

OSShD—Organization for the Collaboration of Railways

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Background

The Ministers managing railway transport of Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Viet Nam, GDR, China, North Korea, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, the USSR, and Czechoslovakia decided to establish a special inter-governmental organization called the Organization for The Collaboration of Railways (OSShD) at a conference in Sophia on 28 June 1956, and the executive body started operations in Warsaw on 1 September 1957. During the last 40 years, OSShD has had both fruitful and difficult periods. Its highly-specialized work, which is oriented towards collective resolution of railway transport problems, has allowed it to maintain the authoritative status of an international organization despite recent political changes in Europe and Asia.

The new geopolitical situation has generated problems requiring coordinated action by all participants in international railway transport between Europe and Asia. For example, new frontiers have increased freight transport times as a result of additional customs procedures, etc.

In contrast to European countries, railway links between OSShD member countries are characterized by remarkably long routes (8000 to 10,000 km), different and severe climatic zones, and two track



IX Session of the Conference of the OSShD General Directors at Voronezh, Russia, 18–22 November 1996 (OSShD)

gauge changes on a single route (1435/1520/1435 mm).

Transport between Europe and Asia is controlled by different regulations from Western Europe, such as the Agreement on International Passenger Communication (AIPC), Agreement on International Freight Communication (AIFC), Rules of Mutual Use of Railway Cars (RMURC) and Agreement on Rules of Settlements Between Railways. OSShD is an intergovernmental body responsible for concluding and policing these agreements and related matters, as well as for coordination of operating conditions and tariffs.

Expansion of Member Countries

OSShD coordinates resolutions between member railways and improves the technical, legal and tariff compatibility between OSShD members and transport systems in Europe.

Reforms during 1990 to 1992 activated and improved OSShD's operating efficiency. In 1990, OSShD consisted of 13 member countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Viet Nam, GDR, China, North Korea, Cuba, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, the USSR, and Czechoslovakia). In 1992, it was joined by the six newly-independent states of Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldova and Ukraine. The reunification of Germany influenced the participation of the former East-German Deutsche Reichsbahn, which took observer status.

Discussions at some meetings of the Ministers Conference on the many developments, and analysis by OSShD, made it possible to determine the main directions for improving OSShD activities. Four matters were recognized as very important:

- Extension of the West-European railway links to the eastern coast of Asia and introduction of modern technologies



Passenger train leaving Poznan Station, Poland

(EJRCE)



Track improvement works between Warsaw and Poznan

(EJRCF)

- Exchange of operation experience between the railways of Central and Eastern Europe with those of Asia
- Unification of international transport legislation
- Cooperation on transport policy and environmental problems

A major aim of OSShD's activities is perfecting railway links between Europe and Asia and raising competitiveness of railways. According to the resolution of the XX session of the Ministers Conference in Ulan Bator (1992), a new leading body was formed—the Conference of Railway General Directors.

The next OSShD reforms widened the membership to include associate members, observers, and annexed enterprises. In 1993 to 1995, seven countries—Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan (Kirghizstan), Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan—joined the OSShD. Since then, there have been 24 active member countries in total.

In 1997, Iran joined the OSShD and the Agreement on International Railway Freight Conveyances. Observer members include Germany, France, Greece and Finland.

The new annexed-enterprise membership stimulated huge interest and 17 companies, including Siemens, Alcatel Sel, Plasser & Theurer, Intercontainer-Interfrigo, Kolmex, and Transmanche are current members. These companies can enter discussions on matters of interest to them, and can organize presentations on

developments and products. Such cooperation allows OSShD to become familiar with their experiences, and problems.

Main Operations

A main theme of the Organization's operation lies in the programme for perfecting railway links between Europe and Asia which describes the increase in freight volume that can be achieved both by direct investment in technical equipment, and by rationalization and improvement of existing procedures and services. This programme forms the basis for continuation of various work within the OSShD framework. Its major provisions were presented at international conferences and published in *Schienen der Welt*, 4, 1995. The freight and passenger volumes between Europe and Asia, and the major railway flows were defined within the implementation of this programme, taking into account the activities in Europe of UIC, UN, ECE Inland Transport Commission, and the Trans-European Main Line Railway Programme, as well as ESCAP. In 1994, the Ministers of Transport of Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, approved the regional programme for development and use of the international railways via the border crossing-point Druzhba-Alashankou until the year 2000. In early 1995, the Ministers of Transport



Level crossing work

(Y. Akiyama)

of Belarus, Germany, Poland and Russia signed a cooperation agreement on modernization, reconstruction and development of the Berlin-Warsaw-Minsk-Moscow corridor, which provides gradual realization of the necessary measures by 2000 and 2010.

At present, OSShD is carrying out the following works:

- Organizing combined conveyance between Europe and Asia
- Perfecting passenger communication systems (priority on Tallinn-Warsaw seat reservation system)
- Defining conditions for organizing direct freight traffic on Europe-Asia route (experimental container train between Korea and Germany started in cooperation with ESCAP)

OSShD also established the conditions for joint work by ministries of transport, customs, immigration, and by railway administration to create more favourable conditions for moving passengers and freight across frontiers.

An important point in shortening freight transport times (especially for dangerous freight) and cutting time losses due to freight reloading is use of variable-gauge wheel sets designed for the 1435 and 1520 mm gauges. The Russian Railways (RZD), Bulgarian Railways (BDZ) and Polish Railways (PKP) continue to search

for efficient ways of changing bogies under cars when the track gauge changes from 1435 to 1520 mm and vice versa. OSShD is working to resolve the many technical problems of different push-pull devices, brakes, car sizes, etc.

Active involvement by OSShD in the various agreements and the Regulations on settlements of charges allows impartiality in agreements and, in separate cases, more flexible decision-making on revisions (with the consent of the involved parties), and also guarantees the participation of new members in these agreements.

In the field of transport legislation, the sphere of application of major agreements, such as passenger and freight conveyances, was defined, and the XXII and XXIII sessions of the Ministers Conference approved the improvement of the agreements and their rapprochement to other legal agreements on the Eurasian continent, which are now the subject of work by OSShD in cooperation with the Central Office for International Railway Transport (OCTI).

The aim of the rapprochement of the transport legislation lies in easing movement of freight between Europe and Asia and, most importantly, in effective use of the existing infrastructure and rolling stock.

The improvements to date have eliminated some differences in the agreements on international freight communications and the Carriages of Goods by Rail (CIM), and the rapprochement tendency has been marked (such as new system for describing and coding freight) and new rules on transporting dangerous freight prepared by OSShD based on UN recommendations and the Regulations governing the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Rail (RID).

OSSHd is also participating in preparation of the new convention on customs regulations in international railway freight within the framework of the UN ECE Inland Transport Commission to be presented at the UN ECE Inland Transport Commission forum in 1998.



Improved Polish tracks and station on Berlin-Warsaw-Minsk-Moscow corridor

(Y. Akiyama)

The domestic and international media have reported on OSShD's activities (*Schienen der Welt*, 5, 1992; 4, 1995, *Rail Engineering International*, 2, 1994), and OSShD has presented reports on its activities at international conferences (Berlin, 1991, Bielefeld, 1994, Verona, 1995). The growing authority of OSShD in the international arena has stimulated interest by other international organizations resulting in cooperation agreements with UIC and OCTI.

This level of cooperation allows OSShD access to developments by these organizations and eliminates the possibility of duplication.

OSSHd is planning the following measures for the future:

- Fuller use of OSShD potential to resolve regional problems (establishment of database on new services, tariffs, and developments on trunk lines connecting Europe and Asia, etc.)
- Resolving members' problems to increase competitiveness
- Establishment and gradual introduction of system for funding specialized projects

to be achieved by special institutes
Future OSShD activities will allow:

- Establishment of major passenger and freight flows between Europe and Asia
- Specification of technical parameters for high-quality freight lines
- Confirmation and simplification of legal regulations on procedures at frontiers related to transportation across Eurasian continent, delivery terms, financial responsibility, etc.
- Creation of competitive conditions for acceptance and carriage of large freight volumes to improve OSShD members' financial conditions
- Development of new forms of freight carriage by block freight trains from large-scale senders to large-scale receivers in shortest possible time at competitive prices

The technical and technological means of railways in respect to traffic between Europe and Asia are indisputable, and the activities of the OSShD members will be oriented towards it. ■



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