



Analysis

September 16, 2024  
Written by Kevin Smith

Latest News

**Lines wants level playing field with state-owned freight operators**  
August 29, 2024 | Freight

**Making the most of Europe's rail capacity**  
March 4, 2024 | Analysis

**High Speed 2 scrapped beyond Birmingham**  
November 4, 2023 | Analysis

**Could HS2 to Manchester be scrapped?**  
September 25, 2023 | Analysis

**Deutschlandticket faces uncertain future**  
September 19, 2023 | Policy

## Unife's new director general sets sights on closer industry collaboration

Enno Wiebe officially took over as the new director general of the European Rail Industry Supply Association (Unife) on June 1. He reveals his plans for the organisation to Kevin Smith.



Enno Wiebe, director general of the European Rail Industry Supply Association (Unife).

VISITORS to the European Rail Industry Supply Association's (Unife) stand at InnoTrans are likely to be greeted by the new director general. Mr Enno Wiebe took up this role on June 1, succeeding his long-serving predecessor, Mr Philippe Citroën.

Wiebe is no stranger to the rail industry. He joins Unife following a 13-year career with the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER), where he served as technical director. He also worked for the International Union of Railways (UIC) between 2007 and 2011 after starting his career with German Rail (DB).

Wiebe says he is excited to cross over into the more competitive environment of the supply industry. But it's not all change. He reveals that 80-90% of Unife's views on technical developments and the future vision for the rail sector are the same as those held by the state-owned operators and infrastructure managers he has been working alongside.

"The nice thing for me is that the topics are not completely new, the environment is not new," Wiebe says. "The perspective is the only thing that is a little different now."

Wiebe believes that his experience at CER can help to bridge the gap that often exists between the rail operating community and suppliers. Indeed, eliminating industry silos is a priority for Wiebe, who sees it as crucial for the sector if it is to deliver many of the key projects and innovation programmes now underway and in which Unife plays a central role.

"If we come to the institutions and just say, we need more money, I'm not sure they will buy it."

*Mr Enno Wiebe, director general at Unife*

"I want to open up the dialogue," he says. "Not just exchanging views or position papers, but really to talk to each other, to work with each other, and to develop things and to work towards common targets or visions."

One example of a programme that has already done much to improve this dialogue is the Europe's Rail joint research undertaking (ERJU). There is a greater presence of operators and infrastructure managers within ERJU compared with its predecessor Shift2Rail, although the original cross-industry research and development initiative did open the door to closer collaboration.

Crucially, the ERJU's System Pillar is closely aligning development within the Innovation Pillar and the process of updating the Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSI), working alongside the European Union Agency for Railways (ERA) on wider standardisation. ERJU's Deployment Group is similarly working to offer a clear pathway from research and development to industry deployment.

"If you look at the composition of the founding members, it's a sound balance between the rail operating community and the supply industry," Wiebe says. "And that is what we need, because we need to collectively develop and collectively deploy. It is not something fancy that someone in Brussels develops. It is coming from the actors themselves. It fits a defined framework, which is regulated and standardised, and has a defined migration strategy."

Wiebe is hopeful of adopting a similar holistic approach for the rollout of the Future Railway Mobile Communication System (FRMCS), a project where he expects significant progress over the next two years or so. He is also encouraged by the cross-industry work taking place to develop Digital Automatic Coupler (DAC) and is hopeful that this collaborative approach can spill over into the wider deployment of ERTMS, a consistent sticking point for the industry.

### Funding

Inevitably, these programmes need money and securing the necessary government funding is the sector's biggest challenge. Wiebe believes that it should not be a choice between one programme or another as delivery of all these innovations is required for rail to achieve its full potential in Europe, notably through the creation of the Single European Railway Area (Sera). However, the industry needs to make a compelling case to convince those holding the purse strings that it deserves the required level of support.

"If we come to the institutions and just say, we need more money, I'm not sure they will buy it," Wiebe says. "But if we say we want to invest in rail, we believe in rail, we have innovative programmes - not products, but programmes - and we even have a sound migration strategy, then I think that is convincing."

These are not hollow arguments. Rail has much in its favour, chiefly strong environmental credentials and the apparently broad political consensus that supporting rail is an effective way of decarbonising transport. The health of the European and wider global market reflects this sentiment, as Unife will underline with the official launch of the 2024 edition of its World Rail Market Study during InnoTrans.

But inevitably there are challenges that could yet stall this momentum. Inflation, high energy costs, and supply chain disruption are continuing to impact European suppliers under pressure from Asian competitors. The ongoing war in Ukraine also adds a further sense of jeopardy and uncertainty over future priorities for government investment.

"It always terrifies me when I see discussions of budget cuts, when I see reductions in personnel," Wiebe says. "This is the wrong kind of momentum for rail. Please give us the right signals."

Lobbying to get what rail needs will be important and Wiebe seems to possess the necessary enthusiasm to present the supply sector's concerns and aspirations in a constructive way during discussions in Brussels and elsewhere.

There are also challenges closer to home. Wiebe says he is keen to address the concerns of the SME community within Unife. He adds that Unife is working hard to support its more than 100 members with the increasingly important issue of cybersecurity. Internally, he hopes to make Unife a progressively more attractive place for young people to work, reflecting a general recruitment challenge across the rail industry.

There is certainly much for Wiebe to get his teeth into. Many of the key topics will be discussed during presentations at the Unife stand at InnoTrans (see panel below). The global rail industry's most high-profile event appears to be the perfect forum for growing cross-industry collaboration to blossom.

### Unife leads debate on key industry topics

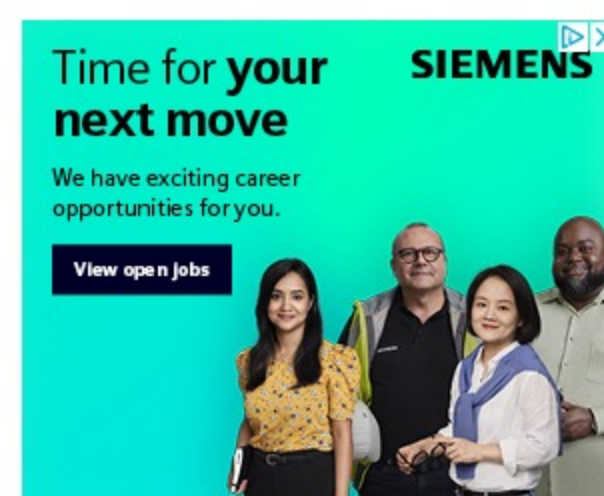
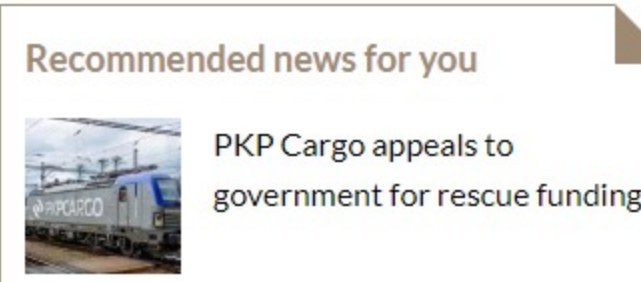
THE European Rail Industry Supply Association (Unife) will offer visitors to InnoTrans a series of presentations and events to highlight its latest activities as well as key industry talking points at its exhibit (Hall 27, stand 630).

Key events include a presentation of the major findings of the 2024 World Rail Market Study on September 24 at 13.30. Unife will host its SMEs Award 2024 at 10.00 on September 25, while a special forum will take place on September 26 at 10.00 to discuss driving efficiency and performance in railway systems through ERTMS.

Other highlights include a session on the Western Balkans and Europe, with an emphasis on the investment required to deliver the TEN-T network (September 24 at 15.00), sessions on FRMCS (September 24 at 16.00) and cybersecurity (September 25 at 11.15), and a discussion of the common challenges facing the European and North American rail supply industries on September 25 at 14.00. A meet and greet cocktail reception will take place on September 24 at 17.00.

**Categories:** Analysis, Policy

**Tags:** European Rail Industry Association (Unife), Innotrans, InnoTrans 2024, Premium, Unife



### IRJ Resources

- 1 Digital Edition
- 2 Advertising
- 3 Podcasts
- 4 Webinars & White Papers
- 5 Industry Events
- 6 Index
- 7 About Us
- 8 Contact Us
- 9 Tenders/Employment
- 0 Event



Sign up for the IRJ Rail Brief Newsletter

Email Address

Country



## Sign up for the IRJ Rail Brief Newsletter...

Get the latest news!

Email Address

Country

### Sections

- News
- Passenger
- Financial
- Freight
- Fleet
- Infrastructure
- Policy
- Technology
- Regions
- Innovations

### Connect with us

- f t in
- Subscribe
- Circulation
- Newsletters
- Digital Edition
- Subscription Services

### About us

- Subscribe
- Advertise
- Contact Us
- Privacy Policy
- Terms & Conditions

### Resources

- Railway Age
- Railway Track & Structures
- Simmons-Boardman Books
- The Railway Educational Bureau