

Modalohr road semi-trailer carriers: tests on the Gotthard route

100 000 road semi-trailers per year with a corner height of four metres transported on the Gotthard corridor across Switzerland using the existing railway infrastructure – that is the aim of the “Transhelvetica” project of French vehicle manufacturer Lohr Industrie and SNCF subsidiary Viia. This is to be implemented with further-developed Modalohr wagons, with their more strongly tapering pockets in the lower area and a system for load-dependent height compensation, complying with the Central-European loading gauge standard UIC 505-1. However, the prototype of the “Modalohr UIC” wagon announced by Lohr Industrie is not yet ready. The two tandem wagons which were used on 24 October 2012 for two test runs from Arth-Goldau to Airolo and back, were wagons like those in operation on the Bettembourg (L) – Le Boulou (F) and Aiton (F) – Orbassano (I) lines (see RU 9-10/2012, p. 144). Evidently it is possible even with these to transport four-metre road semi-trailers on the Gotthard route without upgrading the infrastructure. The runs, for which extensive clarifications were needed with SBB Infrastructure beforehand, were subject to only a few restrictions: the wagons were not allowed to run on certain tracks in Arth-Goldau, Brunnen and Wassen.

From 2015 Viia would like to offer two Germany – Switzerland – Northern Italy connections with the new Modalohr wagons and has submitted an application for the co-financing of the intermodal freight terminals to the Swiss Federal Office of Transport (FOT/BAV). Reactions in Switzerland have been sceptical. However, according to the FOT, the system might provide a “transitory solution until the four-metre corridor is implemented” and later serve to complement the same. The corridor for four metre high loads is also an essential prerequisite for the operation of double-deck passenger trains through the Gotthard Base Tunnel. The project initiators had originally proposed the Modalohr system as an alternative to the four-metre upgrade on the Gotthard route; this is why some stakeholders in Switzerland now see the advances from France as a potential threat to the Gotthard upgrade, which is on track at the political level at last. In the meantime Lohr and Viia have adapted their communication accordingly; amongst other things, the term “RoLa” will no longer be used, to avoid appearing as competitor of the RALpin-RoLa Freiburg – Novara. In actual fact, the proposed project concerns unaccompanied intermodal transport, with the advantage that due to horizontal loading, even non-craneable road semi-trailers can be transported.

SBB as well as BLS placed great value on not appearing at the test runs, evidently for fear that this could be seen as support for the Modalohr system as opposed to the planned four-metre corridor. Initially Lohr collaborated with SBB in preparation for the test runs and an SBB Cargo locomotive should have hauled the trains. However, after this collaboration had proved unsatisfactory (according to Lohr), Bahn-Support GmbH was entrusted with the organisation of the runs and ordered the necessary

traction from BLS Cargo. After a BLS Re 465 locomotive had brought the Modalohr wagons from Basel to Arth-Goldau as agreed, BLS Cargo unexpectedly pulled out just a few hours before the test runs were due to begin. Finally, the SNCF subsidiary

Captrain helped out and made an ES 64 F4 available at short notice. On enquiry, BLS Cargo explained their decision by claiming to have found out only at the last moment that press representatives had also been invited to attend. (mr)

The Modalohr road semi-trailer carrier test train leaving the Wattingen helical tunnel near Wassen heading uphill towards Airolo. The test run proved the possibility to transport four metre semi-trailers already today via the Gotthard route. After implementation of the four metre corridor Modalohr wagons could transport even higher semi-trailers if requested (photo: C. Waldis).



Right: This meeting with an ETR 470 tilting train demonstrates the huge dimension of the four metre semi-trailer load (photo: J. Lüthard).



Below: Locomotive ES 64 F4-088 hauling two Modalohr tandem wagons after leaving the Wattingen tunnel en route from Airolo to Arth-Goldau (photo: A. Schmutz).

