

Sleeper Pads Reduce Life Cycle Costs





Study confirms: Elastic bedding reduces track superstructure deterioration

According to a study conducted by the Graz University of Technology, the use of sleeper pads has resulted in improved track quality throughout the Austrian Railways network. The findings show that sleeper pads reduce deterioration of the ballast, the most critical element in the track superstructure. The improved track quality behaviour extends the maintenance intervals and substantially increase the overall service life of the superstructure.

The increasing rail traffic volumes and higher vehicle speeds are subjecting tracks and points to steadily increasing loads. This is in turn causing accelerated deterioration of the individual track components and higher track maintenance costs. The fact that sleeper pads reduce deterioration on ballast superstructures has already been shown in calculations as well as long-term tests on a variety of test sections. Now, further proof has been provided by a study conducted on the Austrian national rail network by the Graz University of Technology.

Austrian Railways (ÖBB) conducted their first tests with sleeper pads in 1997 to assess their deterioration-reducing effects on ballast bedding. The results showed a 50 % reduction in track deterioration rates, facilitating at least a 100 % extension of the tamping cycles. Because of these

positive results, Austrian Railways is installing sleeper pads on more and more tracks. Under certain conditions¹, concrete sleepers with sleeper pads are now the standard solution for mainline tracks and turnouts².

¹ > 30,000 total gross tons/day; speeds < 160 km/h; tracks with radiuses < 600 m. Only one of these three conditions must be met.

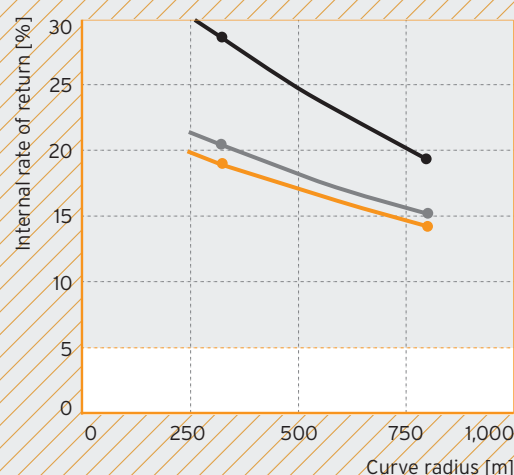
² See also ZEVrail 133 (2009) 5 May, pp 180 ff.

The study: Economic Benefits of Sleeper Pads (WINS)

The aim of the WINS project was to verify the findings collected in the various test sections by examining the entire rail network. "Our measurements on over 1,500 cross sections showed significantly improved track

geometry in the sections equipped with Sylomer® SLB 3007G sleeper pads. This means that the maintenance intervals can be extended on track sections with sleeper pads, and that the overall service life of the track superstructure in these sections will be considerably longer. This also reduces the costs associated with operational hindrances. These effects significantly lower the life cycle costs of the superstructure, even taking the higher investment costs into account," explained Professor Peter Veit, institute director and faculty chair at the Institute for Railway Engineering and Transport Economy at Graz University of Technology. Using the results of the study, the experts developed a life

Economic benefit of sleeper pads - internal rate of return



In relation to curve radius, traffic load 55,000 total gross tons/day, track

Additional costs for a padded sleeper

15 €
22 €
24 €



cycle costs calculation instrument that can be used to calculate the cost efficiency of a solution with sleeper pads. This LCC model offers a statistically sound decision-making aid for track strategy that takes the typical national cost structure into account.

Sleeper pads offer the greatest savings on heavily loaded tracks

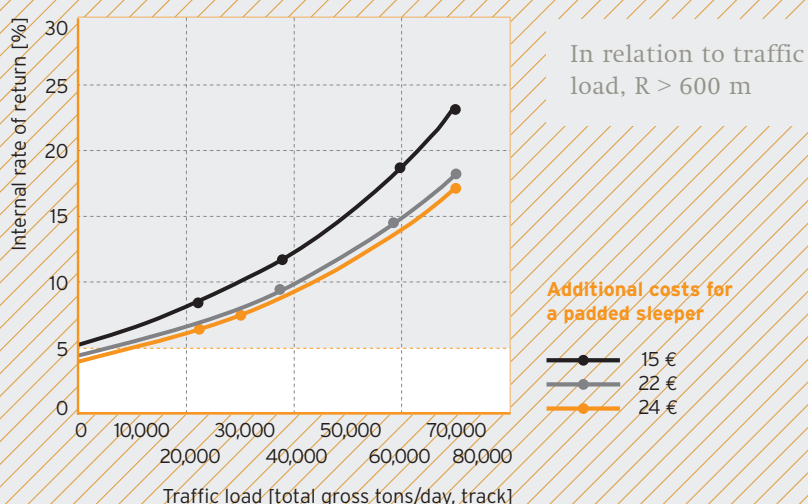
Sleeper pads offer the greatest cost savings when they are installed on track sections subjected to especially high loads. There we can find the biggest economic advantage. "At a daily traffic load of 70,000 total gross tons, we see a static cost reduction of one third or an internal rate of

return of 16 %," said Stefan Marschnig from LCC rail consult, a research partner of Graz University of Technology, summarising the results. An internal rate of return³ of 5 % is already achieved at a traffic load of 10,000 total gross tons per day. Decreasing curve radiuses further increase the saving effect. Individual analyses have shown that softer sleeper pad types like Sylomer® SLS 1308G result in further improvements of track quality. "In general, it can be said that sleeper pads are a technically and economically proven solution for reducing the total costs of a track superstructure," said Professor Peter Veit, summarising the results of the life cycle cost study.

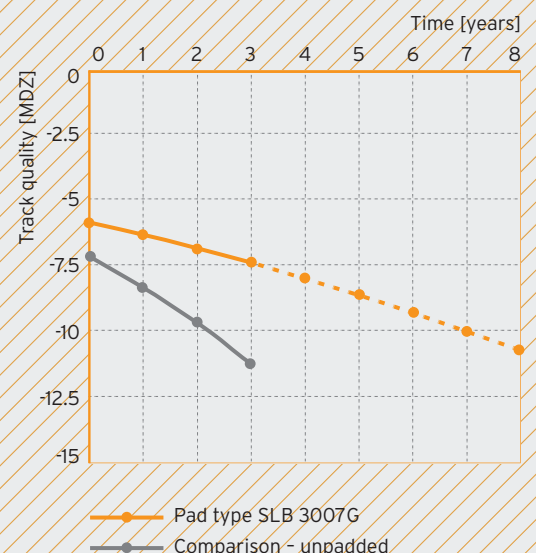
³ This internal rate of return is based on the additional cost for the pads. In other words, this value indicates at what interest rate the sleeper pads refinance themselves, or how fast the positive effects from the pads, such as reduced maintenance expenses and increased service life, pay for the additional investment. The lower limit of 3.5 % is identical to the bank rate. Austrian Railways requires a rate of 5 % for the implementation of innovations. All of these interest rates are real rates, in other words not accounting for inflation.

» Some 980,000 sleepers and 350 turnouts with Getzner pads installed worldwide. «

Economic benefit of sleeper pads - internal rate of return

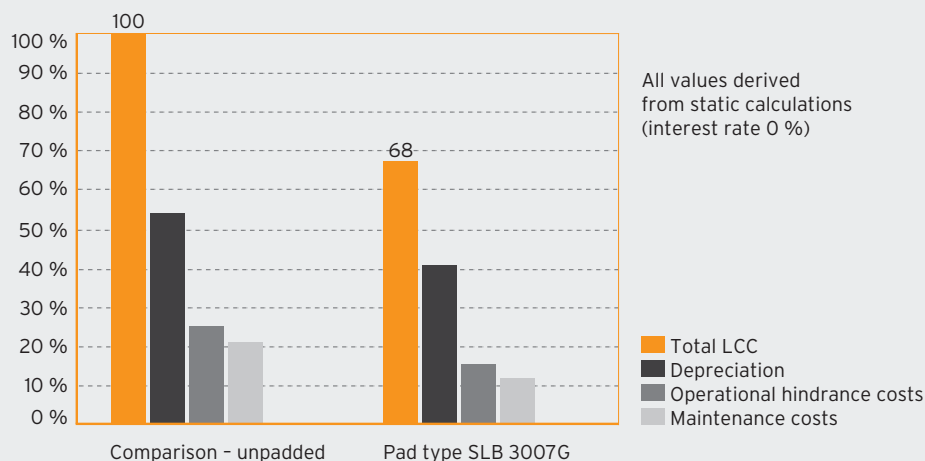


Track quality



Breakdown of standardised annual costs

Traffic load > 70,000 total gross tons/day, straight track



Long-term tests on sections with extremely high axle loads

The results of the LCC model confirm that the return on an investment in sleeper pads increases in line with the traffic load. This implies that installing sleeper pads would be an effective way to reduce costs especially on sections with extremely high axle loads. Getzner Werkstoffe is currently examining this effect in more detail on lines with 36-ton axle loads, and similar results are expected from the long-term tests at the Facility for Accelerated Testing Service in Pueblo, Colorado.



Cost reductions through LCC analysis

- Tamping intervals extended by at least 100 %
- 50 % less track possessions on the line
- Total service life increased by at least 25 %
- Less rail corrugation in tight curves
- Better track quality, and thus improved comfort
- Advantages of timber sleepers combined with the benefits of prestressed concrete sleepers
- Greater contact area between the concrete sleeper and ballast bed (and up to 90 % less unit pressure on the ballast)
- Less ballast settling

The WINS study in brief

- The world's first statistical proof of the investment return offered by sleeper pads on the basis of a full rail network analysis in cooperation with Austrian Railways
- At least a 10 % rate of return on the additional investment
- The higher the track load, the more the investment in sleeper pads pays off