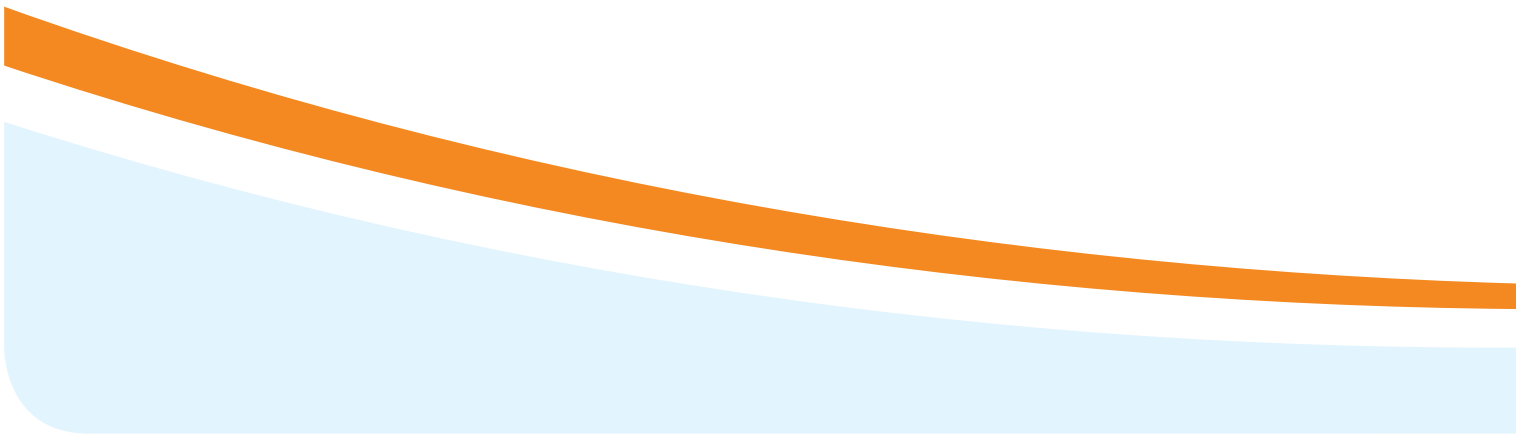




Rail helping the EU meet the Green Deal's goals



European Economic
and Social Committee



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A well-digitalised railway is critical to the Green Deal's climate goals. However, it needs further significant investments and more robust coordination at EU level. Yet, there are also low-hanging fruits to be picked quickly, such as improved ticketing.

Digitalisation, decarbonisation and the role of railways in the TEN-T corridors were the main themes of the conference held by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on 15 November 2021 as part of the European Year of Rail 2021. The year dedicated to promoting rail was at the same time another year of the COVID-19 crisis in which railways kept Europe moving despite health challenges and financial losses. "This Year of Rail is a unique opportunity for organised civil society to debate the benefits of rail for travellers and users, and the advantages in terms of working conditions, the economy and the climate," stressed EESC president **Christa Schweng**. She also called for immediate support measures for transport to overcome the crisis and "– quite literally – survive".

Greening and digitalisation

EU transport has to cut its CO2 emissions by 90% by 2050 (55% by 2030). Therefore, the fundamental solution for the Green Deal's transport area is quite simply more railways in Europe since, as **Elżbieta Łukaniuk**, member of Commissioner **Adina-Ioana Vălean's** Cabinet, said, railways are a "very prominent element of a sustainable future transport mix". That is why the European Commission wants to double high-speed rail traffic by 2030 and triple it by 2050. Rail freight is also subject to ambitious targets: it is expected to increase by 50% by 2030 and double by 2050. One of the crucial measures leading the EU towards those goals is the completion of the TEN-T Core and Comprehensive Networks by 2030 and 2050.

One of the flagship initiatives of the European Year of Rail 2021 was the Connecting Europe Express. On 7 October 2021, it reached its final destination of Paris after a journey of 20,000 km and 36 days travelling across Europe, from west to east, and north to south. It aimed to raise awareness of rail's benefits and the challenges that still need to be overcome. The train made over 120 stops, crossed 26 countries and 33 borders, and travelled on three

different gauges along the way. “The Connecting Europe Express could have travelled the same route in 10-15 days instead of 36 if Europe had enough robust infrastructure for high-speed rail and the proper interoperability,” said **Alberto Mazzola**, executive director of the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER), the voice of European railways.



Healthy competition in climate-friendly transport requires an EU level playing field with other modes of transport in cost calculation, including “external costs”. In the case of even low-emission road transport, issues such as lorry noise, traffic jams and car accidents must be included, which would make even electric vehicles considerably more expensive than rail for the environment. **Pietro Francesco De Lotto**, CCMi President, reiterated the EESC’s call for a single rail regulator to be established in the EU. This would help

the development of interoperable, digitalised railways and thus would help implement the Green Deal. Railways should strive to better integrate trains into transport networks, linking rail with airports and ports. Moreover, railways need to further develop the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS – according to Mr Mazzola, the EU should significantly increase its co-financing), digital capacity management and automatic digital coupling, all of which should be interoperable within the common European area.

Ticketing

Meanwhile, ticketing remains a tangible example of rail market fragmentation for ordinary, non-freight users. It continues to languish despite the growing demand for such a digital service. Mr Mazzola argued that a lot of work had already been done on ticketing by railway operators. And now it is easy to find online vendors selling tickets for many of Europe’s long international routes. The CER would like to see ticketing strongly improved by 2025. Yet, BEUC’s **Dimitri Vergne** argued that the European Union needs legislative action on joint ticketing despite the rail industry initiatives, which should be appreciated.

EU legislation should help establish a digital sales system of combined tickets for different operators with consumer protection guarantees (e.g. in case of missed transfers resulting from train delays) through a single booking service. Moreover, independent players must have access to data on train connections if we want vendors to be able to sell combined and single tickets, as Mr Vergne stressed. It would help them develop widespread booking systems with a single vendor, similar to buying combined airline tickets.

“People should be free to choose which means of transport to use. We have achieved this with planes and roads; we must do it with railways too, especially when we reach 2030 as a milestone in the TEN-T area. Our role as the EU institutions is to deliver a single rail area,” said **Barbara Thaler**, MEP and member of the TRAN Committee. She stressed that the EU must strive for trains to be available, punctual, flexible, affordable and convenient, which would attract many more customers.

There is a need for harmonisation in terms of cross-border ticket price reductions for “senior citizens”. “By 2030, we should have a multimodal ticketing system with such multimodal information about road, rail, air and water connections,” Mr Mazzola said. Improving ticketing is low-hanging fruit. Railways could also be made more effective and attractive by selling tickets e.g. six months in advance of the journey. Still, the EU’s timetable regulations need to be changed for this to happen.

More political will? More money? Both?

“Sanctions and penalties do not work,” argued **Iveta Radičová**, coordinator for the Mediterranean TEN-T corridor, when asked for ideas on how to overcome the causes of delays in the implementation of rail connections in TEN-T. At the panel discussion on “The role of railways in the TEN-T corridors and the completion of its core network”, Ms Radičová stressed that the biggest challenge for cross-border rail connections is bi-national coordination and cooperation. Individual governments are often recovering from economic crises, dealing with new problems or focusing on priorities unrelated to cross-border railways. This makes it more difficult for TEN-T projects.

“The only obstacle is political will,” said Ms Radičová. Now that there is political coordination and cooperation from EU governments, the issue of financing, including from EU funds, is becoming much less of a problem. Yet, **Carlo Secchi**, coordinator of the Atlantic TEN-T corridor, stressed that “many more

billions” are needed to complete the European TEN-T goals when it comes to rail. “Therefore, we should look for ways to attract private investors and players from financial markets on a larger scale in addition to public investors. Establishing public-private partnerships in this area is no longer a taboo subject,” he argued. He referred to the Tours-Bordeaux high-speed rail line constructed as a public-private partnership project with contributions from the European Commission and the European Investment Bank.

Mr Secchi pointed to technological problems of interoperability (electrification, signalling systems and train length, and difference in gauge in the case of Iberian railways) and delays in permitting as obstacles to the timely implementation of TEN-T (as well as political decisions de-prioritising the construction of high-speed cross-border railways). Mr Secchi predicts



delays in the planned implementation of the cross-border TEN-T network by the 2030s. **Inés Ayala Sender**, coordinator of the Rhine-Danube TEN-T corridor, pointed to the role of the Green Deal in promoting TEN-T and in exerting political pressure for its timely implementation. She stressed how wise it is to appeal to young people through night trains, which – with reasonable efforts from operators – can be a fashionable, modern attraction on longer routes, including cross-border ones.

Moreover, there was a call for forward planning for projects beyond 2030, i.e. connecting all EU capitals and major cities via high-speed rail. However, the issue of regional rail networks and commuter networks must remain in the spotlight. An improvement at regional level can significantly contribute to the greening of European transport. Additionally, **Tālis Linkaits**, Latvian Minister of Transport, drew attention to the geopolitical aspects of railways for the EU. An example is the construction of the Rail Baltica link, which has to contend with the legacy of the Baltic States’ isolation from the rest of Europe during the Soviet era.

The conference on the European Year of Rail 2021 also included a presentation on the breakthrough “Women in Rail” agreement, which was signed by CER and the European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF) on 5 November 2021. The document is the first EU-level agreement of its kind on gender equality and the first autonomous agreement in the railway sector for over 15 years. It is intended to track up-to-date statistical data and other developments in this area. It also aims to attract more women to the rail sector, give them more protection and guarantee equal treatment in the workplace. “But the real work only starts now because this agreement still has to be implemented,” underlined **Jedde Hollewijn**, Policy Officer for Railways, ETF.

Infrastructure, connectivity, interoperability

More infrastructure, more connectivity, more interoperability – this was the main message at the EESC conference. It highlights the priority of overcoming the fragmentation of the market technically, legally, and in terms of multi-modality and ticketing. “We need as many links as possible to other modes of transport and other fields. Moreover, we have to strive for simplification and a move away from administration routines,” said **Stefan Back**, President of the TEN Thematic Study Group on Transport, EESC. The more railway use increases, the more transport will contribute to the Green Deal, but digitalisation can have a significant effect on both railways and the economy as a whole. “We call for the share of rail in both passenger and freight mobility to be increased in a way that connects Member States and effectively communicates the benefits of rail to the public and industries alike,” said **Baiba Miltoviča**, president of the EESC Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN).

The EESC’s work on railways

The opinion ***Evaluation - 2011 White Paper on Transport***, adopted on 9 July 2021, was mentioned often during the discussion at the “European Year of Rail 2021” conference. It assesses the state of implementation of the *Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area – Towards a competitive and resource-efficient transport system* presented by the European Commission in 2011.

As the EESC pointed out in the opinion, the European Commission has so far focused mainly on competition within the railway sector instead of consistently pursuing environmental policy objectives in its transport policy regarding the railway sector. The EESC expressed its strong support for the greening of transport. At the same time, the energy transition must be fair and – without denying its objectives – provide viable and realistic alternatives, taking account of the specific economic and social territorial features and needs of all parts of Europe, including rural areas. In connection with the Green Deal, the EESC “has called for, calls for and will continue to call for policies for investment in modern infrastructure adapted to future challenges”.

Moreover, the EESC recommends prioritising direct links between airport hubs and the high-speed railway network, the existence of which must be a prerequisite before discussing a possible ban on short-haul flights. Finally, the EESC reiterated that co-modality should be the aim rather than a modal shift. The green transition must both be socially just and preserve the competitiveness of European transport, including through full implementation of the European Transport Area with full implementation of the single market.

Yet, in this context, the EESC also drew attention to the need to fully implement in practice the formal market opening achieved with the fourth railway package to make rail an attractive partner in multimodality terms, taking into consideration environmental and social issues. In the above opinion, the EESC also expressed its regret regarding the delays in implementation of TEN-T.

The progress in developing an efficient and competitive EU-wide railway network, as outlined in *A strategy for revitalising the Community's railways* from 1996, was the subject of the opinion **The Single European Railway Area**, which the EESC adopted on 24 March 2021.

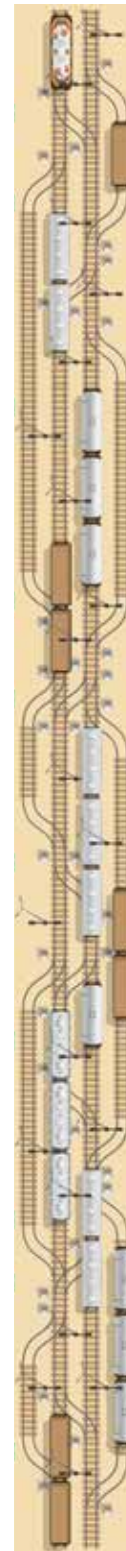
As the EESC stated in this opinion, the joint European endeavours in this area have not yielded the expected overall results despite almost three decades' worth of work to open up the EU's international and national freight and passenger rail markets and harmonise technical and safety rules. In 2001, the modal share of rail freight transport (land transport modes) was 17.5%, and in 2018 it was 17.9%. The modal share of rail passenger transport rose from 6.6% in 2007 to 6.9% in 2018 (all passenger transport modes). Despite having the same legislative framework, developments varied across the EU Member States.

The EESC considers that a lot remains to be done at the political, regulatory and cultural levels. Measures are needed to facilitate cross-border operations by reducing border checks and eliminating administrative problems and delays at border crossings. Additionally, traffic planning, capacity planning and information need to be improved. Investments are required not only in infrastructure but also in digitalisation and updating of rolling stock. This includes, for instance, digitalisation through the deployment of ERTMS and automated couplings. Moreover, investment is needed in a just transition and in skills development. This would improve traffic flows, optimise resource utilisation and safeguard employment.

Regarding public debt, the EESC recommended allowing an exception to the Maastricht Treaty criteria for public investments in transport infrastructure even beyond the COVID-19 crisis. Public service contracts are essential to ensure accessible, affordable and inclusive passenger services for all. The EESC considers the direct award of public service contracts to be one of the most effective and efficient measures to promote railway passenger transport.

The EESC also outlined the most pressing challenges for railways in its opinion **European Year of Rail (2021)**, adopted on 15 July 2020. In addition to the Green Deal tasks, it focused firmly on aspects of digitalisation that are important not only for passengers and freight but also for railway workers. As the EESC stated, employees' concerns must be appropriately safeguarded by involving employee representatives and trade unions. Employees must have access to training and further education to remain in high-quality jobs and sustainable employment. Special consideration must be given to gender-specific requirements to guarantee gender equality.

As the EESC noted in this opinion, demographic, economic and political trends will shape new ways of moving in urban and non-urban areas. That is why railways must adapt in order to integrate themselves into a multimodal, ever more digitalised transport chain. Trains may be used more frequently by an increasing number of older and young people both in urban areas and for long-distance journeys if railways meet new needs



in terms of comfort and accessibility to an even greater extent. At the same time, a tech-savvy generation of customers will rely much less on private transport, over which shared mobility and public transport solutions will be preferred, provided there is an adequate level of service quality.

It will be especially critical for railways to improve their ticketing technologies, making the purchase of tickets easier with the possibility of combining different parts of a journey into one ticket, and to consider the future potential



of multimodal ticketing. The EESC urged the European Commission to support initiatives to achieve this goal, for instance through expert guidance, sharing best practices and awarding grants. The comprehensive digitalisation of railways will also enable them to continue adapting their services to accommodate the needs of shippers in an increasingly efficient manner.

In its opinion ***Ensuring an inclusive sectoral transition to a digitalised rail sector***, adopted on 30 October 2019, the EESC called for a European rail regulator

to be established. It explained that a single European railway area needs a common regulator – in addition to regulatory bodies set up in the Member States – to support the development of the EU rail single market, which also covers digital aspects. Furthermore, international freight and passenger traffic, which is to be enhanced on a continental scale, requires increased joint efforts and common regulatory supervision on a continental scale.

The EESC called for robust European social dialogue, e.g. in a “digital road map” framework. Moreover, it advocated joint social dialogue initiatives to identify and anticipate the impact of automation and digitalisation and maintain a high level of employment and social guarantees as part of a socially just transition. It also stressed that traffic safety and passenger and staff security cannot be guaranteed in the EU solely through digital and automated systems; a human presence is necessary.

In this opinion, the EESC paid a lot of attention to new applications for passengers, i.e. e-ticketing, e-booking, integrated ticketing, multimodal ticketing, Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) and digital platforms and stations. The key concept behind MaaS has to be to offer travellers door-to-door mobility solutions based on their travel needs and choices, ensuring affordability of and accessibility to mobility and public transport as a service of general interest. MaaS regards the entire transport system as a single entity, and rail, with its low emissions rate, must be part of it.

Therefore, the EESC encourages the rail industry to develop a comprehensive and interoperable MaaS framework with other public transport modes. This will ensure affordability of and accessibility to mobility and public transport for all members of the public as a service of general interest and provide an open plug-and-play IT framework for the distribution of multimodal tickets in Europe. Rail could be the backbone of the mobility aspect of a European Digital Identity.



Online event TEN | CCMi
European Year of Rail 2021

Événement en ligne TEN | CCMi
Année européenne du rail 2021

15.11.2021 | 10.00-16.10 EESC - JDE62



EUROPEAN YEAR OF RAIL 2021

conference held by the EESC on 15 November 2021

Opening remarks

- **Christa Schweng**, EESC President (video message)
- **Baiba Miltoviča**, President of the EESC Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)
- **Elżbieta Łukaniuk**, member of Commissioner Adina-Ioana Vălean's Cabinet in charge of rail and roads
- **Barbara Thaler**, MEP, TRAN Committee, EPP shadow on the European Year of Rail
- **Aleš Mihelič**, State Secretary, Slovenian Ministry of Infrastructure (video message)
- **Tālis Linkaits**, Latvian Minister of Transport

Decarbonisation and digitalisation of railways

- **Pietro Francesco De Lotto**, CCMI President, EESC (moderator)
- **Alberto Mazzola**, Executive Director, Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER)
- **Dimitri Vergne**, Team Leader on Sustainability, European Consumer Organisation (BEUC)

Cultural event to mark the European Year of Rail

- **Isabel Caño Aguilar**, TEN Bureau member and former Vice-President for Communication, EESC
- **Koen Clement**, General Manager, Europalia Arts Festival
- Screening of the film: **La Ronde** by Boris Charmatz

Presentation of the “Women in Rail” agreement

- **Alberto Mazzola**, Executive Director, Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER)
- **Jedde Hollewijn**, Policy Officer for Railways, European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF)

The role of railways in the TEN-T corridors and in the completion of its core network

- **Stefan Back**, President of the TEN Thematic Study Group on Transport, EESC (moderator)
- **Iveta Radičová**, Coordinator of the Mediterranean TEN-T corridor
- **Carlo Secchi**, Coordinator of the Atlantic TEN-T corridor
- **Inés Ayala Sender**, Coordinator of the Rhine-Danube TEN-T corridor

Closing remarks

- **Stefan Back**, President of the TEN Thematic Study Group on Transport, EESC



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