

HÜBNER General Manager Helge Förster at the German Transport Forum (DVF)

The corona crisis as challenge and chance

Berlin, Germany (17 September 2020). What does corona mean for a company in the mobility sector? What measures has it been necessary to take to deal with the pandemic? And how does a company with a worldwide production network and a corresponding supply chain manage in such a crisis? Helge Förster, General Manager at HÜBNER, shared insights about the company's handling of the corona crisis during the preceding months at a recent meeting of the steering committee of the Deutsches Verkehrsforum (German Transport Forum) in Berlin. Prior to Förster's remarks, Steffen Bilger, State Secretary of the German Federal Transport Ministry, outlined the logistics plans of the German government.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus in China in January, HÜBNER has had to take various corona-related actions: temporarily closing down and then reopening production locations around the world; securing or relocating production processes; dealing with shifting customer wishes regarding delivery and non-delivery of goods. After China came India and Malaysia, then Europe and North American, and finally Brazil and South Africa. For months now, the family-owned company has been operating in crisis mode.

"While production in Russia and China has returned to a high level in the meantime, demand in the USA continues to be significantly weaker. And in Brazil, India and South Africa, it's hardly possible to do anything," Förster reported. In Germany alone, the company had more than 100 employees in quarantine at certain times.

"In addition to protecting the health of our employees and ensuring the continuation of production, safeguarding the financial well-being of the company was the most urgent task that we had to deal with," Förster told the assembled politicians and industry representatives. "We stopped certain investments, followed up more closely on incoming payments that were overdue and reduced advance outlays to ensure sufficient liquidity. And on the other side, it was necessary to increase inventory levels to ensure continued production through the crisis. All in all, a fairly demanding balancing act," summed up the HÜBNER General Manager.

In the long-term, however, the mobility market will remain a growth market, Förster is convinced. Förster: "Particularly in the major metropolises around the world, there is simply no alternative to the use of public transport for both local and long-distance requirements. In addition, there continues to be a strong support both politically and socially for a basic shift in transport and mobility practices." With a newly launched driver protection system that protects driving personnel in local transport companies against corona

infection, the current pandemic also holds market opportunities for innovation. The company is currently also working on new antiviral surfaces for use in public transport vehicles.

Survival of the rail industry - Support from policymakers is needed

In conclusion, Förster also had a message to share especially with the political representatives in attendance. "Other countries and regions are more and more demanding that some part of the value creation for orders for local and long-distance transport are handled in their local markets," remarked the HÜBNER General Manager. "This worldwide protectionism is going to have serious long-term effects on domestic industry in Germany – jobs and know-how will be exported in a major way."

Förster: "A stronger emphasis on local-content demands also for Germany and Europe would ensure fair conditions in worldwide competition – and also strengthen the local rail industry here. We need you for this."

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