

PRESS RELEASE

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Supporting modal shift objectives – private rail freight companies support English as second operational driver language and optimising rerouting options

Private rail freight companies, represented by ERFA, held their annual strategy workshop in Brussels this week. The conditions needed to boost rail freight growth in Europe and to drive rail's attractiveness for customers on quality, reliability and cost issues were the main themes of the day.

Simplifying driver language requirements to support modal shift objectives was a major topic of the discussions. ERFA strongly welcomes the adoption of new EU rules allowing railway companies and Infrastructure Managers to pilot alternatives to the current B1 level language requirement for drivers crossing borders. Both train driver trade union representatives (ALE) and private rail freight companies agreed that English should be adopted in the future as a second operational language for rail, facilitating cross-border rail services in Europe. This would help make the train driver profession more attractive and accessible for a new generation of train drivers. English is now the most widely-learned second language in the EU.

Elisabeth Werner, the European Commission's Land Transport Director at DG MOVE, urged the sector to get going with testing alternative language and/or technological solutions and looks forward to drawing recommendations for the future development of a new language regime for train drivers. She highlighted the possibility for railway companies to test English as one of the many alternatives that could be explored during pilots from 2019. ERFA commits to working in collaboration with Infrastructure Managers, train drivers, their representative organisations and National Safety Authorities to find solutions that adapt the language level to the skills needed and that contribute to rail's attractiveness as a transport mode.

Removing language as a barrier is just one of the steps needed to improve the resilience of the rail system. At its meeting ERFA highlighted the positive steps taken in the contingency handbook adopted by infrastructure managers (IM ICM Handbook) to identify structures and processes needed to better support international rail services in the event of disruptions. As part of this improved contingency planning infrastructure managers are publishing rerouting overviews, including information on technical parameters, other operational requirements and a rough indication of capacity.

ERFA also kick-started a discussion on the main elements of Railway Undertaking contingency plans that could help minimise the impact of large-scale disruptions. RU contingency planning is already an essential element of an RU's risk management and business strategy. In order to facilitate common understanding additional recommendations could be made to support effective communication during disruptions and to explore different possibilities for optimising rerouting options.

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A key priority identified by ERFA members for 2019 is the development of an EU-wide strategic plan, identifying a clear set of tools that boost rail freight and that can be deployed at national and international level. Competitive track access charges and the development of performance schemes that provide incentives for infrastructure managers to minimise disruptions to rail services were considered as high priorities to be included in the plans.

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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 2018, ERFA represents 30 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.