

Cross-section audit of the railways' procurement of rolling stock

Federal Office of Transport, Swiss Federal Railways, Schweizerische Südostbahn AG and Transports Publics Neuchâtelois SA

Key facts

In 2018, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the procurement of rolling stock for the first time. Between 2006 and 2017, the Federal Office of Transport (FOT) approved 36 such procurements in the standard gauge area of regional passenger transportation. Stadler Rail AG delivered its FLIRT product (Fast Light Innovative Regional Train) in two thirds of these projects, with an order volume of approximately CHF 2 billion.

Technical harmonisation of regional passenger transportation rolling stock is necessary

In order for the transport companies to be able to invoice the cantons and the Confederation for the consequential costs of the investments in the regional passenger transportation tender, they must first have these approved by the FOT. The FOT does not match the regional passenger transportation offers with the already approved rolling stock procurements. The performance-related offer is subject to detailed checks and procurement costs are included in these. Prior approval for the procurements is not necessary. This is not a financial guarantee for the operating costs.

Although the mechanical coupling of rolling stock is harmonised, different manufacturers' multiple units cannot be coupled together for operation. The electronic control interfaces are not standardised. It is difficult for transport companies to change rolling stock suppliers. The SFAO recommends that the FOT makes it mandatory for multiple units from different manufacturers to be able to join with each other.

Cooperation and standardisation – savings potential in regional passenger transportation

Between 2002 and 2017, the selected transport companies' procurement of FLIRT multiple units totalled around 145 four-part FLIRT multiple units, shared between 19 individual orders (supply contracts and addenda). Manufacturers expect economies of scale on orders exceeding 50 multiple units. Regional passenger transportation lacks a quality standard, as well as an overarching fleet strategy with coordinated scheduling. This makes it harder to form more economical procurement lot sizes. The high-quality regional transportation offer (trains every 30 minutes, large number of stops, high demands on punctuality) drives up costs for all transport companies (e.g. double motorisation, lightweight construction, greater track wear).

The purchaser cannot readily identify which timetable requirements will result in which consequential costs. The regional passenger transportation's mobility offering is largely standardised. The overall management of the regional transportation fleet has potential for savings in investments and maintenance. The SFAO recommends that the FOT assess which measures would make these possible (e.g. from a regional passenger transportation rolling stock fleet strategy coordination unit at the FOT to a specialised rolling stock company).

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