

In favour of rail liberalisation in Italy

More wiggle room

A total of 16 private railfreight operators in Italy are working to improve the industry's transport services - with not inconsiderable success. ITJ correspondent Anitra Green reports from Liguria.

Since its inception in 2009, the Fer Cargo association has been making major strides. According to its president Giancarlo Laguzzi, the group has quadrupled its turnover to 14.7 tonne-kilometres (tkm). This corresponds to a share of 33% of overall cargo in the Italian railfreight market. Although not all of its 16 members are Italian companies, such as SBB Cargo Italia, Captrain Italia or DB Schenker Rail Italia and others, they all have one common goal: to promote the transport of cargo by rail by liberalising the Italian market.

Imperfect liberalisation

Theoretically, the Italian market was liberalised twelve years ago, but Laguzzi is adamant that «the obstacles continue to be high, in fact they are unbelievable». Safety certificates are valid for just one year - compared to five years in other European countries, and railway companies do not have the right to have their stock repaired by local service providers. «We end up sending our engines to Zurich or Munich,» said Laguzzi.



Photo: A. Green

Oceano Gate is part of the Fer Cargo network in Italy.

But he nevertheless considers the efforts worthwhile. The Swiss government is currently upgrading tunnels and other infrastructure that will provide access to the Gotthard base tunnel, which is scheduled to open next year. The aim is to provide corridors for trains measuring up to 750 metres in length and 4 metres in width. «This will represent a major competitive edge for the Ligurian ports, and they are already making preparations for the new traffic volumes to be expected,» stated Laguzzi.

Meanwhile, the government-owned company Trenitalia has suffered dramatic declines in its railfreight volumes. It has slumped from 62.8 million tkm in 2008 to a mere 27.8 million tkm in 2014. The enterprise has in the meantime acknowledged that there is an urgent need for change. According to some reports, a new business called Trenitalia Cargo will be established by privatising the cargo sector.

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