

BPS Spedition

«Intermodal investment pays»

BPS Spedition, a Swiss forwarder based in Muttenz near Basel, has been investing in environment-friendly intermodal transport, despite the challenging economic times. Moving some of its freight to/from Spain by rail instead of truck has proved worthwhile.

René Häner, director of the Swiss forwarder BPS Spedition, has relied on intermodal services for transport to Spain in the past. «We relied on the shuttle train that operated between Basel (Switzerland) and Perpignan (Spain) in 2008, but the connection was unfortunately discontinued after four months because of capacity problems in France,» he said. «When Hupac introduced a new intermodal service between Basel and Barcelona (Spain) in mid-April this year, we immediately knew that we would take advantage of it.»

The new blocktrain runs twice a week and carries 44 swap bodies, eight of which are BPS units. «We already invested in 30 swap bodies for the Perpignan shuttle two years ago. We have now purchased another 20 for the Barcelona link. This enables us to transport 200 t more freight per journey than we could with a 40 t truck,» Häner explained. The twice weekly departures with eight swap bodies apiece add up to an annual 440,000 km of rail services now offered by BPS, which was established in 2001. As a result, carbon dioxide emissions are reduced by 727,584 kg a year.

New customer already on board

The transit time between Basel and Barcelona is the same whether the goods are hauled by truck or by train. «But rail ena-

bles us to dispatch our cargo more flexibly and at shorter notice than can be done with HGVs. This applies to both imports and exports,» Häner elaborated. Usually there is no vehicle available for rapid deployment, even if the company wanted to rent one. Another advantage of rail is that the freight can be temporarily stored at the terminal in Spain, if necessary, without incurring extra costs. The goods can even be forwarded from Barcelona to Madrid by train if the customer requires it. «Moreover, trains are permitted to operate on weekends and holidays, in contrast to lorries,» he pointed out.

The Swiss company's CHF 700,000 investment in equipment for intermodal transport has already paid off in one way.

«Our new intermodal service to/from Spain has already attracted a new customer. The client has entrusted us with the carriage of its paper, because our dedication to promoting intermodal services fits well with the customer's environmental policy.»

Despite the many obvious advantages, Häner conceded that you have to believe in the intermodal concept to make a success of it, and you have to be willing to promote it to customers if necessary. This is because road haulage is still cheaper than rail, due to the economic crisis. And things do not always run smoothly with rail transport either. Häner and his six-man team in Muttenz had to grapple with unexpected difficulties when the new shuttle was launched. «The employees of the French railway SNCF went on strike for several days, forcing us to quickly make other arrangements. That cost us a lot of time and energy,» he admitted.

BPS Spedition uses the new shuttle connection to transport one third of its volume to Spain by rail. The company wants to increase that percentage in future. «One day we hope to be able to transport most of our goods to/from Spain by rail. We also hope to create an intermodal offering for freight to/from Italy in the medium term,» Häner concluded.

Claudia Benetti

www.bps-spedition.ch



René Häner (above), director and co-owner of the Swiss forwarding company BPS Spedition, believes in intermodal transport.: His company moves freight an annual 440,000 km by rail to Spain.

Photos: BPS Spedition