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Successful 9th edition of the UIC HIGHSPEED 2015 World Congress in Tokyo

(Paris, 16 July 2015) The 9th UIC World Congress on High Speed Rail, organized by the International Union of Railway (UIC) together with East Japan Railway Company (EJRC), concluded on 10 July. With over 2,200 visitors in total over the three days, the congress ended with highly positive feedback from the participants. The congress achieved the desired international impact, and even beyond, with Japanese TV and the participation of Japan's Prime Minister Mr Shinzo Abe and three other ministers of the current government.

Innovation this year

Both in terms of design and substance, the congress this year took innovation to a new level.

The goal of “zero congress paper - real-time” was achieved with the distribution of tablets to all attendees thanks to the Toshiba sponsor. Participants had everything in hand in a few clicks: the programme, corporate information from UIC and JR East, the two organisers, the opportunity to ask questions directly to the speakers or to vote on several issues, speaker presentations, etc.

The content of the conference was ambitious with the objective of covering several topics related to high speed during 35 parallel sessions: infrastructure, rolling stock, operations, management, distribution and marketing, economics and finance, railway governance, etc. A new concept was to dedicate a full session to the academic world in order to connect it to the training of future managers, experts and researchers.

The motto of the congress being “*Celebrate the past, Design the Future*”, the conference was divided into two parts, respectively aiming to learn from experience and analyse the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Two Round Tables

Each part ended with a round table during which invited guests expressed their views on topics as diverse as:

- Speed,
- Interoperability,
- The digital revolution,
- The environment,
- Innovation,

- Mobility,
- Inter and intra-modal competition,
- The station of today and tomorrow,
- New transport technologies,
- Security,
- Standards,
- etc.

A significant role was reserved for the industry, alongside railway operators and infrastructure managers.

Among the conclusions of the congress we must, among other things, remember that:

- While the railways lost their important role at the end of last century, high speed rail has unquestionably renewed its appeal and never have there been as many kilometres of new lines built worldwide; new countries have begun to join the “country-club of high speed”, such as Saudi Arabia, Morocco, the United States, and soon Malaysia and Singapore;
- The ecological advantage of high speed rail is certain and partly explains the revitalisation of the train; however, other modes of transport are also in progress and the benefit of rail transport cannot be maintained without further efforts and innovations to always do more and better;
- If environmental constraints and the scarcity of natural resources have an impact on the global economy, railways will have to maintain their traffic by increasing their share in a market made less dynamic by attenuating growth;
- Competitors (car and airplane) are changing the economic model and the trend introduced by the low-cost model is considered as irreversible; however, new forms of competition can also be seen as opportunities to resolve the issue of the first and last kilometre which generate handicaps for all public transport;
- The digital revolution is a source of productivity and a way to decrease costs, but competitors do the same as well;
- Innovation has become the main engine of growth; with the digital revolution, entirely new fields open to scientific and technological inter-disciplinarity.

UIC Director General Mr Jean-Pierre Loubinoux said in his concluding remarks: *“The Shinkansen and later the TGV were conceived by our fathers, for us. And today we are designing a future for our children. And from one High Speed Congress to the other we can feel its evolution. This future will learn the lessons of our present and our past. But we can be proud of our legacy. We must also be demanding with our transmission. Even if we must always stay modest in front of tomorrow. I can see from this congress six evolutions for a future that will be more safe (hopefully), sustainable (necessarily), service-oriented (evidently), connected (digitally), interoperable (technically), intermodal (systematically). Now the show must go on and we must think of the next steps”*.

Conclusions

The congress ended with two practical conclusions.

First, UIC will launch an « alliance » with the academic world by connecting its own network of members with a network of world-renowned universities. Some of them have already expressed their support for this project, in China, Japan, the USA (MIT), Russia and Europe. High speed rail requires the university to train and recruit talent.

High speed rail cannot be at the forefront of innovation by staying away from scientific laboratories and inter-disciplinary bodies. For their part universities need to develop their training with the knowledge of railway engineers and of the railway industry as well as with a number of railway research subjects.

10th World Congress in Turkey

A new date has been scheduled for July 2017 to meet again at the next UIC World Congress on high speed rail. The 10th edition will be held next time in Istanbul. Many very positive testimonials about the congress have already been received. Feedback has been given not only to UIC but also to JR East whose organising skills and the traditional hospitality are without comparison. Delegates were welcomed by various friendly events. The gala dinner was an enjoyable event for the participants and will remain in their memory, as it combined artistic and culinary tradition and modernity, perfectly in line with the motto of the congress. Eight technical and cultural tours were also offered on the last day to the participants of the congress thanks to a trip on the Shinkansen that embodies “punctuality, the politeness of kings”.

Warmly thanks

UIC would particularly like thank Mr Masaki Ogata, Vice Chairman of East Japan Railway Company (EJRC), for his personal involvement in the success of this congress, as well as his team, as well as Michel Leboeuf and Inaki Barron, UIC, as efficient architects of this congress, and all the UIC team also involved in the preparation of this major event.

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