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ECTA: The show must go on

// BY PETER MACKAY ON 16 DEC 2016

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Transport companies are having to come to terms with the 21st century. For those in the chemical sector, ECTA is here to help

The 2016 annual meeting of the European Chemical Transport Association (ECTA) started out as a sombre affair, as ECTA president Andreas Zink, director of LKW Walter in Austria, paid tribute to the Association's managing director, Marc Twisk, who had died suddenly

earlier in the year. Zink described Marc as “a good friend and a great professional”.

Nor had Marc been in the role that long, although he had already done a lot of work to define the Association’s work plans for the coming years. “It is up to us to continue his work and strive for the highest level of safety in chemical transport in Europe,” Zink said.

Marc’s untimely passing also left ECTA with something of a headache. Zink explained that the board had thought long and hard about the best way forward and, in the end, decided to split the role into two positions. He announced at the annual meeting, which took place in Düsseldorf on 10 November last year, that Peter Devos had assumed the role of managing director as from the start of that month. Devos had a career of more than 25 years with Monsanto, largely in supply chain and logistics functions, and has subsequently set himself up as an independent logistics consultant.

In addition, Evert de Jong took over the role of Responsible Care coordinator in August 2016; he is a long-standing member of ETCA’s Technical & Responsible Care Committee and currently works for the De Rijke Group in the HSSEQ department. De Jong is due to retire in April this year, which will allow him to devote more time to his ECTA work.

Devos and de Jong will be supported in their efforts by Dolorès Guion, deputy managing director, and these three members of the management team will work closely with Zink and ECTA board members.

DOT ON THE HORIZON

ECTA’s annual meeting is always worth attending, if only to see what specialist chemical transport service providers are doing to overcome the challenges they face. Some of those were laid out very clearly by Dirk-Jan de Bruijn, who also offered some potential solutions.

De Bruijn began by quoting APM Terminals, which is predicting a doubling in the number of container moves from terminals to the hinterland over the next ten years. Infrastructure capacity will not double, though, so industry will have to look at new ways of doing things – there is a need for systemic change, not just adding more truck capacity. “If we do nothing, congestion costs will rise by 50 per cent,” he said.

De Bruijn’s day job is as programme director for the EU Truck Platooning Challenge. This programme forms part of the EU’s ‘smart mobility’ initiative and aims to encourage systems developers and truck manufacturers to implement IT-based solutions. It is clear that the

programme is moving ahead very rapidly – de Bruijn said the aim is to have real platoons running on the roads by the end of 2017.

So far, the 'Challenge' element of the project involved a trial in which six truck manufacturers ran platoons of three trucks each from their production sites across Europe to Rotterdam. At present, each of the three trucks is manned although in due course, once the concept is tested, there will only need to be a driver in the lead vehicle. Those running behind will be automatically controlled through wifi communication and will run with only a short gap between them.

"Truck platooning will reduce congestion, reduce emissions and increase safety," de Bruijn said. There is also a business case: better asset utilisation, better deployment of drivers and lower fuel consumption will all help operators reduce costs and increase efficiencies. Mercedes Benz, for instance, calculates that the more efficient airflow around vehicles travelling more closely together delivers an overall fuel saving of some 7 per cent in a three-vehicle platoon.

It was clear from de Bruijn's presentation that the project has come a long way very quickly but, equally, that there is still a long way to go – driverless vehicles will probably not be on the roads of Europe before 2030. Practical implementation will also call for extensive cooperation among truck manufacturers, systems developers, authorities, shippers and academics. However, he said, there is a need to put a 'dot on the horizon' to give all these parties a goal to aim for. Summing up, he called for action: "Don't predict the future – create it!"

De Bruijn's presentation generated a lot of interest among the delegates at the ECTA meeting. However, while the potential for the deployment of platooning in general freight transport is a real possibility, it is unlikely that it will be used in ADR transport any time soon. Those with an interest in seeing what the project looks like in practice can find more information at www.eutruckplatooning.com.

MAN AND MACHINE

But platooning is not the only new development that should help transport operators deliver the capacity and capabilities that shippers will be wanting in the future. Peter Brock, managing director of Mercedes Benz trucks, showed some of the technologies that

are already available on his company's vehicles. While this was something of an advertisement for Mercedes Benz, there were some interesting illustrations of the latest safety systems.

For instance, the addition of cameras on all sides of the truck provides data input to automated emergency braking systems, while the use of GPS-based truck monitoring data can provide predictive breakdown prevention. In such cases, Brock explained, an alert can be sent to the operator while the truck is still on the road, allowing a repair to be lined up at the most appropriate point on the route.

There is an increasing amount of data being generated all along the supply chain, Brock said. The loading dock, warehouse, customer and the truck itself are all sending data somewhere – but they are not talking to each other. It should be a relatively simple matter to link up all those data streams in one network and generate some real benefits for all participants.

The meeting moved away from technology and back to people in a presentation by Simon Axup, vice-president of consulting and organisational safety at Dekra. His opening contention was that too many organisations see people as the problem – “if only they'd just follow the rules everything would be ok”.

In fact, Axup said, good organisations see people as the solution. Their approach is to find a culture that “encourages them to bring their brains to work”. He also alerted the audience to the fallacy of seeing ‘safety leadership’ as something new to be learned. “Safety leadership is just good leadership,” he stressed. “It's not in a different box.”

VALUE OF SQAS

After lunch, delegates were given a presentation by Stefan Bartens, vice-president of logistics procurement in Europe for BASF. His point was that, while audits can be a nuisance for carriers, they provide the shipper with the information needed to make an informed choice about the best logistics partners.

The Safety and Quality Assessment System (SQAS), developed and managed by the European Chemical Industry Council (Cefic), is, Bartens said, “the cornerstone of safety” for shippers. And for BASF, reference to SQAS reports is “part and parcel of the procurement process”.

“Whoever we work with needs to have an SQAS audit,” Bartens said. Only those with a ‘score’ of at least 90 per cent will be reviewed. The SQAS score is factored into the procurement process in terms of the acceptable rate – for instance, a company with a high score might receive a 5 per cent bonus on the rate compared to a carrier with a lower rate. This is not the only factor – prior performance also counts – but it will certainly be part of the contract award decision.

Other chemical companies have their own approaches, Bartens said, but all will look at SQAS reports in one way or another. He quoted figures from Cefic that show the number of reports downloaded by chemical companies has increased steadily in recent years, from just under 3,000 in 2012 to nearly 5,400 in 2015.

Evert de Jong had a rather different view on SQAS scores, saying he does not trust scores of 97 per cent or more. “How can you get continuous improvement if you’re already at 97 per cent,” he asked. Assessors that are giving such scores need to be looked at.

From the floor, Jos Verlinden, logistics director at Cefic, challenged those comments. Assessors are well trained and regularly observed at work to ensure consistency. It is inevitable that there is some degree of subjectivity but SQAS is the best system available, he said. The focus should be on those companies getting poor scores. As to the issue of continuous improvement, the SQAS questionnaires are updated every few years, a process that in itself sets higher benchmarks for companies to strive towards.

FUTURE TRANSPORT

Evert de Jong also provided the audience with an update on ECTA’s Responsible Care activities. It is in the process of finalising three new documents, which will give advice and guidance on:

- The management of change
- The cleaning of silo tanks
- The safe loading and unloading of silotanks.

A new item ECTA is working on will look at the impact of the refugee crisis in terms of safety and security in the supply chain.

De Jong said ECTA’s objectives for 2017 fall under the heading of ‘continuity’ – “We want to stay on target with all the programmes and ensure that systems are aligned with the standards they are related to,” he said. In addition, ECTA will aim to fine-tune existing

programmes in the light of experience. In that area, ECTA is closely evaluating McKinnon's fuel-based figures for carbon dioxide emissions.

ECTA also wants to make its expertise available more widely and is looking at options for smaller companies to join the Association and its Responsible Care programmes. This is seen as important in improving safety standards among smaller sub-contractors in particular. Similarly, ECTA is taking part in a Cefic-led project to develop guidelines for the safe storage and handling of dangerous goods containers, which is aimed at smaller sites.

ECTA remains alert to external developments and how they impact the transport sector. One of those is the increasing driver shortage, and it is looking at possible ways to address this over and above the truck platooning idea. Another is what has been called the 'fourth industrial revolution' – the potential offered by increasingly intelligent and autonomous systems to decentralise decision-making and generate a step-change in industrial efficiency.

ECTA had invited Dr Max Haberstroh of RWTH Aachen University to give his take on how 'Industry 4.0' will impact the logistics sector. Implementation of this latest revolution requires real-time availability of all relevant information, the networking of all entities in a value chain, and the ability to devise the optimal value stream from that data at any time. For the logistics sector this will mean cross-company networking and cooperation, which points to the need for neutral system providers.

In the future, Haberstroh explained, cross-system interconnections will have a big impact on demand forecasting and preventative maintenance. That will help optimise asset utilisation both on a local and a global level – something he termed 'synchronodal transport'.

CHINA CALLING

The day ended with a convivial dinner and, as ever, an intriguing final presentation, this time from Chris Wood, director of downstream markets at PetroChina International's London office. Wood reported that China's 13th five-year plan, which covers the period from 2016 to 2020, targets annual GDP growth of 6.5 per cent, which is lower than has been the case in recent years. The plan includes new social and environmental measures and a call for upgrading in the industrial sector to make its exports more competitive on the world market. In addition, China will focus on energy efficiency and self-sufficiency and on investment in trade and overseas activities.

The impact of these changes, Wood said, will include lower imports overall, a reduction in coal consumption, a slower rate of housebuilding, and a shift in labour-intensive industries to lower-cost territories such as Bangladesh and Vietnam. China will instead focus investment on higher-technology industries.

Wood said he expects to see an increase in chemical exports from China as the country focuses on international trade; this is the reasoning behind the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative.

Another perhaps unexpected result of the shift of focus is that overseas investment is diversifying and moving into areas such as entertainment, transport and tourism. In addition, Wood said, China is committed to liberalising the internal market. This may not be happening as rapidly as some (both within and outside China) would like, but it is happening. That will mean a growing opportunity for inward investment.

It may take more than a year for all of that to filter down to European chemical transport operators but advances in technology are moving so fast that it is not easy to keep up; this year's ECTA annual meeting has already been scheduled for 23 November and HCB will once again report back on salient developments. Prior to that, ECTA will hold its annual Responsible Care Workshop on 14 September in Brussels. More details about these and past events can be found on the Association's website.

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26	27	28	29	30	31