

Press Release – Addressing International Capacity Management Essential in order to Grow Rail Freight

22 June 2022

On 22 June, the European Commission’s public consultation on boosting cross-border rail concluded. ERFA believes it is essential that the follow-up to this consultation process is that the European Commission adopts an ambitious legislative approach with a strong focus on capacity management, built along the provisions with TTR (Timetabling and Capacity Redesign), in order to ensure that rail freight is well placed to meet its long-term growth targets.

The European Union’s Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy sets a target of growing rail freight volumes by 50% by 2030 and a doubling of volumes by 2050. This will not be achievable however unless how capacity is managed in the railway sector is changed fundamentally.

Infrastructure managers have to develop towards an international capacity management process based on digitalisation. Today capacity is managed and allocated with complicated instruments and mostly with a national focus, given that most passenger traffic is domestic. For rail freight to grow, given its strong international profile, it is critical that international capacity management takes a predominant role in capacity planning. This should include regulation and instruments for binding capacity allocation for freight and passenger (a) in long term planning (when investments are done), (b) in mid-term plans (5 years) and (c) in a rolling procedure each year, which clearly defines and secures the infrastructure slots for rail freight sector.

It should be recognized that the sector is working towards this, through the TTR project, but it will be necessary that the primary principles of TTR are also enshrined in legislation. The current situation of part-postponement of the implementation of TTR from 2025 to 2028 shows that some countries have not legally prepared for that important development.

On top of this, there needs to be a clear legal framework on capacity rights in the event of a disturbance or works. The current situation with works, joined with poor capacity planning, is leading to a situation of cancelled rail freight services and, on top of this, reputational damage to rail freight. Capacity management, especially regarding international coordination, is lacking and it is essential that more focus is placed on management of capacity than solely management of works.



Finally, the process of booking international capacity needs to be simplified. It must be possible for railway undertakings to carry out rolling planning for international traffic with one contact point, namely their national infrastructure manager.

ERFA President, Dirk Stahl, commented, *“the current situation of high disturbances and poor coordination of capacity in the European network clearly shows how the framework for managing capacity and infrastructure works today is not meeting the needs of cross-border traffic. Given that over 50% of rail freight crosses at least one border, this is of paramount importance. If we are serious about modal shift objectives, we have to stabilize the situation in short term whilst also developing a stronger system for the future.”*

ERFA Secretary General, Conor Feighan, concluded, *“ERFA welcomes that the European Commission has launched a consultation on this important issue. What rail freight needs is legal clarity on how capacity is managed, its rights in booking capacity and also the introduction of redress for lost capacity and operations on the network. Given that rail freight is primarily international, it is important a European approach is taken so as to avoid a patchwork of different national initiatives.”*

More information on ERFA’s position can be accessed [here](#).