

**Rail freight transport: the impact of COVID-19 on the volumes appears to be negligible until the end of the month of March**

International passenger traffic is suspended in all the WB6 due to the closure of borders. At national level, passenger traffic is significantly reduced due to the national measures taken by national authorities.

At the same time rail freight operations are performed at almost the same level as before the COVID-19 crises.

Railway undertakings and Infrastructure managers are able to offer safe cross-border cargo connections for large volumes of goods using minimal human resources. However, in order to fulfil this vital function, it would be essential that train drivers are excluded from the imposed measures/restrictions and allowed to cross borders in order to pick up and deliver freight trains smoothly.

For all services, specific protocols have also been activated for the sanitisation of facilities, workplaces and spaces dedicated to customer service, always in compliance with the indications of the competent authorities.

The second important thing for the sustainability of the freight transport, in the current conditions, is availability of the border crossings.

In Western Balkans (WB6) there are seven BCPs with EU MS (open 24 hours) and five BCPs intra-WB6.

	HR	HU	RO	BG	GR	ALB	BIH	MK	KOS	MNE	SRB
Albania										Tuzi	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1. B.Samac/ S.Samac 2.Capljina/ Metkovic										Brasina/ Zvornik*
North Macedonia					Gevgelia/ Idomeni				Hani Elezit/ Blace		Tabanovci
Kosovo*								Hani Elezit/ Blace			
Montenegro						Tuzi					Vrbnica/ Bijelo Polje
Serbia	Sid/ Tovarnik	Subotica	Vrsac	Dimitrovgrad / Kalotina			Brasina/ Zvornik* *	Tabanovci		Vrbnica/ Bijelo Polje	

Figure 1. The overview of border crossings that are open 24h for rail freight operation

\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

\*\*All BCPs are open from 00-24 with the exception of Brasina/Zvornik (SRB/BIH) where the working time is from 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM.



Figure 2. border crossings open 24 hours for rail freight operation

It is important to mention that there is no major difference related to the waiting times on borders compared to the period pre-COVID-19.

### Freight traffic volume for the period January-March 2019 and for the same period 2020

	2019	2020	2019	2020
	Tons		Net ton-kilometres (NTKM)	
SER	2618900	2336000	621900000	592000000
ALB	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
MNE	212558	280000	25467500	29745000
MK	470791	488992	88166073	91620091
KOS	303630	228458	7241049	4686837
BIH	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	3605879	3333450	742774622	718051929

Figure 3. Freight transport in the WB region in March 2019 and 2020

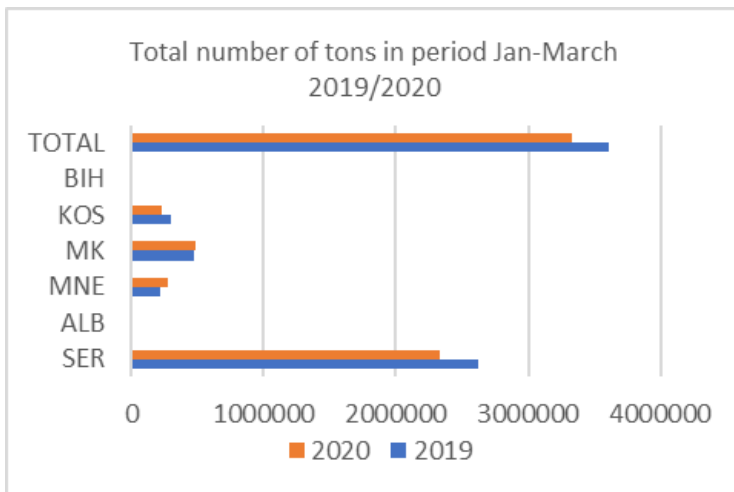


Figure 4. Freight transport in the WB region in tons in 2019 and 2020

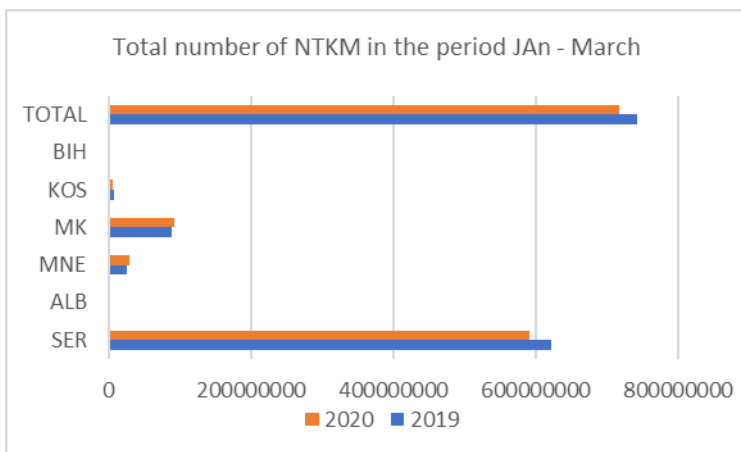


Figure 5. Freight transport in the WB region in Net ton-kilometres (NTKM) in 2019 and 2020

Data from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania is not available.

The first impression looking at the figures (based on available data) is that there are no significant differences in freight operation between the first quarter of 2020 and 2019.

### **Montenegro**

BCP MNE-SRB (Bijelo Polje) is open 24h and fully operational. On Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> March, MNE cancelled transport restriction for the joint rail station Tuzi. Daily, there are 2 full freight trains from MNE towards ALB and 2 trains (empty) from ALB to MNE.

Transport volume in the first three months of 2020 is on same level as it was in 2019. Around 30% of the traffic is international (over the two BCPs), while 70% is domestic transport (mainly trains with goods for export) from Niksic to Port of Bar.

Freight in tons		Freight in Net ton-kilometers		Number of trains	
March 2019	March 2020	March 2019	March 2020	March 2019	March 2020
85.023	112.102	10.186.304	11.898.051	104	143

Figure 6. Freight transport in MNE for the March 2019/2020

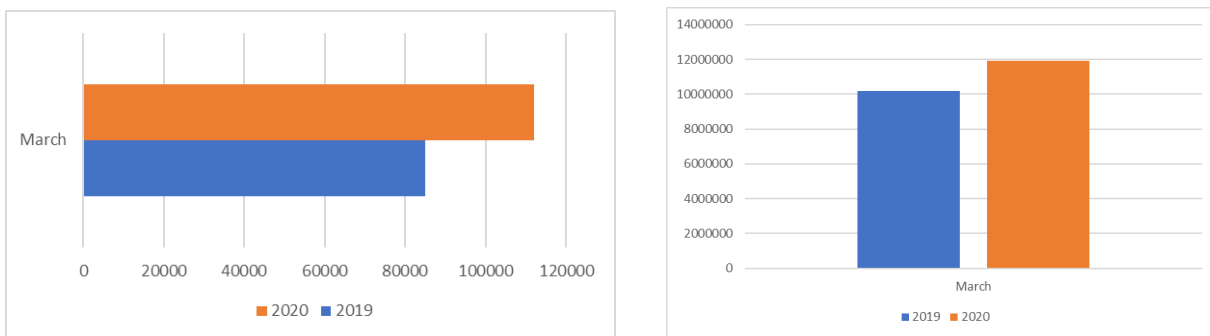


Figure 7. Transport volume in tons and net ton-kilometers (NTKM), during March 2019 and 2020

It is noticeable that freight transport is increased by 31,8% in tons, while the number of NTKM is increased by 16,8% and the number of freight trains is increased by 37,5%.

4.75% of total transport in March 2020 passed over the Tuzi border crossing with Albania. 26% of the total rail transport in March 2020 passed over the border crossing Bijelo Polje (with Serbia) and the rest is export of goods from Montenegro via Port of Bar.

## Serbia

Transport of freight is functioning normally, while SRB revised its previous Decision on closure of borders crossing on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020, thus removing railway border crossing Kikinda (SER/RO) from the Decision, so both border crossing towards Romania are now open for traffic. Still, railway traffic is closed on **Mokra Gora, Sremska Raca (SER/BIH) and Bogojevo (SER/HR)** border crossing stations which has minor impact on freight traffic.

Regarding the volume of traffic, the figure is very close to the same period last year. By comparing data about the exchanged number of trains on border crossing for January and February 2020 with the same months last year, it can be concluded that there was only a slight decline on Brasina (BIH/SER) and Vrsac (SER/RO) border crossings, while a slight rise is noted on Bogojevo, Sid (SER/HR), Kikinda (SER/RO), Dimitrovgrad (SER/BG) and Prevevo (SER/MK).

Subotica (SER/HU) and Vrbnica (MNE/SER) remained at practically the same levels.

Regarding the volumes on the whole network, since the declaration of state of emergency on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the cargo activity of the RU is more or less at the same levels compared to March 2019.

The number of freight trains on border crossings in the table below shows the average daily number of trains exchanged on each border crossing in March 2020 compared to March 2019. Average daily number of trains									
	Subotica	Bogojevo	Sid	Brasina	Kikinda	Vrbnica	Dimitrovgrad	Presevo	Vrsac
	Mar-19	13	0	9,75	2,91	0,16	1,75	11,16	7,08
Mar-20	13,84	0,58	10,29	4,90	0,77	3,45	8,13	8,68	2,48

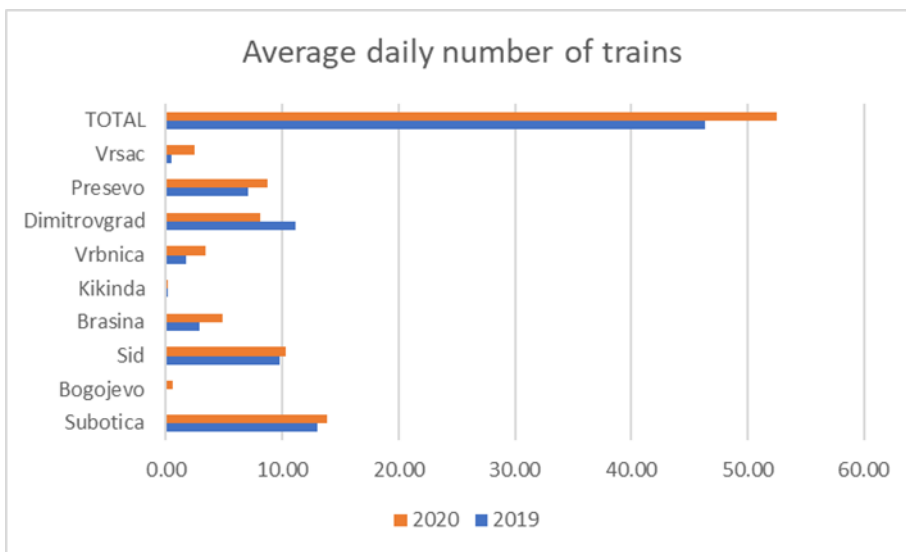


Figure 8. Average daily number of trains on border crossings in Serbia (March 2019 and 2020)

Serbia had certain issues on border crossings related to coordination with neighbouring countries, in terms of e.g. unsynchronized closing of border stations (case with Romania) and the issue of free movement of railway undertaking personnel in the border crossing area (case with of Hungary). **Currently, problems are solved.**

	Tones (000)		NTKM (mil)	
	2019	2020	2019	2020
January	891	760.2	224	185.8
February	841	828.7	186	209.4
March	886	747.2	211	197.1
total	2619	2336	622	592

Figure 9. Transport volume in the first three months 2019 and 2020

Around 25% is domestic transport, while 75% is international (transit, export and import).

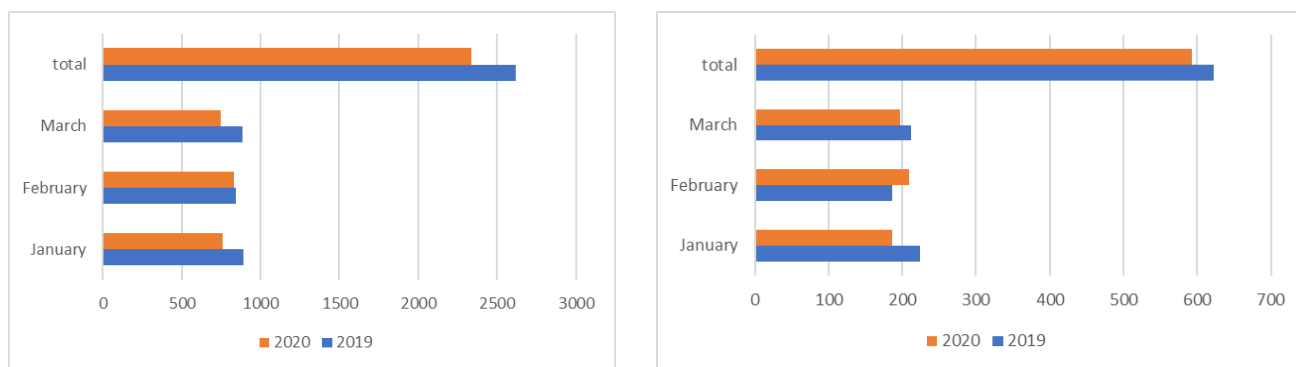


Figure 10. Transport volume in Serbia in Tons (000) and NTKM (000000)

### Kosovo\*

Kosovo\* keeps the border crossing Hani Elezit with North Macedonia open for international rail transport. The rail operations are performed regularly.

No.	Transport data	January - March		Difference 2020 - 2019
		2019	2020	
1	Train kms of freight trains	18,127.42	12,997.69	-5,129.73
2	Gross tons of freight trains	639,638.00	433,140.20	-206,497.80
3	Gross tons kms of freight trains	15,131,359.68	8,588,522.40	-6,542,837.28
4	<b>Net tons of freight trains</b>	<b>262,243.00</b>	<b>189,628.30</b>	<b>-72,614.70</b>
5	<b>Net tons kms of freight trains</b>	<b>6,094,628.90</b>	<b>3,579,472.60</b>	<b>-2,515,156.30</b>

Figure 11. Train kilometres, gross tones and net tons of freight for (January – March) 2019 and (January – March) 2020

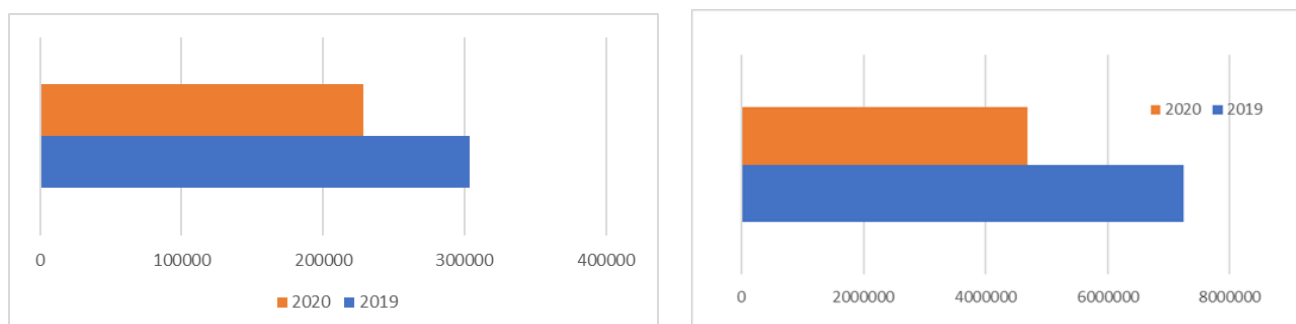


Figure 12. Net tons and NTKM of freight for (January – March) 2019 and (January – March) 2020

**North Macedonia**

There are three 24 hours open BCPs with Kosovo\*, Serbia and Greece.

Month	Wagons		Tones		NTKM (net tons km)	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
January	4811	6764	140520	183353	26398716	35118512
February	4558	5454	147205	153619	27562938	29499560
March	6522	5000	181047	150000	34202400	27000
total	17910	19238	470791	488992	88166073	64647091

Figure 13. Transport figure for the period Jan-March 2019 and 2020

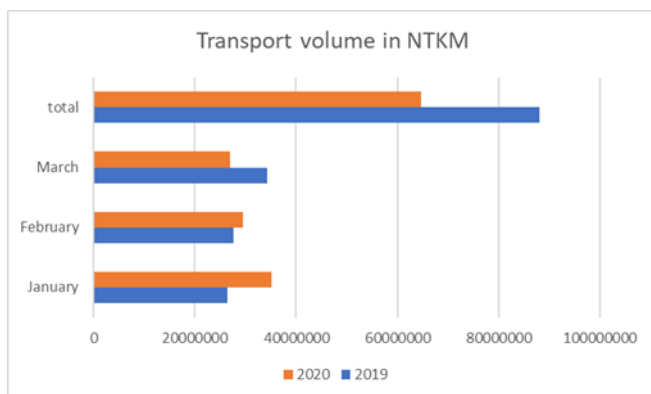
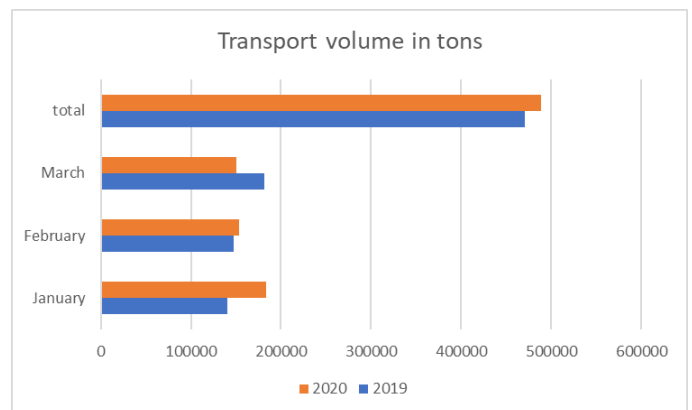
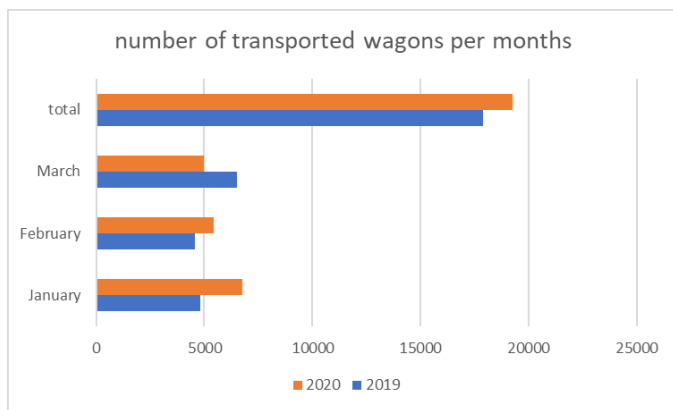


Figure 14, 15 and 16. Transport volume in MK for the period Jan-March 2019 and 2020