



News Release

Infrastructure access charging regime should support the competitiveness of rail freight

Brussels, 13 January – Track access charging impacts rail’s attractiveness to customers and should therefore be fair and competitive vis-à-vis other modes of transport. In its present form it greatly complicates the development of new rail freight services. Therefore, rail stakeholders call on the European Institutions and Member States to simplify and harmonise rules and to create an intermodal level playing field, in order to make rail a more attractive solution, especially for freight. This was the main message from participants at last night’s Rail Forum Europe dinner held in Brussels, sponsored by CER, ERFA and UIRR.

Senior managers from the rail freight sector, **Reinhardt Bamberger (Rail Cargo Group, Austria)** and **Frank Schuhholz (ERFA Vice-President, the Netherlands)** highlighted anomalies from which European rail freight undertakings suffer under the present track access charging regime in certain EU Member States.

Whereas domestic rail freight is in decline, new services are introduced on longer-distance cross-border links. Heterogeneous methods used to determine track access charges in the various European Member States make it very challenging to predict the fees payable for a particular train that crosses several countries. By contrast, for road, in many countries the simple purchase of an annual vignette to access the motorways is sufficient.

While only around 1% of roads in Europe are tolled, track access charging applies to every kilometre and component of the rail network, thus distorting competition between road and rail. Moreover, dealing with this important cost component ties significant management resources. Operators need more transparency and predictability of track access charges.

Jocelyn Fajardo, Member of Cabinet of European Commissioner for Transport Violeta Bulc, gave an overview of the Commission’s priority actions in order to boost rail transport and address pricing issues. He said: *"The Commission aims at fairer and more efficient transport infrastructure pricing, avoiding intermodal distortions. In the short term, our priorities will be to ensure that the new rules on rail charging deriving from the recast directive are adequately applied in all Member States and to prepare for a revision of the so-called "Eurovignette" directive applicable to the road sector"*.

Wim Van de Camp, Member of the European Parliament’s TRAN Committee and of Rail Forum Europe presented an innovative approach aimed at lowering track access charges to make rail more competitive vis-à-vis other modes. He declared: *"We need to take down the barriers that currently impede the competitiveness of the rail transport sector. The sector needs to tell us if track access charges form such a barrier and what steps should be taken"*.

Opening the discussion, **Libor Lochman (CER)** highlighted that external costs are well documented in the European Environment Agency’s TERM report as well as in the recent CER/UIC publication on "Rail transport and environment: Facts and Figures". He insisted on a specific externality: *"Noise is rail’s major remaining*

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burden on the environment and should be addressed. However, proportional measures based on noise annoyance should be taken for all modes, including road”.

Philippe Citroën, UNIFE Director General, acknowledged that track access charges and level playing field are very important elements, however they are not sufficient to make rail more attractive: *“Investments in rail should be encouraged through an efficient use of existing instruments such as the CEF and EFSI. Moreover, we should work together to make the European rail system more interoperable. Last but not least, innovation and research can also play a key role, especially through the implementation of the Shift2Rail initiative”.*

RFE Chairman Michael Cramer thanked the participants and concluded the debates: *“We all know that rail should be further promoted as it is an environmentally friendly solution. This is all the more important, in light of the recent climate deals struck during the COP21 conference in Paris. Therefore, I call on the Commission to be courageous and come up with ambitious proposals to address the current regulatory framework which hampers fair competition between different transport modes”.*

About Rail Forum Europe

Founded by Members of the European Parliament from across the parliamentary committees, Rail Forum Europe is an international non-profit making association that aims at bringing together EU decision-makers and the rail sector to achieve a better understanding of rail-related issues.

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