

PRESS RELEASE



26th February 2015, Brussels

ERFA supports efforts to reduce rail noise, but not at the expense of jeopardising the competitiveness of the rail sector

Social sustainability – a basic requirement for further rail freight development

ERFA, representing new entrants on the rail market, recognises the need to modernise the rail sector, to make it a sector truly attractive for customers and passengers, and to ensure it continues to play a central role in the sustainability of the transport system. This also means addressing environmental concerns, such as noise pollution for people living close to railway lines. Only by responding to the needs of its customers and society at large, can the rail sector play a thriving and growing role in the transportation of goods and people.

As the EU earlier this month adopted a voluntary scheme for rewarding silent freight wagons and trains and penalising noisy ones, ERFA stresses the need for workable solutions that do not jeopardise the competitiveness of the rail sector, that do not lead to distortions within the rail market and that ultimately do not result in a modal shift back to road.

Any increase to the cost of rail transport will have an impact on the rail sector's ability to compete with the road sector and its already cheaper services. If the will is really there to relieve the congestion and pollution caused to society by lorries transporting goods, efforts must be made at all levels to support the rail sector in remaining an attractive and cost-effective choice for customers and shippers.

The challenge of financing the retrofit of rolling stock

The technological solution for reducing the noise caused by the contact between wheels equipped with cast iron blocks and rail infrastructure is available. But it's the question of how to finance LL-brake block retrofit for wagon rolling stock, which has a long life-cycle, that is the real problem.

The Connecting Europe Facility funding available for noise retrofit is a start, but will not get us very far in terms of covering the costs for retrofitting, or especially the higher operational costs linked to these quieter braking systems.

Nor will the bonus paid to silent freight trains under the new EU voluntary scheme cover the higher operational costs.

ERFA believes the financing of the noise problem must be properly addressed, taking serious account of the additional long-term costs of quieter brakes, and the danger this implies for negative modal shift back to the road.

PRESS RELEASE



Regulation must address the entity responsible for investments

The voluntary EU “Noise Differentiated Track Access Charge” scheme creating different levels of track access charges, while seeking the right objectives, i.e the incentivisation for retrofitting of wagons, targets railway undertakings and not the wagon keepers, who are the ones in fact responsible for the retrofitment of their noisy wagons.

This will not work for private railway operators, who in most cases depend on wagons provided by independent keepers and/ or who operate trains with often changing wagons from third parties. It is difficult to imagine that small private operators will be able to influence the provision of silent wagons. Yet the railway undertakings will be dependent on the availability of quieter wagons from the wagon keeper, and according to this new scheme, will be penalised for operating non-silent wagons.

But the scheme will not work either for independent wagon keepers. They will most likely have limited incentive to retrofit in the short term under the current provision, as they may not receive the bonus that is paid to the railway undertaking.

For regulation to be effective it must keep up to speed with today’s dynamics in the rail sector, where running a train and wagon keeping are often two separate businesses and where railway undertakings do not necessarily own their own wagons.

A new approach to solve the noise issue

In view of the forthcoming EU Communication on rail noise, ERFA seeks to stress the added value of targeting incentivisation schemes at wagon keepers, who bear, at least initially, both the cost for retrofitting and the higher operational costs.

Direct funding for wagon keepers would result in quicker retrofitting, less administrative burden, prevent discrimination between state-owned and private operators and create advantages both for the environment and competitiveness of the rail sector.

ERFA is determined that night bans or operational restrictions for noisy wagons and trains should be avoided at all costs, which is the risk if this problem is not properly addressed, and wishes to see any future EU action designed in such a way so that it really gets to the heart of the matter.

PRESS RELEASE



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ERFA - European Rail Freight Association - represents new entrants, i.e. all those operators who want open access and fair market conditions, and sustains their role of pushing forward the development of the railway market. The Association is very much a spin-off of the First Railway Package, adopted by the EU in 2001, and its vision of creating an open and competitive European rail market.

In 2014, ERFA represents 34 members from 16 countries. The members of ERFA all share a commitment to work towards a competitive and innovative single European railway market by promoting attractive, fair and transparent market conditions for all railway companies.

The members of ERFA represent the entire value chain of rail transportation: rail freight operators, wagon keepers, service providers, forwarders, passenger operators and national rail freight associations.