

RDC plans auto train service, drops plans for long distance trains to Berlin

By Keith Fender | February 20, 2015

HAMBURG, Germany – The German subsidiary of U.S.-based Railroad Development Corp., which already operates the HKX-branded long-distance service from Hamburg to Cologne, is planning to operate vehicle-carrying shuttle trains in the north of Germany. The service will operate between the German mainland and the town of Westerland on the island of Sylt.

The only connection between Sylt and the main land is by rail, the 7-mile “Hindenburgdamm,” which opened in 1927 built on a causeway in the shallow sea. Because of this, all road vehicles from Germany to Sylt have to travel by rail. The only other means is through a limited car ferry service operating from neighboring Denmark.



The existing Deutsche Bahn Sylt Shuttle uses diesel hydraulic locomotives built in the 1970s, although newer units are on order from Bombardier. A train is seen leaving Niebüll for Westerland on Nov. 18, 2014.

German national rail operator Deutsche Bahn operates the service, branding it the Sylt Shuttle. Railroad Development Corp. has applied to German national rail infrastructure manager DB Netze for a long-term agreement to replace Deutsche Bahn as the operator, promising to add up to 50 percent more service. RDC has offered a premium payment for the slots and, as a result, are the preferred bidder. The route used is partly single track and is also used by long-distance and regional trains, so only one car shuttle operator can be accommodated on the line.

Railroad Development Corp. proposes to operate the service for 10 years, and, according to German media reports, hopes to have a contract agreed with DB Netze by March 2015. Assuming it is successful, RDC plans to buy six new car-carrying trains, and will offer continued employment to much of the existing staff.

Also, in early February, Railroad Development Corp. announced it was giving up plans to operate a second long-distance route in Germany, connecting Cologne and Berlin, as it could not reach an agreement for operating slots with DB Netze. RDC says it wanted to expand the market for rail as the combination of long-distance motor coaches, deregulated in Germany in 2013, and low-cost domestic flights have steadily eroded long-distance rail passenger numbers in the past few years.