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## **The URVIS number under the Luxembourg Rail Protocol**

### **What is it and how does it work in practice?**

The Luxembourg Protocol to the Cape Town Convention is a new international treaty that introduces a global legal system to make it cheaper and easier for the private sector to provide asset-based financing for all types of railway rolling stock, new or used, without the need for state guarantees or support. It provides for the protection and regulation of security rights held by creditors which security rights may be registered, and searchable online 24/7, at an [International Registry](#) based in Luxembourg.

The Protocol entered into force in contracting states on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024. It introduces, for the first time, a global unique and permanent numbering system (URVIS) for all types of railway rolling stock. The URVIS number comprises 16 numbers (15 random numbers plus a check digit) and is issued by the International Registry on demand against a small fee. Registrations of security interests by creditors must be made by reference to the URVIS number. This will deliver benefits to operators, secured creditors (secured lenders or lessors), manufacturers, rolling stock maintenance companies, insurers and regulators, by making it easier to track the location and status of, and to maintain, the rolling stock throughout the lifetime of the equipment regardless of where it is in the world. URVIS is particularly helpful when rolling stock crosses international borders. But there are still some practical questions:

**Q: Does the URVIS number replace the running number or the manufacturer's serial number?**

**A:** No, these are entirely separate and designed for different purposes. The running number is usually allocated on immatriculation, or admission to service of an item

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of rolling stock to a particular rail network based on its physical characteristics and fitness for purpose. But that number could change in relation to any particular item of rolling stock. For example, the equipment could be re-qualified to operate on another rail network, at that point receiving a new number. Furthermore, the manufacturer's serial number is constructed by the manufacturer and may well be duplicated or recycled by it or other manufacturers. The URVIS number however, can never alter or be duplicated. The running number is therefore like a number plate on the back of the car, which can change. The URVIS number is, on the other hand, like the permanent Vehicle Identification Number stamped on the car's chassis.

**Q: Is the URVIS number mandatory?**

A: There is no mandatory requirement for every new or used item of railway rolling stock to be identified with the URVIS number *unless* the creditor wishes to register its security interest in the item at the international registry. There will be other benefits of having using the URVIS number for rolling stock (for example, facilitating lifetime tracking and tracing. In addition, even where rolling stock is owned by the operator, it would be prudent for the operator to register its ownership by filing a notice of sale recording its acquisition of the equipment by reference to the URVIS number. Since this registration would also be publicly accessible it would go a long way in practice to secure the operator/owner from third parties claiming title rights, particularly when the rolling stock is crossing international borders. Similarly, even where a debtor is not in a contracting state, registering a security interest at the international registry by reference to the URVIS number may provide a creditor with valuable additional security, and protection against fraud, as a matter of domestic law.

**Q: Is there a requirement to mark financed equipment with an URVIS number?**

A: Yes, if a creditor wishes to register a security interest against an item of rolling stock at the international registry, it is condition that the URVIS number is permanently marked on the item under the UN [Model Rules on the Permanent Identification of Railway Rolling Stock](#). These Rules set out minimum standards for permanent marking of rolling stock with URVIS numbers (essentially a 15 cm x 10 cm plate, fixed to both sides of an item). Guidance notes may be found [here](#). The UN is currently working on creating digital solutions for tracking rolling stock by reference to URVIS numbers.

**Q: How unique is the URVIS number?**

A: The number will be unique at the time it is issued and thereafter. Once the number is given out by the International Registry, it will never be used again and will be permanently deleted from the list of available numbers.

**Q: How will URVIS numbers be allocated by the International Registry?**

A: Under an automated process where a user will request the and will receive the next available number. In the future, depending on demand, the Registrar may



introduce a facility for the purchase of customised numbers. You can see a short video on how to apply for an URVIS number [here](#). It is not necessary to register as a Registry user to obtain URVIS numbers.

**Q: How is the URVIS number constructed?**

A: The number comprises 16 Arabic numerals including one check digit. But deliberately the number is a random one given out by the international registry; it will not reflect any operational characteristics of the equipment. Once allocated to a specific item of rolling stock, the number can never change regardless of its location, status or use.

**Q Will it be possible for a manufacturer, keeper or operator to buy a block or sequence of URVIS numbers?**

A: Yes, although because of the check digit they will not necessarily be consecutive numbers. The purchaser would then allocate and fix the numbers to specific items of rolling stock in accordance with the UN Model Rules. It is also possible that a block of numbers will be made available to regulators who can then allocate the URVIS number and the running number for the equipment at the same time.

**Q: What will be the cost of the URVIS number?**

A: The International Registry has a [Schedule of Fees](#) set by the Supervisory Authority, in consultation with the Registrar. Currently the cost is Euros 15 per number with a possible surcharge for customised numbers. There are separate modest charges for registering and searching against a security interest registered at the International Registry.

**Q: Is the allocation of an URVIS number or the registration of the security interest at the international registry dependent on rolling stock operating on a particular gauge?**

A: Absolutely not. The Protocol applies to all rolling stock regardless of which gauge it operates on, regardless. The Protocol will also secure variable gauge rolling stock, moving between different gauges.

**Q: Can components of railway rolling stock be given a separate URVIS number?**

A: Yes, this is possible although the Protocol only covers railway rolling stock in its entirety and not components. This means that it will not be possible to create and register a separate security interest *under the Protocol* although it may assist in creating rights under local law.

For more on the Luxembourg Rail Protocol, visit [www.railworkinggroup.org](http://www.railworkinggroup.org). Keep up to date with all the latest developments via the Rail Working Group's [LinkedIn group page](#).