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Annual review 2020

BLS Cargo moves successfully ahead despite the pandemic

Despite a decrease in traffic volumes last year, BLS Cargo was able to post positive year-end results, introduce new locomotives into service and strengthen collaboration on operating processes within the enlarged BLS Cargo group.

In 2020, turnover was CHF 277 mill., a decrease of 5.5% compared with the previous year (2019: CHF 293 mill.). Traffic volumes even declined by 10% with train numbers totalling 19 956 (2019: 22 265). On the one hand, the downturn was a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic, with factory closures during the first lockdown early in the year particularly affecting industry. On the other, the Lötschberg-Simplon route, one of BLS Cargo's most important transit corridors, was completely closed to traffic for several weeks during the summer months for engineering work to take place.

BLS Cargo withstands the coronavirus pandemic

Throughout the year, BLS Cargo had to contend with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic in many ways. In the early part of the year, it was necessary to ensure first and foremost that international supply chains were maintained in spite of temporary border closures and that engine drivers could continue to work cross-border services, whilst at the same time protecting the health of staff. By maintaining close dialogue with Swiss and EU administrative authorities, BLS Cargo was able to keep industry supplied with goods at all times and was designated a key supply company by the Federal Office for National Economic Supply.

Incorporation of Crossrail into the BLS Cargo group

In 2020, Belgian operator Crossrail Benelux NV, which is part of the BLS Cargo group, became a fully-fledged operating company, responsible for providing traction services in Germany and Belgium, exclusively for BLS Cargo. BLS Cargo assumed responsibility for all customer contracts and marketing activity. The practical inclusion of Crossrail in the BLS Cargo group gave a noticeable boost to operational collaboration on joint cross-border services. For example, since autumn 2020, 10 newly commissioned multi-system locomotives have been used on international services between Belgium and Italy and customers have benefitted from the efficiency and improvement in quality of service offered by this method of operation.

Positive year-end results

One year on from the outbreak of coronavirus, BLS Cargo is in a stable financial position. Despite loss of freight volumes, the company was always able to ensure liquidity, maintain a robust equity structure and commission and finance the new locomotives on order as planned. At the same time, a profit for the year of CHF 1.9 mill. was recorded, thanks to efficient cost management and one-off items. As a result, BLS Cargo was able to forgo Covid-19 support offered by the Federal Government.

Outlook

2021 started well for BLS Cargo. The second wave of the pandemic is having less of an impact on traffic volumes than in the previous year. From an operating point of view, there are fewer restrictions to consider and safeguards are in place to ensure that resources can be used transnationally. In addition, BLS Cargo is celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2021 and can look back on a successful company history becoming a leading corridor operator on the north-south corridor between the North Sea and the Mediterranean. 2021 has also been designated the European Year of Rail by the EU and BLS Cargo will play its part by transferring further business from road to rail.

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BLS Cargo AG

We are a corridor operator providing rail freight transport services on the north-south corridor between the North Sea and the Mediterranean. Unaccompanied combined transport services transiting Switzerland, conventional wagonload traffic as well as the rolling highway constitute our key services. In addition, we operate full trainload services within Switzerland as well as Swiss import and export traffics and other routes from Belgium. Since 2019, Belgian operator Crossrail has been part of the BLS Cargo group, hauling freight trains on our behalf in Belgium and Germany. BLS Cargo's shareholders are BLS with 52%, SNCF Logistics with 45% and Ambrogio Trasporti with 3%.

The BLS Cargo group now employs around 400 staff in four countries - Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Belgium.

For further information go to: blscargo.ch.