

Press Release – 2022: A Challenging Year for the Rail Freight Industry

21 December 2022

The past 12 months have proven to be extremely challenging for the rail freight sector. Rail freight has been exposed to unprecedented increases in energy costs and been confronted with a difficult situation due to ongoing infrastructure works throughout the European network. Some successes have been achieved, but more has to be done to put rail freight on the right path to achieve the modal shift objectives set out in the European Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.

Like many sectors of the European economy, the railway sector has been hit extremely hard by increasing electricity costs arising out of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In some cases, the cost of electricity has increased by up to 1000%. ERFA has played an important role over the past year in raising the need for support on electricity prices. Some positive developments are starting to be observed. Last week, the German parliament voted to reduce electricity prices for railways to 13 cents per kWh for up to 90% of historical or forecast demand. This sets a good example for other Member States to follow and it is now important that it is quickly approved by the European Commission.

Unfortunately, though, infrastructure works continue to be a major issue for rail freight undertakings. This leads to sudden changes or cutbacks to available capacity – often at short notice. In many cases, the level of coordination with rail freight undertakings is low and it is extremely difficult for rail freight to subsequently develop reliable services for end users. Lessons must be learnt from the current difficult situation. It is essential that there is a shift that places a much higher focus on managing capacity.

Throughout these difficult situations, the possibility to waive and reduce track access charges remain a positive support where such measures have been implemented. That being said, the Regulation is set to expire on 31 December 2023 and it will be important that the next year is used to rethink charging principles for rail freight undertakings. The Regulation should be viewed as a starting point in a broader discussion on charging principles to support modal shift at a European level, including sufficient support from member states to the Infrastructure Managers.

ERFA President, Dirk Stahl, stated, *“although the past year has been extremely challenging for rail freight undertakings, we believe ERFA has played an important role in highlighting these problems. We are starting to see Member States react to the energy crisis and recognize*

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that, although there is no solution yet, a huge amount of political attention is now focused on the infrastructure situation.”

ERFA Secretary General, Conor Feighan, concluded, *“2023 will be an important year in terms of European legislation. We will most likely conclude discussions on the revision of the TEN-T Regulation and will have new important proposals, particularly the revision of the Train Drivers Directive and new legislation on capacity management. It is important that lessons from 2022 play a pivot role in how these important legal texts evolve.”*

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