with the previous railway packages,” Doppelbauer says. “Some member states are still struggling with the transposition of the second and third railway packages. We have only got three years but we are confident we can meet the schedule.”

While a large chunk of NSA activity will be centralised at this point, national bodies will continue to play a crucial role. For example, while the agency will be responsible for authorisation of vehicles for operation in more than one country, supervision will remain with the NSAs. The success of the new structure therefore depends on close cooperation between the agency and the NSAs.

“We cooperate with the NSAs at various levels,” Doppelbauer explains.

“Firstly, we have an active NSA network. Secondly, we run workshops with stakeholders including the NSAs on key topics such as safety certification, vehicle authorisation, and the OSS. Thirdly, there are individual cooperation agreements which are facilitated through MoUs. We have already signed six of these and are negotiating more as we speak.”

The agency must sign a formal cooperation agreement with each NSA to provide a basis for the transition of responsibilities. The formal cooperation

help to ensure continuity

The agency will establish a so-called pool of experts for competency management, drawing on experience from the NSAs. For the duration of a project staff from NSAs will work under the direction and liability of the agency. “It will be quite complex but we are already prepared with MoUs and we have worked closely with the NSAs, which have really been very helpful,” Doppelbauer says. “There has been a good spirit of cooperation, which is necessary if we want this new system to



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agreements will follow a standard format while taking into account differences between the legal systems of member states, particularly around the secondment of staff and the concept of liability, which varies between different countries. At the core of these agreements will be learning cases - examples of real projects demonstrating how the NSA works at present and outlining any best practice that might be transferrable to the agency. This will

work properly.”

Doppelbauer is under no illusion about the scale of this task, and he stresses that a successful transfer of responsibilities and sharing of resources at a European level requires the support of numerous stakeholders, not least the member states themselves. However, these stakeholders will need to accept new ways of working, and adapt to them quickly. Through the Fourth Railway Package, the agency has been



Photo: Quintus Vosman

Under the terms of the Fourth Railway Package technical pillar, the agency is expected to be ready to issue vehicle authorisations from 2019.

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handed the task of overcoming fundamental flaws in the member states' current safety regimes while delivering an internationally-accepted system that is faster and more efficient to operate than those it replaces.

A reduction and simplification of both national rules and TSIs is therefore a key objective for the agency and a precondition of the technical pillar. "If the authorisations the agency issues from 2019 onwards are to be of value we have to reduce national specificities," Doppelbauer says.

The need to reduce the cost of authorisation and safety certification is also a primary consideration.

"Fragmentation of these processes means unnecessary cost and unnecessary delays for introducing new vehicles or establishing new railway undertakings," Doppelbauer says. "In the future you will need just one authorisation. That will be a key improvement but we need to ensure it is faster and cheaper than the current process. This is a clear objective I have given to the team and it's something we consider whenever we have new proposals for the process. We try to identify simplifications wherever possible."

Inevitably change on this scale means

a larger organisation encompassing a broader range of skills. An analysis carried out by the agency indicates that around 40 additional staff will be required by 2020 and the EC has already allocated a budget to recruit 10 extra employees in 2017. The agency has established a competent management workstream to identify the skills required and where the gaps are likely to be. "We have prepared job profiles for certain roles that will be necessary and we will shortly post vacancy notices for new staff, which will also be open to existing employees," Doppelbauer says.

Best-practice

Despite the need to focus on managing a huge change in the role of the organisation, the agency continues to look beyond Europe, sharing best practice with its counterparts around the world. At InnoTrans the agency will host the first meeting of the Platform of Rail Agencies, which will bring together representatives of agencies from Europe, North America, Australia, Brazil, the Gulf and Japan. "I believe this could be a significant step forward in international cooperation,"

Doppelbauer says. "Digitisation and automation are fashionable topics and we have made significant progress here. We are also hosting an event in Florence where we will gather around 30 high-level participants to reflect on possible digital strategy and automatic train operation, which we will do further work on to identify short-term quick-wins and long-term strategy."

In the context of intensifying competition from Chinese and Japanese suppliers, and rapid technological advancement in road transport, Doppelbauer believes the process of simplifying certification and authorisation now presents a unique opportunity to secure the future of rail transport in Europe.

"I see a challenge and we need to deliver quality," he says "We have very little margin for error - the process needs to work, our results need to meet the specifications. I believe there is more and more alignment and consensus on the course of action to be taken, and we can only make this happen by working together. This isn't just the agency acting alone, it's the agency acting with the Commission, with stakeholders in the industry who together can make the transition." **IRJ**



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