

A successful entry into intermodal transport

UnitCargo is a forwarding company operating throughout Europe with transport routes from the Balkans to Scandinavia. The company has set itself the goal of shifting more of its truck transports from road to rail. To this end, UnitCargo is using Helrom Trailer Rail and combining the goal of carbon neutrality with economic efficiency and social aspects.



DAVOR SERTIC
Managing Director of UnitCargo



UnitCargo truck trailers on Helrom trailer wagons

PORTRAIT

UnitCargo

UnitCargo, founded in 2004, is a successful international logistics company specialising in truck transport. Currently, UnitCargo employs 100 employees across six sites. The company works exclusively with fixed partner companies and is a recognised expert for the transport corridor Scandinavia, the Balkans and beyond.

Social commitment and a strong sense of ecological responsibility are the chief features of its corporate image. UnitCargo has been EMAS-certified since 2012 and works with an environmental management system. Managing Director Davor Sertic is Chairman of the Transport and Traffic Section at the Vienna Chamber of Commerce and initiator of the Green Logistics forum – a platform that has set itself the goal of making truck transport more sustainable and efficient.

Interview with Davor Sertic, Managing Director of UnitCargo

Mr Sertic, UnitCargo has been transporting semi-trailers with Helrom Trailer Rail on the Vienna – Dusseldorf railway line since 2021. How did this cooperation come about?

We were actually specifically looking to get into intermodal transport with a sustainable transport concept that made sense ecologically, as well as economically. Our core business is truck transport. In 2022 alone, we organised 60.000 complete truck loads across our six branches, most of these being for industrial customers, a great many from the automotive sector, but also from the paper and steel industries.

“Many forwarders simply can't imagine putting their semi-trailers on trains, or that this could also work financially and logistically. Helrom opened that door for us.”

My next strategic step was to shift part of these capacities onto the rail network to make UnitCargo fit for the climate goals of the EU Green Deal. As forwarders, we of course still use diesel. However, if you're really serious about CO₂ neutrality by 2030, you can't just complain; you have to do something. So we had a look at the market to find out which intermodal service provider would be ideal for us. Helrom was the only company we found offering a method that was quick and easy to implement and that also made economic sense for us.

What were the decisive arguments in favour of transport with Helrom Trailer Rail?

We were able to get into intermodal transport relatively easily with Helrom. Helrom puts all non-craneable trailers without loading terminals onto the rail network. These are precisely the same semi-trailers that we use. Using craneable semi-trailers would have been more difficult for us.

Helrom's great flexibility is another plus point. Up to now, for SME truck forwarders in particular, converting from purely truck transport to an intermodal provider has been an almost impossible step. I've been working as a freight forwarder with truck transports by road for 34 years. Many forwarders simply can't imagine putting their semi-trailers on trains, or that this could also work financially and logistically. Helrom opened that door for us. We can operate with non-craneable trailers and they can be loaded close to our site without a large terminal. This makes Helrom an important strategic partner for us in getting into intermodal transport.

What does the flexibility you mention that Helrom offers a company like UnitCargo look like?

For me as company manager, getting into intermodal transport was of course initially associated with a certain financial risk. For example, in the case of other providers, we would have had to book entire trains. Helrom made it possible for us to start initially with fewer semi-trailers per train and gradually increase the volume. Particularly for us as an SME, this flexibility was decisive in getting started in intermodal transport. In Helrom we have a platform that also makes an economically viable conversion possible.

So the economic framework facilitates the ecological conversion?

Definitely. Most of the forwarders in Europe are SMEs. These companies have to operate economically, even with a greater integration of intermodal transports. Ecological sustainability is the goal. The climate goals of the Green Deal are fixed and we have to orient ourselves to them.

However, for me, sustainability is not defined by just being ecological – it also has to be economically viable. On top of this, there is the social aspect, which also has to be taken into account. At Helrom, each of these three pillars – ecology, economics, and the social aspect – can be combined very well with each other.

By social aspects, do you mean the working conditions for truck drivers?

The problem of the shortage of truck drivers is well-known. Increasing numbers of drivers are turning away from this profession and switching to related areas that offer them better working conditions. We interviewed hundreds of truck drivers and the picture is clear: at weekends and most evenings, drivers want to be at home with their families, they want a workplace with socially acceptable conditions. With an intermodal concept like Helrom's, forwarders can offer their truck drivers a workplace with a radius of, say 200 km, for example. You can be sure that those forwarders won't have any problems finding driving staff. And that is an important advantage.



Bruno Weissmann, Davor Sertic (second and third from left) and the team from UnitCargo



FACTS

Helrom Trailer Rail

BARRIER-FREE WITHOUT TERMINAL.

Helrom has facilitated the first really barrier-free transport for all kinds of truck trailers. You no longer need any expensive loading terminals, cranes, or craneable semi-trailers.

A BRILLIANTLY SIMPLE PRINCIPLE.

The trucker trailer is unhitched from the tractor unit, the Helrom trailer wagon opens at the side, the trailer is pushed onto the wagon – ready to go. All you need is an asphalted surface next to the track in order to move 100 per cent of all truck trailers onto a train without much effort.

EVERYTHING FROM ONE SOURCE.

From the time when the forwarder's trailer parks at the Helrom trailer hub, to the time of collection at the destination, Helrom carries out the entire rail transport – with its own trains, personnel and its own trailer hub operations.

ECONOMICALLY VIABLE.

For SMEs, it is important that intermodal transport makes economic sense. Combined freight traffic is possible for almost every company thanks to Helrom Trailer Rail.

FOR A SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT TRANSITION.

Helrom enables industry and commerce to become part of the energy transition and slash their carbon emissions in transport.

Apart from all the advantages and general conditions, what counts for UnitCargo at the end is of course also the reliability and punctuality of the transport itself.

Previous intermodal concepts involved a long chain of parties in the transport: from the company with its schedulers to a large terminal. The terminal is not controlled by the same people who schedule the train because the train belongs to another company, etc. Should a minor detail not work or should there be any misunderstandings in the communication, the potential for errors and delays is enormous. Helrom does not need any terminals and is responsible for the entire transport from parking area to parking area, thus eliminating all of these interfaces. And this really is no exaggerated promise: Helrom's trains are extremely punctual. Times are adhered to without fail. To date, we have not had a single delay in the train transport of our trailers. Helrom works with the same quality expectation here that we also want to offer our customers.



"UnitCargo shows how Helrom can democratise intermodal transport because with our barrier-free system SMEs can for the first time get into intermodal transport. No investments in craneable semi-trailers were needed and UnitCargo doesn't have

to book any entire trains with us either. Thanks to our flexibility, we can adjust very well to the requirements of UnitCargo. And due to the fact that we offer everything from one source, we also guarantee the reliability that is vital for a long-term partnership."

BRUNO WEISSMANN
Director Sales Helrom



ABOUT

Helrom GmbH

Helrom GmbH is a rail freight transportation and technology company based in Frankfurt. Helrom facilitates a barrier-free switch between road and rail for European long-distance logistics with its worldwide patented freight wagon technology – without investments in loading terminals and close to the customer.

Currently, Helrom operates a very successful connection between Dusseldorf and Vienna, with a logistical catchment area from Hungary, Romania and Serbia all the way to the Benelux and the UK.

Helrom has the most effective and fastest model for maximising rail kilometres in international freight traffic and minimising road kilometres. As a result, Helrom is opening up a fast, financeable way to net zero transport.

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