

The heads of the World Customs Organization (WCO), the Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF) and the Organisation for Co-operation between Railways (OSJD) on 15 May 2020 issued a [joint statement](#) highlighting the need to facilitate railway transport and railway supply chains in order to mitigate the overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Compared to road transport, railway transport is more economical, ecological, quicker and best suited for carrying heavy and break-bulk goods over long distances, even though it lacks of flexibility, as this mode of transport does not allow door-to-door deliveries and needs at least two transshipments, with increased risks of damage to goods.

During the COVID-19 crisis, one of the main challenges for railway companies is the acceptance of paper-based documents required for Customs procedures in international railway transport. In this regard, the joint statement points out that the WCO's Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) contains provisions enabling the acceptance of electronic documents supporting the goods declaration in lieu of originals ([Transitional Standards 3.18 and 3.21, Chapter 3, General Annex](#)). WCO Members are therefore encouraged to facilitate railway transport by temporarily accepting such electronic documents, by postponing the need to submit paper-based documents until a later stage. Customs administrations are also encouraged to give due consideration to the RKC recommendation that urges them to accept any commercial or transport document for placing the goods under the transit procedure ([Recommended Practice 7, Chapter 1, Specific Annex E](#)).

In addition, the statement recalls that WCO has launched various initiatives to ensure that the latest and most reliable information and tailored guidance reaches its Members and global supply chain stakeholders, like a dedicated COVID-19 section of the WCO website, HS classification reference for COVID-19 medical supplies, a list of all the measures implemented by WCO Members in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a paper by the WCO Private Sector Consultative Group, among others.

The [OSJD Bulletin](#) and OSJD website are other important channels and forums for sharing and exchanging information on measures implemented by railways to ensure their uninterrupted functioning during the pandemic.

