

Interview with Jean Pierre Loubinoux, Director General of the International Union of Railways (UIC)

1. What is the Train to Copenhagen communications campaign?

The Train to Copenhagen is about bringing people to Copenhagen and Copenhagen to the people. With this campaign the rail sector would like to remind all decision-makers involved in the one of most important events this decade, the upcoming United Nations conference on climate change (COP 15), of the importance of tackling transport and how rail plays an essential role in the reduction of the growing emissions from the transport sector.

In addition, we would like to support COP 15 participants in walking the walk by providing a low-carbon way to get to Copenhagen.

However, COP 15 is not only about the decision-makers going there, it is about all of us and our common future. By “Bringing Copenhagen to the people” we aim to reach people on trains and in stations with information about the importance of COP 15. We would also like to remind people that they are a part of the solution – the everyday climate heroes - when they choose to travel by train.

The campaign is conducted in cooperation with the WWF and the United Nations’ Seal the Deal campaign among others, and includes an event in Kyoto, a symbolic train journey between Kyoto and Copenhagen, a special train called Climate Express that will bring COP 15 participants, decision-makers, NGOs and journalists from Brussels to Copenhagen on 5 December. In addition a number of UIC members will be conducting national versions of the Train to Copenhagen campaign.

2. Why should the rail sector get involved in the climate change challenge?

First of all, the climate change challenge concerns all of us and we all have to get involved. Secondly, rail in particular should get involved as it is a crucial part of the solution in how to reduce the transport sector’s CO₂ emissions. The transport sector has a special responsibility for coming up with solutions, being as it is responsible for 20% of global CO₂ emissions, and being the sector with the highest emissions growth in spite of all the technological advances. In other words, reducing transport emissions is one of the most crucial steps in combating global warming and securing our future. Rail is already today one of the least polluting transport modes, causing for example three times less CO₂ emissions than a car and up to ten times less than an airplane. However, in addition to not being a visible part of the transport sector’s problems in terms of the different sources of the sector’s emissions, rail needs more attention as regards its crucial role as part of the solution. Rail is ready to play its part as the backbone of sustainable transport systems!

3. How can society fully benefit from the emissions reductions brought about by rail?

There are two ways to achieve emissions reduction generally and in the transport sector more particularly – through technological improvements and behaviour change.

Rail is working hard and systematically to continuously improve the rail product and its sustainability advantages, including its energy efficiency, both via technological improvements and behaviour change. As concerns the technological aspect, the rail sector is working to upgrade existing technologies and new modes of propulsion. To support behaviour change, in addition to improving train services and our management systems, we are developing tools to help people make informed transport decisions, such as EcoPassenger (www.ecopassenger.org) and EcoTransIT (www.ecotransit.org), web tools to compare the energy consumption and emissions performance of different transport modes. Aiming to be as fair as possible, EcoPassenger and EcoTransIT do not only calculate the energy or the fuel needed to travel by rail, road, sea or air, but also include the energy and the emissions from the cumulative energy consumption, including the energy used to produce the electricity or the fuel, in a “well to wheel” perspective – using the best available data and a sound scientific methodology supported by the European Environment Agency.

In addition, in order for society to fully benefit from the emissions reductions brought about by rail, complementary and sustainable transport systems are needed, where the sustainability advantages of all transport modes are exploited in one joint system. Rail should be the backbone of these smart transport systems. To achieve this, a combination of policies and economic measures is needed as the market is distorted strongly in favour of road and aviation transport. The external costs need to be included in order to move towards a fair and level playing field for transport.

4. What exactly is rail doing to improve its energy efficiency?

UIC’s mission is to support its members in meeting the challenges of mobility and sustainable development, and this includes both mitigation and adaptation measures. UIC thus offers an international platform for cooperation, exchange of knowledge and experience, and sharing of good practice.

Regarding mitigation and energy efficiency, rail is a complex system and UIC and its members have worked systematically to break the rail system down into measurable components and indicators under the motto “if you can’t measure it – you can’t manage it!” This system break down includes a full well-to-wheel approach where the rail sector takes responsibility for the full life cycle of all its energy consumption. Concrete measures to increase rail’s energy efficiency are projects like Railenergy, Energy Management Systems and Energy Billing. In addition, the European railways have agreed to a voluntary emissions reduction target of 30% specific emissions between 1990 and 2020. There are other similar initiatives by railways in other regions of the world. To support this, UIC has produced CO₂ emissions reduction guidelines with ten specific energy-saving and energy-efficiency measures, including energy-efficient driving and purchasing green energy. The emissions performance of railways strongly depends of the electricity source offered by the framework conditions. When renewable energy is available, rail offers an efficient mass public transportation system that provides “clean” and sustainable transport overnight. Then the sector can achieve its vision of providing society with zero-emissions railways. The energy efficiency activities of the UIC members are recognised by the United Nations’ Climate Neutral Network – and all UIC members are encouraged to join it.

5. What are the so-called co-benefits?

Thank you for that question, because achieving sustainable development in the transport sector is about so much more than reducing CO₂ emissions!

Growth in transport brings enormous benefits to society. But also many costs – including external costs – and these we have to address. Of course, we welcome every step in the direction of sustainable mobility and sustainable development, including for example zero-emissions cars. But what happens if everybody drives around in zero-emissions cars? Today there are one billion cars on this planet, and projections indicate that there will be three billion in the not too distant future. Where is the space for these? Challenges like parking problems, congestion and road accidents will be taken to new dimensions! However, again, rail is a solution: rail is not only a low carbon transport mode, it is also the safest transport mode with the lowest external costs. Rail offers solutions to challenges such as time loss and congestion, urban versus regional development, by providing area-efficient transport and access to mobility for all – you do not need to own a car to move. Further, investment in rail offers increased GDP as it reduces the amount of external costs. Rail provides green jobs and is a “natural” part of the green economy. All these other positive aspects arising from investment in rail because of its low emissions performance are the so-called co-benefits.

6. How is UIC working to promote rail to influential stakeholders the United Nations Climate Change conference as part of the solution to the climate change challenges and as a way of achieving sustainable development in the transport sector?

UIC actively participates in the United Nations Climate Change conferences, always in cooperation with influential partners supporting rail's messages on the need to focus on the transport sector in combating climate change, and how rail represents a part of the solution. UIC has been present at the United Nations Climate Change conferences (Conferences of Parties, COP) in The Hague (COP 6) in 2000, Marrakech (COP 7) in 2001, Milan (COP 9) in 2003, Buenos Aires (COP 10) in 2004, Montreal (COP 11) in 2005, Nairobi in 2006 (COP 12), Bali in 2007 (COP 13) and Poznan in 2008 (COP 14) to promote rail as part of the solution in combating climate change. UIC strongly believes in cooperation and in sharing rail's messages with organisations and stakeholders who can include rail's low carbon performance into their messages and issues, such as tourism and urbanisation. UIC has a strong tradition in cooperating with the International Association of Public Transport (UITP) in bringing different highly influential stakeholders together at these events to highlight different aspects of the role of rail and public transport in sustainable transport systems, such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Energy Agency. At COP 13, UNFCCC brought UIC and UITP together with two transport research institutions, the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) from UK which resulted in the successful Bridging the Gap cooperative venture. This initiative has since then been joined by several partners, and is still growing. Via several side events and workshops, the Bridging the Gap initiative has brought together experts on transport and climate change with representatives from governments and international organisations to support and bring forward the inclusion of land transport in the future United Nations climate regime .

7. So, where is transport and rail transport in the current Kyoto Protocol and what should happen next?

The Kyoto Protocol gives each country a national target and it is up to each country to define how to achieve its target. This includes the transport and rail sectors. However, these national targets exclude international aviation and shipping. Moreover, the mechanisms developed to support countries in reaching their Kyoto commitment targets were not suited to transport. One such mechanism, the European Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), even penalises rail as one of the cleanest modes, since the inclusion of the power supply sector

caused a dramatic increase in the costs of electricity for the railways. In 2013 alone, the ETS will cost the European Railways half a billion Euros.

The next-generation climate agreement and its supporting policies and mechanisms need to address the transport sector's growing emissions and provide solutions that ensure that society and the planet can fully benefit from rail's emissions reduction potential.

8. What do you seek to achieve with the Kyoto – Copenhagen symbolic train journey?

We want two things in particular! Of course, we hope to attract attention to the Train to Copenhagen campaign and its messages. We therefore decided to symbolise the passage from the first to the second-generation global climate agreements by organising a symbolic low-carbon journey by rail from Kyoto to Copenhagen. This symbolic journey between the two host cities of two climate treaty conferences and their signature will thus turn the spotlight on one of the challenges yet to be solved in any future climate regime – how to tackle the increasing emissions from the transport sector. The symbolic train journey between Kyoto and Copenhagen will demonstrate how to reduce emissions in this crucial, though until now neglected, sector.

In addition, we would like to remind the decision-makers going to COP 15 that to reach a second-generation climate agreement is of the utmost importance. We want to remind them what a huge achievement the Kyoto Protocol really was – as the first ever global climate agreement when the industrialized countries agreed to reduce their collective greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 5.2% from 1990 levels. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in Kyoto on 11 December 1997 at the third United Nations Climate Change conference in overtime. The second-generation climate agreement has to be decided upon in Copenhagen during COP 15. We are encouraging global leaders to “Keep Kyoto on track” and to be as visionary and brave in Copenhagen as they were in Kyoto 12 years ago. This is why we have joined a partnership with the UN's Seal the Deal campaign, which encourages global leaders to simply put their objections and obstacles aside in order to secure our common future.

9. What about the Climate Express running between Brussels and Copenhagen on 5 December?

UIC believes the keys to combating climate challenge are dialogue and cooperation. This special train will bring around 450 COP 15 participants to Copenhagen on 5 December. In addition to providing a low-carbon travel solution to Copenhagen, the train will bring together different people and organizations taking different messages to COP 15. The Climate Express thus also facilitates dialogue and cooperation between these people, and offers them inspiration and interesting conversations they might not otherwise expect to have in to the course of attending COP 15. This might give rise to new and much-needed creative ideas in combating climate change. We would of course have liked to transport everybody who wants to go to COP 15 by train on this day on board the Climate Express, but even though this is not possible, we do hope that people also see the symbolism in this train.

10. COP 15 – and then what?

The messages on why and how rail is a crucial part of the solution in reducing the emissions from the transport sector will be even more important after COP 15. Realistically speaking and even though I strongly wish it were otherwise, land transport will most probably not be a hot issue during COP 15. This, however, makes it even more crucial to be present and promote rail's emissions reduction potential in the follow-up process to the new climate agreement, in the development of supporting policies and mechanisms etc. UIC and its members are therefore already now planning the Train FROM Copenhagen - building on the positive response and attention we have received with the Train to Copenhagen project. With the Train FROM Copenhagen we will continue to target global climate policy makers, promoting the role of rail as a solution in reducing the transport sector's CO2 emissions in the post-2012 climate regime.

11. What would your advice be for the policy makers going to COP 15?

With all due respect, it is far easier to speak from a distance than to be in the middle of an array of interests, each requiring everything from urgent action to understanding and special treatment. Having said this, however, we do need to see brave, strong and visionary decision-making in combating climate change. The solutions need to be scaled up to the size of the challenge, and this counts especially for the transport sector. I hope all the policy makers going to Copenhagen will bear this mind and strongly focus on reaching to an agreement there. I would also like to quote the UIC Chairman, Mr Yoshio Ishida, and remind them that the rail sector is at their service – fully prepared to take its responsibility as a part of the solution!