

Case study:

The stone district of VCO

Shifting stone transports on the rails

About the stone district and the companies interested in the project

The workshop to involve local freight transport actors sparked interest in the project among some companies of the stone district of the Verbano Cusio Ossola, coordinated by the local arts and crafts association, Confartigianato.



The area of Verbano Cusio Ossola, a few kilometres far from Novara, is a well-known district of quarries and production of stone materials for ornamental or architectural use. The northern part of VCO produces gneiss (beole, serizzi). Granite is produced in quarries in the part of the district that is close to Lake Maggiore whereas different types of marble are extracted throughout the VCO area.

The project team had early contacts with two companies, one is focused on producing and selling feldspathic sand that is used for ceramics (tiles, bathroom fittings) and glass production while the other one is dedicated to a special type of marble that is sold in blocks and slabs, when sold as raw material, or as finished products, such as large tiles, bathroom fittings, works of art. The company producing feldspar sand should facilitate contacts with a linked company of the same area that is also specialised in feldspar sand, obtained from scraps of the granite industry.

Type of shipments and transport volumes

Feldspathic sand is transported in swap bodies, currently carried by trucks with destination in the area of Sassuolo in Emilia Romagna (Italy) about 300 km from the production area. The sand travels as bulk cargo with controlled humidity and may also be transported in hoppers, although this is not the case at present. The company with which there were early contacts sends 8 to 10 trucks a day from Baveno to Sassuolo.

Early discussions with the company running the marble quarry focused on transport of blocks and slabs which is carried out in 20' containers loaded up to 28 tonnes. The departure point is Crevoladossola and there are many different destinations. In 2022 Genova was the transit port of about 2,000 containers of marble destined overseas. All such containers travelled by truck. Many transports by truck are towards the north and east of Europe and further east. Crevoladossola is the origin of the truck transport to northern Europe whereas eastwards transports depart from a warehouse in Verona belonging to the company interviewed.

Transit time requirements

These vary but a strong constraint for marble containers is the need to meet the loading schedule of the vessels on which they are exported.

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Access by road and rail

Access by road and rail to the area is excellent.

The Verbano Cusio Ossola is served by the A26 motorway that links the area with the national motorway system and with the port of Genova. Both the destinations of the marble and of the feldspathic sand can therefore be transported on routes that are mostly on motorways.

The area is also served by railway lines belonging to the Rhine-Alpine Corridor with major freight flows. To the north of the area, Domodossola is the meeting point of the single-track electrified line from Novara via Borgomanero and of the double track electrified line linking the Milan area to the west coast of the Lake Maggiore. North of Domodossola the Simplon tunnel takes to Brig in Switzerland.

Domodossola, located within the stone district, is home to a rail-road terminal with departures to the north of the Alps. Novara is located between 40 km and 100 km of the district, depending on where in the district the quarry is located, and hosts the terminals of CIM/Boschetto and Agognate linked to the national network and offering further services across the Alps, to the west of the Alps and to the south of Italy. Also, the rail-road terminals in Gallarate are within a short trucking distance and can be reached travelling by motorway.

Bottlenecks

The company selling feldspathic sand did not mention current bottlenecks in relation to road transport, but it is interested to explore the rail option. In fact, they tried it in the past but were disappointed due to:

- Commercial offers for rail transports that had too short a duration;
- Issues with weight measurements at different locations along the rail network when sending the goods;
- Issues with space to receive the swap bodies at the destination terminal in Sassuolo.

The company selling marble organises its own transport when it sells FOB, therefore with delivery at the ship. It sells ex-works for transport by land, but it has a say in the choice of transport company and transport means: customers prefer to transport blocks and slabs with companies that have a positive track record with the seller.

The only bottleneck concerning rail that was mentioned is the reliability of transports that need to meet ships loading times.