

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 Régiorail, and will be established this autumn. At present, OFPs have appeared in a random fashion across France – the objective of Régiorail 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 Régiorail 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 Régiorail 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 Lérrouville, in Lorraine. The new company would deal with “last mile” services for existing traffic via Lérrouville 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.

Régiorail 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 Caudiès-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 Alteo (ex Rio Tinto Alcan) plant in Gardanne to the Imerys Ceramics France factory at Caudiès-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, Régiorail 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 Régiorail from Alpha Trains.

Régiorail 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**

Régiorail buys into CFR

Régiorail has also purchased 60% of the capital in one the earliest OFPs, Compagnie Ferroviaire Régional (CFR). CFR's original plan was to haul stone from two quarries to Cergy-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. Régiorail'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 Régiorail “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, Régiorail is not involved financially in the new OFP. **DAH**