Making Rail Competitive by Cutting Technical and Administrative Costs Through European Harmonisation and Deployment

Presidency Declaration

Europe plays an important role in transforming rail transport. A robust rail sector is vital for the EU's economic strength, enabling high-capacity passenger mobility, especially in urban areas and supporting logistics, industry, and military mobility.

Achieving this objective within the Single European Railway Area requires the full implementation of the 4th Railway Package and of the TEN-T Regulation, laying the ground for an increased European rail offer, with open access, competitive PSO tenders, and integrated capacity management on a modern and resilient network.

However, even in a growing market, this Declaration recognises the need to significantly reduce the technical and administrative costs through European harmonisation and deployment.

Therefore, with this Declaration the Presidency encourages the European Commission, ERA, and the Member States to take the following into account in order to achieve a robust rail sector:

1. Building a Single European Railway Area requires continued efforts to remove remaining cross-border obstacles for smooth and cost-effective train operations. A bottom-up mapping of remaining cross-border interoperability bottlenecks at EU level (technical and operational), with a focus on the large volume routes, is needed, together with the follow-up work to remove such obstacles, which impose cost and time, including the ones in the context of legacy systems, the ETCS and the radio system compatibility testing, the train detection systems etc.

2. To protect investments, a balance must be struck between stability, harmonisation and innovation in the lifecycle of the Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSIs). New specifications should be mature, thoroughly tested, and proven before being specified in legislation. TSIs should foster modern train operations in a single European railway market while remaining inclusive, transparent and definitive. The aim should be to keep TSIs mature stable over longer cycles.

3. When revising TSIs, cost-efficient migration planning must be ensured through effective deployment strategies, and appropriate financing models. This applies, i.a. to innovations such as Future Railway Mobile Communication System (FRMCS) and the Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC).

4. For ERTMS to become cost-efficient, there must be a single target system of engineering specifications leading to standardisation of related products, complemented by the implementation of harmonised operational rules. This must lead to scaling up industrial capacity of ERTMS equipment (on track and onboard).

5. ERTMS deployment must be coordinated at EU level, across borders, fostering ETCS-only and the new radio system as a target. This is the only path towards achieving the strong capacity and safety gains associated with ERTMS.
6. The cost of maintaining and renewing the existing network is a significant cost driver. Harmonised European maintenance solutions and the emergence of an internal market for the railway supply industry should be encouraged. Sharing and adopting best-practice templates for multi-annual contractual agreements between Member States and infrastructure managers is also encouraged.
7. Coordinated European action needs to be supported by targeted innovation and pre-deployment activities. Targeted innovation, such as predictive maintenance and digital operations, shall be further reinforced and scaled up for EU-wide deployment.
8. Administrative processes linked to vehicle testing, certification and authorisation, especially in the context of the retrofitting of entire fleets, need to be streamlined. ERTMS track-side projects approval and the final ERTMS infrastructure authorisation need to be aligned, simplified and standardised. An ERA-led process involving industry and administrative stakeholders could identify the appropriate balance between safety and cost-efficiency gains, while creating more EU network efficiency.
9. Conditions must be put in place to facilitate that rolling stock can be authorised cost-effectively for a wider area of use (e.g., 'go-everywhere' vehicles). These developments are likely to trigger the development of a stronger second-hand market for rolling stock.
10. Training and upskilling the workforce at all levels (IMs, RUs, drivers and signallers, industry) is necessary to address the challenges of an ageing workforce, gender imbalance and skills shortages in critical areas such as digitalisation, green technology, and engineering (in particular in the field of ERTMS).

The Presidency recommends implementation of concrete actions in response to the above and the monitoring of such implementation.