



PRESS RELEASE N°19 /2013

UIC “GSM-R Asset & Evolution Management Conference” successfully held in Paris

The “GSM-R (radio communications system for railways) Asset & Evolution Management Conference” organised by the International Union of Railways (UIC) in partnership with the GSM-R Industry Group (IG) was held in Paris, UIC Headquarters, on 10 and 11 September. Among the 230 participants, stakeholders (from the areas of telecoms and signaling domains, authorities & standardisation bodies), railways and rail transport experts, strategy decision makers, and an international audience were able to learn about GSM-R’s present status, evolution, and the strategy for preparing the future. Mr Jean-Pierre Loubinoux, UIC Director-General, welcomed all the participants to this UIC conference. This was one of the first biggest global conferences for UIC organised after the summer break on a very important technical issue for the rail sector.

He underlined in particular that many participants – up to 230 – joined this conference from the rail sector, from different institutions and from many countries. He also wished to thank the many sponsors who helped in the organisation of this special event which in his mind highlights the main role and added value of UIC as the worldwide association for all rail operators, rail infrastructure managers and rail stakeholders, the technical platform always at the forefront of innovation and new technologies, and at the service of all its members and many political institutions in need of technical support and technical expertise.

In this respect he particularly welcomed during the morning panel the presence of Isabelle Vandoorne, from DG MOVE, European Commission, Marcel Verslype, Executive Director of the European Railway Agency (ERA), and Libor Lochman, Executive Director of CER, the political association for the same European members.

He underlined that the GSM-R adventure started at UIC with the EIRENE project in 1992, and has since developed worldwide, proving to be the right choice for radio communications and a success story. The conference was organised over two days.

The first day (10 September) the subjects discussed focused on GSM-R: state-of-the-art, the right support for voice and data (ETCS) applications, and also focused on some of today's GSM-R challenges – like the Network Redundancy, Quality of Service, and last but not least – about Frequency Interferences to GSM-R, where points of view were expressed by ECC/CEPT, ERA, EC (DG MOVE, and DG CONNECT) and UIC, showing a willingness to find the most viable solutions in the shortest time possible with noticeably good cooperation among all involved parties.

In the latter part of the second day, the GSM-R Industry Group, with the support of RFF, SYNERAIL, Kapsch Carrier Comm and UIC delivered the conference participants a Demonstration of GSM-R Technology & Applications, proving the system maturity, its ease of use and fit for purpose, as well as the very large possibilities for additional railway applications.

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It showed for example the Driver Advisory System, the Functional Addressing or the way of functioning of the Railway Emergency Call.

The subjects discussed on the second day conference (11 September), were about the GSM-R evolution – the growing demand for applications, GSM-R technology evolution, and also about the best way to prepare the future, what in some discussions is called “life after GSM-R”, as UIC always has to anticipate the future evolutions of technology for the benefit of the rail sector.

The interventions showed that even if GSM-R, which is based on GSM is anticipated to be supported until the end of next decade, and possibly further, the growing demand for applications, the public mobile market and technology evolution shows that actions have to be taken to prepare for GSM-R's successor.

The European Railway Agency has started the first steps necessary for these actions, while UIC, after releasing a number of reports and specifications since 2009, is launching the Future Railway Mobile Communications essential project, currently in the final phase of the UIC Opt In Process. These actions will be coordinated, with strong involvement of the EC; the 1st quarter initial results are intended to be made available at the end of 2014. The new system equipment, which must co-exist with GSM-R are to be made available at the beginning of the next decade. ETCS bearer independence, where the actual “GPRS for ETCS” European initial important step, is a priority.

At the end of the Conference, Mr Hans Guenther Kersten, Director of UIC Rail System Department, announced that UIC is considering holding a Global Telecoms Conference such as this every two years.

A suppliers' exhibition was arranged at the same time featuring 15 booths at UIC.

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