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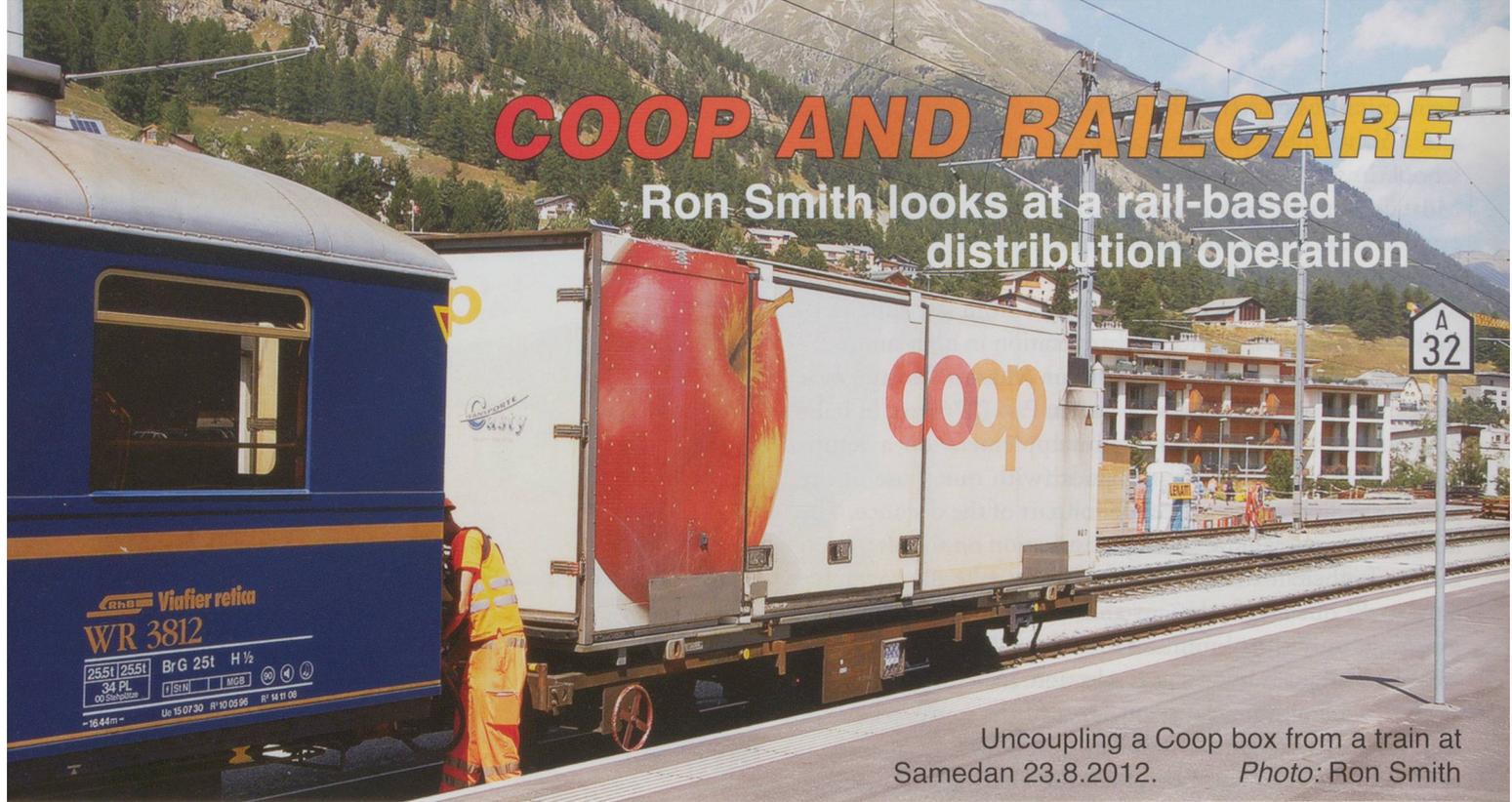
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COOP AND RAILCARE

Ron Smith looks at a rail-based distribution operation



Uncoupling a Coop box from a train at Samedan 23.8.2012. Photo: Ron Smith

In September 2010, the COOP created a 100% owned subsidiary called railCare, their logistics arm that is rapidly growing its use of rail. The COOP has a target of being CO2 neutral by 2023, and transferring their main movements from road to rail will considerably help achieve this target. Although railCare is owned by the COOP, and supported by them with IT, training, expertise and administrative staff, it operates as a neutral partner for logistics. Many COOP movements are one way only, for example from major hubs to stores, while suppliers have products moving to the major hubs, and railCare already moves products such as drinks and pasta into the hubs for their suppliers. Established rail depots are located at Härkingen, Geneva, Aclens, Niederbottigen, Frauenfeld, Daillens, Brig and Roggwil. Rapidly developing ones are at Felsberg, Visp, Landquart, Sierre, Martigny, Stabio, Dagmersellen, Thun – Gwatt, Pratteln, St. Margrethen, Kempthal, Oensingen, Gossau, Dietikon and Castione. railCare have complete 'track and trace' over their loads, trains, wagons and containers, down to individual pallets and roll cages. The cargos of food (fresh, chilled and frozen) and non-food items amounted to 13,894 containers carried in 2011. In 2012 this should reach 18,470 with the introduction of 'Puntofresco' - fruit and vegetables from Italy arriving by train from the south – and by 2013 it is planned that this figure will rise dramatically to 48,582 containers including 16,000 "Puntofresco" containers. In the 2013 total will be some 14,000 loads handled by a new service 'Metro Lemanique' that starts in June 2013, providing a short distance shuttle from Lausanne (Aclens north of the City) into Geneva. Due to chronic road congestion between these two cities, road deliveries have become totally unreliable. Even though the rail route is also congested, it is far more reliable.

COOP is renting locomotives and wagons. Trains are 250 to 300 metres long; have a maximum of 26 containers per train; a maximum 700 tonnes weight,

and a maximum of 24tonnes/container. There is a fixed timetable operating all year round. The COOP has 12 depots of its own with cranes or reach-stackers, and is working with horizontal transfer techniques. This is where the road vehicles have hydraulic chain operated systems that slide the container sideways onto the parallel rail wagon, and are investigating this system with 40 containers. Railcare trains also use SwissPost (PTT) container depots. The COOP has a different time peak to the PTT, and so the operations are compatible and help to utilise the PTT facilities better. The COOP believes that they have sufficient volume to make their rail operations viable and competitive with the road cost. By drawing in suppliers (at a stand-alone cost basis that is at least cost neutral to the supplier) and some third party transport, they will have a dedicated reliable operation under their total quality control. It is interesting that they have not gone to the SBB, BLS or private companies to operate the rail service, but it is very encouraging to see a major retailer investing and developing a significant new freight network. 

Plan courtesy of railCare.

