First low-cost TGV turned out

In spring 2013, SNCF will launch “low cost” TGV services from Marne la Vallée-Chessy station, east of Paris, to Lyon, Marseille and Montpellier. For this, four TGV Duplex are being equipped with single-class, high density seating, with no bistro car. Tickets will only be sold by internet. Trains will be intensively diagrammed, each completing almost 3000 km per day. The sets are being created from TGV DASYE power cars and refurbished first generation Duplex trailers. Christophe Masse

Set 760, in a special livery, is seen at Jablines, just south of Marne La Vallée-Chessy, on a run from Bischheim works, where the train was modified, to Villeneuve Saint-Georges. All markings were covered by white labels and will not be revealed before an official launch. Christophe Masse

RDC to help French OFPs expand

Belgian logistics company Eurorail and US railway management and investment company Railroad Development Corporation (RDC) are currently creating a 50/50 joint-venture in order to help the creation and expansion of Opérateurs Ferroviaires de Proximité (OFPs – local rail freight operators) in France, where traffic potential exists. The company will be known as Régirail, and will be established this autumn. At present, OFPs have appeared in a random fashion across France – the objective of Régirail is to create a network and to identify synergies between OFPs.

Eric Debrauwere, head of Eurorail, states that the idea is not to create a national operator but for OFPs to operate at a regional level, and work together with national freight operators over long distances. The name Régirail already exists as it was applied in April 2012, to the OFP TPCF Fret, created in 2010 by heritage operator Train du Pays Cathare et du Fenouillèdes (TPCF), when Eurorail became its main shareholder. This operator will become part of the joint venture as Régirail LR – LR as it is active in the Languedoc-Roussillon region of southern France. A development strategy has already been established, and will include the creation of an OFP in the Lorraine region of north-east France. Eurorail already manages a wagonload hub served by Europorte, Euro Cargo Rail, CFL Cargo and SNCB Logistics at Lérouville, in Lorraine. The new company would deal with “last mile” services for existing traffic via Lérouville to and from a paper plant at Golbey, near Épinal, and would seek out new traffic in that area.

Henry Posner III, Director of RDC (based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA), believes that wagonload can be profitable in Europe, and in France in particular. In 2009, RDC was involved with French infrastructure manager RFF and State investment company Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations, in the creation of a company to invest in OFPs, a project which was finally abandoned.

Régirail LR is currently working with Marseille area OFP RDT13 to create a service along the Mediterranean coast route. On 25/26 July 2012, the two operators ran a test train for Eurorail, between Caudès-de-Fenouillèdes and the port of Fos-sur-Mer. A daily train on this route is expected in early 2013. Raw alumina will be transported from the Althea (ex Rio Tinto Alcan) plant in Gardanne to the Imerys Ceramics France factory at Caudès-de-Fenouillèdes, on the Rivesaltes–Saint-Martin-Lys freight line. After refining, the alumina will be moved to the port of Fos. During the test, Régirail crewed the train, while RDT13 piloted operations in the Bouches-du-Rhône département and provided shunting staff. The loco used was Vossloh G 1206 diesel 61009 hired by Régirail from Alpha Trains.

Régirail LR is also in the process of starting up trains carrying timber originating on the Rivesaltes–Axat line to the Grenoble area. This will involve a considerable expansion of staffing and will require the hire of a main line diesel loco. LC/DAH

Régirail buys into CFR

Régirail has also purchased 60% of the capital in one of the earliest OFPs, Compagnie Ferroviaire Régionale (CFR). CFR’s original plan was to haul stone from two quarries to Cercy-la-Tour in central France, then hand over trains to long-distance operators. These could not be found so CFR has had to revise its business plan and find more resources. The company is now moving a train a day to destinations up to 400 km away from its base area. Régirail’s aim is to help CFR stabilise its position then to allow the company to expand, the objective being to add less-than-trainload freight – likely to be timber – from its home area. This would be added to Régirail “network”.

CFR founder and President Jean-Jacques Mary is leaving the company, to start a new OFP in the Belfort area – a further potential “spoke” to the “wheel”. However, Régirail is not involved financially in this new OFP. DAH

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