

# Office of Rail Transport

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## Office of Rail Transport debate on safety during railway works

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During the 15th International Railway Fair TRAKO in Gdańsk, the Office of Rail Transport organised a debate on the state of rail transport safety in Poland. During the debate participants discussed safety issues during railway construction works.

The "State of Railway Safety" debate was preceded by a presentation given by Ignacy Góra, President of the Office of Rail Transport.

Polish rail companies transported 342 million people in 2022. Two years ago we were coming out of a pandemic, when passenger drops were huge, and last year brought Russia's attack on independent Ukraine. All these events had an impact on rail transport. We see this clearly in intermodal transport. We can already show the statistics for 2023 and the drops in transport are significant, as they range from 12 to 18% in imports, and exports are down by as much as ca. 80%. As long as the war is not over, the situation may be difficult, and the danger is that the supply chains previously running through Poland may not return, said Ignacy Góra.

In a summary of the state of railway safety, President of the Office of Rail Transport pointed out that accidents at level crossings and involving people crossing the tracks, of which there were 370 in 2022, are the biggest burdens on the railway system. He also stressed the need to install the



automatic monitoring systems at level crossings category D and described the activities carried out by the Office in the area of education, i.e. the ABC Railway Campaign II or the Railway Safety Academy.

There is a steady progress in terms of the accident rate. 15 years ago we had 4 accidents per 1 million train-km, 10 years ago we had 3 accidents, and currently 1.89 accidents per 1 million train-km. It is safe, but we want safety levels to be even higher. We expect that this rate should be at least below 1. This is why we need to invest in modern technologies and in the computerisation of rail transport. What the Polish railways are currently facing are the threats in cyberspace. In my opinion, these are currently the most serious risk factors. We must pay a lot of attention to make ourselves immune to this type of attacks," President of the Office of Rail Transport pointed out.



The President of the Office of Rail Transport also pointed to 147 accidents within the railway system. One important measure that can reduce the number of incidents involving failure to stop a railway vehicle before a 'Stop' signal is to ensure that those entering the train driving profession have the right knowledge and skills. From 2023 the President of the Office of Rail Transport is conducting state exams at the Examination and Monitoring Centre for Train Drivers (CEMM). Thanks to funding from the European Funds, the CEMM has been equipped with three state-of-the-art simulators. Marek Wierzbowski of the law firm Prof. Marek Wierzbowski and Partners – Advocates and Legal Advisers also spoke about legal changes related to the examination of train drivers.

## DEBATE ON RAILWAY WORKS SAFETY

The debate on safety during railway construction works was attended by: Kamil Wilde, Vice President of the Office of Rail Transport; Piotr Deredas, Director of Budimex Railway Construction Power Engineering; Maciej Gładyga, Managing Director of the Land Transport Chamber of Commerce; Dariusz Grajda, President of the Management Board of the Union of Local Government Railway Carriers, Member of the Management Board, Commercial Director of the Mazovian Railways; Wojciech Jurkiewicz, Chairman of the Board of the Association of Independent Railway Carriers; Jakub Majewski, President of the ProKolej Foundation; Janusz

Malinowski, Chairman of the Board of the Łódź Agglomeration Railway; Mirosław Skubiszyński, Vice-President of the Board - Chief Operating Officer, PKP Polskie Linii Kolejowe; Mirosław Skubiszyński, Vice President of the Management Board - Chief Operating Officer, PKP Polskie Linii Kolejowe. The moderator was Adrian Furgalski, Chairman of the Board of the Railway Business Forum.

We had 39 construction-related incidents in 2022, which is lower than in previous years. There were no serious accidents and no fatalities. In the Office we carry out a lot of inspections, but more than 60% of them end up finding irregularities. From our point of view, these are issues on the part of the infrastructure manager. During the course of works, on the site there should be, for example, appropriate fencing, gantries, reflective tape and shields. At the moment, the responsibility for safety is contractually shifted to the contractors, whereas part of the security of investment works should be more on the side of the infrastructure manager, because ultimately it is to him that the responsibility in the event of an accident passes, said Kamil Wilde, Vice- President of the Office of Rail Transport.

Mirosław Skubiszyński from PKP PLK emphasised that from the point of view of the manager, the Polish railways are safe and UTK statistics show this unequivocally. He stated that in 2022 there was historically lowest level of accidents assigned to PKP PLK – the number of incidents, accidents and accidents at level crossings decreased. The vice-president of PKP PLK stressed that safety is a continuous work. The contractor who submits tender documents is obliged to meet the relevant safety requirements. The tenders are evaluated in terms of meeting these criteria during works on the network. PKP PLK requires from the contractors the information about the security of, for example, the construction site even before the tender is awarded. These issues determine the admittance to the proceedings. The vice-president of PKP PLK also stated that during construction work most often fails the human factor. That is why training courses for contractors' employees are conducted.

Maciej Gładys, managing director of the Land Transport Chamber of Commerce, stressed that rising investment costs must not impact safety, because saving on safety does not pay off for construction companies. He said that no company will be allowed into the construction site by the infrastructure manager unless they can prove that the requirements of the underlying documents and the organisation of the works are met. He added that when it comes to funding, the Chamber will always call for valorisation, but this does not affect safety.

Piotr Deredas, director of Budimex Railway Construction Energy, said that technically it is not possible to secure the entire construction site with fixed barriers or automation. Therefore, he considered it an important element to strive for an improved safety culture and to implement new standards during investments on railway sites. For the contractor, crucial are track closures. For the contractor, permanent 24-hour closures are the best from a safety point of

view.

The issue of 24-hour traffic closures was addressed by Jakub Majewski, president of the ProKolej Foundation. He pointed out that there have already been examples where closing lines around the clock did not speed up investment works. He also cited examples from abroad, where investment works are carried out in much shorter periods of time, also at night or only at night or, for example, on days off when there is less traffic.

During the debate, reference was also made to the issue of train delays, which are also partly due to ongoing construction works on active railway lines. Janusz Malinowski, president of the Łódź Agglomeration Railway, spoke about how important this is for the operator. ŁKA has a contract with a large pharmaceutical company, which is able to pay better for the transport service, but has one condition - a guarantee of punctuality. The contract is in force on the Łódź Kaliska - Zgierz - Łowicz line, where construction works are also being carried out - but, as the ŁKA president emphasised, the operator runs trains on this route in such a way that delays rarely occur. He also noted that punctuality can be improved organisationally and is an often underestimated element which can attract new customers to rail companies.

Dariusz Grajda, chairman of the board of the Association of Local Government Railway Carriers, member of the board and commercial director of Koleje Mazowieckie, said that safety is a priority and an important measure is the continuous training of train drivers and other staff. This is particularly important with frequent timetable changes due to construction works. He pointed out that he observes that young people are sometimes too lax on certain safety issues, which can lead to accidents.

Wojciech Jurkiewicz, chairman of the board of the Association of Independent Railway Carriers, emphasised the role of the human factor. He said that a person who understands the need to be cautious and reasonable is a person who provides a sense of safety. An employee who does things unreliably cannot guarantee safety, because he is only doing what he needs to do at the time of inspection. Convincing each of us that our life and health is in line is a priority.

In summing up the debate, Ignacy Góra, President of the Office of Rail Transport, pointed out that when it comes to rail safety, it is particularly necessary to support the work of man. Man, despite training, knowledge, awareness and skills, makes mistakes in certain specific situations. I am glad that there are technical solutions that could counteract and prevent these accidents. We are implementing ETCS, we will be implementing ETCS Limited Supervision. We have to give up the outdated independent braking of the train and vigilance. Digitalisation and computerisation is what is needed to improve safety, he concluded.