

String Railway Transport

At first glance, the game hasn't changed much, except for the box format. Again, we get a thick bundle of strings – in colors different from those in its predecessor, though. A scoring board is missing. Instead, the new game comes with a bag full of colored wooden cubes.

STRING RAILWAY TRANSPORT is not a variant or expansion of the previous game; and it can't be combined with that game either. It is something independent and new. Whereas the predecessor was exclusively about building up a railroad network, the new version uses that as merely the precondition for fulfilling lucrative cargo deliveries. This requires some more preparation.

Again, the playing area is enclosed by a long string. A second one signifies a mountain range; this time, water is left out, even though the game instructions still mention a river. Depending on the number of players, a

different number of city stations and approximately the same number of stations in the outskirts are distributed throughout the playing area. This time, the station tiles don't show any point numbers or connecting conditions. The city stations are equipped with cargo

cubes (drawn unseen out of a bag) at the beginning; the outskirts don't get them until they are connected to the track network.

On your turn, you first use one of your strings to build a new route, and, in doing so, you connect any number of stations. If you cross other players' routes or build into the mountains, it costs you action points. Initially, you have only very few points at your disposal. They are displayed on small locomotive tiles. Buying a bigger locomotive that provides more action points costs action points as well – first only one, but it becomes more expensive with stronger engines.

Action points are badly needed; as the track network grows, you can't avoid crossing other lines. You need the action points especially to pay the freight costs. The small colored cubes need to be transported to a station of their color, but only over your own routes. If you succeed, you put them aside



for the final scoring. Each station they pass, however, costs one action point.

The long distance missions are more challenging. They are not indicated by wooden cubes but by tiles that give you minus points if you don't complete the mission. However, they are more flexible in their handling. The longer the transport route the bigger the reward. But, of course, this costs action points as well. Only if you resolve these long distance missions do you get wild card cubes, in addition to victory points. At the end of the game, players score for sets of differently colored cargo cubes – the more the better. The wild cards substitute for missing colors.

Each player has only five strings to use. This means that the game ends after only five rounds. But different from the predecessor game, this takes a bit longer this time since this game is not only about connecting profitable stations but also about optimizing transportation routes. Unfortunately, only after connecting a station in the outskirts for the first time does one learn what cargo is waiting there to be transported. A chance for the subsequent player to create a faster connection.

Which is the better game: STRING RAILWAY or STRING RAILWAY TRANSPORT? It is pointless to answer this question because the first game is no longer available. TRANSPORT, too, was already sold out at

the beginning of the SPIEL. But on request, Hisashi Hayashi, the author, announced he would produce a new print run. It can be assumed that it won't be available before SPIEL '12. Currently, a distribution partner is not in sight – and, in view of the unusual game materials, probably pretty unlikely. And this is really a pity, since this game is definitely worth a recommendation. *KMW/sbw*

STRING RAILWAY TRANSPORT (OKAZU) by Hisashi Hayashi; for 2–5 players, about 10 years and up; duration: about 30–75 minutes; price: about 24 €.

