

Press Release – Ambitious Track Access Charges Policy Needed to Reach Green Deal and Modal Shift Objectives

10 November 2023

For rail freight to be able to meet the modal shift objectives of increasing rail freight volumes by 50% by 2030 and doubling volumes by 2050¹, it needs to be cost competitive with other modes of transport, particularly road. This will require the implementation of Track Access Charge regimes which looks to ensure parity in cost for road and rail. Recent experiences have shown a fragmented approach to infrastructure charging throughout Europe. In several Member States, Infrastructure Managers are continuously adjusting infrastructure rates to increasingly allow rail to compete. In other cases, the opposite is being observed, where rail is becoming more expensive compared to road, undermining rail freight’s ability to compete.

Today, there is no European approach to track access charges, and they are often not viewed as a strategic tool in achieving modal shift. According to the [latest market monitoring report](#), track access charges in 2021 ranged from €0 per train kilometer to €17.40 per train kilometer for the minimum access package. Whilst the average Track Access Charges for freight have decreased by 15.5% between 2017 to 2021, this is largely due to a select number of proactive infrastructure managers and Member States.

For instance, with the “TraFöG” system in Germany, the federal government promotes rail freight by paying a proportion of the route prices. This has ensured that the level of infrastructure charges in Germany remain competitive with other modes.² Other support measures to ensure track access charges remain low, thereby facilitating the competitiveness of rail freight, have been introduced in other European countries such as Austria and Belgium.

In other cases, railway charges are often set in isolation from charging set in the rest of the transport network. This had led to a situation where rail infrastructure costs are rising in several Member States whilst road costs are decreasing. In Portugal, track access charges are expected to increase by 23% for 2024, from 1.77 €/km to 2.17 €/km whilst road charges will decrease by 30% in 2024 in several highways. Moreover, the Portuguese Infrastructure Manager have recently made available a proposal of an additional 8% increase for 2025, meaning a total increase of 31% of the track access charges for rail freight transportation in

¹ [European Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy](#), Milestone 7

² 0.41 €/km in 2020 and €2 €/km in 2021 for minimum access package

For more information, you can Contact:

European Rail Freight Association asbl, info@erfarail.eu, Tel +32 2 513 60 87;
Rue Montoyer 39, B-1000 Brussels ; Reg nr. 0478.440.721. Belgian official gazette 26.11.2007

opposition to an announced strategy to decrease the road charges. This will have a significant impact on modal shift potential.

It is acknowledged that railway infrastructure needs to be financed and it is therefore important that reducing track access charges does not undermine infrastructure development. Member States should explore support mechanisms which compensate for any loss of revenue by infrastructure managers. European financial mechanisms, such as EU ETS, should be used proactively to compensate Member States and infrastructure managers who reduce track access charges.

The upcoming European Commission Guidelines on Track Access Charges should also focus on the need for Track Access Charges to play a strategic role in modal shift. The revised Guidelines should highlight the need to harmonise calculation methods for Track Access Charges, which should be based on train operation costs.

ERFA President, Dirk Stahl, stated, *“Modal shift is a joint responsibility of rail freight companies, policy makers and infrastructure managers. We therefore welcome the positive steps being taken by policy makers and infrastructure managers in certain European countries to lower infrastructure charges, thereby better allowing rail freight to compete. The fact this is not a shared reality throughout Europe is concerning however.”*

ERFA Secretary General, Conor Feighan, concluded, *“At European level, it is important that we begin to view track access charges as a strategic tool in achieving modal shift. Beyond the upcoming Guidelines on Track Access Charges by the European Commission, policy makers should explore what steps can be taken to deliver a European framework for charging which puts rail freight in a position to compete fairly.”*

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