



European Rail
Infrastructure Managers



March 2008



Speech to the UIC Congress

March 17th 2008



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Chairman of the Management Board of
ProRail, President of EIM



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Mayor of Amsterdam, Vice President of the European Commission, Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, Ministers from China, Brazil and Morocco, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

This is a great day for the railway sector all over the world, in Europe and especially in the Netherlands. It is not very often that we can welcome the VIP's of the railway sector in our country. Although previous speakers have already expressed the sentiment in various ways, my words are nonetheless sincere: Welcome! It is a pleasure for me as the Chairman of the Board of ProRail to welcome you to this splendid event. It is a privilege for ProRail to jointly host the sixth UIC High Speed congress.

I have already taken the opportunity to visit the exhibition. I can tell you that a train enthusiast going there would feel the same as a child in a sweetshop. The pictures of the world's fastest and most modern trains are most impressive. All those state-of-the-art train images gives you the feeling being carried away, even without actually taking a train. However I have to bring your feet back firmly on the ground, which at this particular point in the Netherlands is actually a metre below sea level. Because these fast modern trains need fast tracks to run on. No tracks, no fast trains. I would even venture to say: no tracks, no trains at all. You will not be surprised to hear this from the infrastructure manager who is responsible for the railway network in the Netherlands. What is of crucial importance for us is not the trains themselves, but the core business of the railways.

Ladies and gentlemen, with nearly sixteen and a half million people in just a few square kilometres, space in this low-lying country is scarce and costly. And all those people are becoming more mobile each year. And more demanding. Mobility in our country is not just a growing market, it is also a growing problem. For the economy, the environment and the quality of our surroundings both in the towns and outside them. Reducing the problem by providing intelligent solutions to the ever-increasing demand for mobility is what ProRail stands for.

We are doing this not only for the high speed trains, but also for all the other trains that run on our busy railway network in the Netherlands.

And still train traffic continues to grow. Freight traffic has doubled in extent in recent years and the Netherlands is aiming for a 5 per cent annual growth in passenger traffic; growth that ProRail makes possible. We are going to make even more efficient use of what we have. We will be taking up the available margin to enable even more trains to run at the same time. Trains on the most important routes will be running without a timetable at some time in the future. You won't have to wait until 2020 for this to happen, as we are convinced we will be able to implement it in 2012. But that won't be enough. A new railway infrastructure is needed. Not a bad investment from the company's point of view, because despite what many people might think, many railway lines in the Netherlands are profitable. They bring in money. The route between Amsterdam and Utrecht, for example, yields a profit of 9%. Furthermore, current developments in the mobility market are giving us a helping hand. Increasing traffic jams, rising fuel prices and road pricing are making the railways more and more attractive compared with road transport.

A recent benchmark survey showed that ProRail is in the leading group of European infrastructure managers where performance is concerned, and that's exactly where we want to stay. We are convinced that ERTMS ought to play a major part in this. Its implementation in the Netherlands has not been trouble-free, but it will soon be in everyday use on the High-Speed Line South. I would like to point out that on the Betuweroute, the dedicated freight line, ERTMS is working satisfactorily. This is notable because the ERTMS systems from different manufacturers (for the infrastructure and the rolling stock) have turned out to work well together. I am convinced that the railways in the Netherlands are ready for this leap forward in systems. Let us not shy away from the teething troubles that new technology always brings. Infrastructure is not for the faint-hearted.

Ladies and gentlemen, ProRail has worked hard in recent years on catching up with the backlog of maintenance and on the further professionalisation of its organisation. We know our railway network from top to bottom and know exactly where an invested Euro will yield a return. The international benchmark survey I referred to earlier showed that we can withstand international comparison with flying colours. Just to give you an idea: the Netherlands has the busiest railway network after Japan and Switzerland.

Nevertheless, our network has an availability of 99.3 per cent at the moment. 2007 was the best year for punctuality in the last 20 years. The number of disruptions has not been so low in 20 years and we have substantially reduced the time it takes to fix them. The percentage of passengers that experience our stations as being safe is higher than in any other European country. I hope you will allow me, as the responsible infrastructure manager, to be proud of that.

Ladies and gentlemen, the railways in the Netherlands are on the move. We are in for a bright future at high speed. A future in which the rail transport mode once again stands for progress, the trains and tracks that link towns and people together. A link moreover that generates investment on and around the railways and makes a significant contribution to sustainable mobility.

I wish you all a successful conference.