

Rail transport: European rail network for competitive freight

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The Committee on Transport and Tourism adopted the report drawn up by Petr DUCHO (EPP-ED, CZ) amending, under the first reading of the codecision procedure, the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning a European rail network for competitive freight.

Purpose: the aim of this Regulation is to improve the efficiency of rail freight transport relative to other modes of transport, but this objective has to be pursued also through political actions and the financial involvement of the Member States and the European Union. Coordination should be ensured at the highest level between Member States in order to guarantee the most efficient functioning of freight corridors.

Financial commitment in infrastructure and in technical equipment like the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) should aim at increasing rail freight capacity and efficiency in parallel with this Regulation.

Moreover, MEPs believe it is necessary to envisage the development of rail freight in a **cooperative approach** between infrastructure managers.

Freight corridors: according to MEPs, the freight corridors have to contribute to the creation of an integrated and intermodal transport system, in particular by focusing on the major role of strategic terminals in the development of intermodal transport and logistics.

The freight corridor shall link at least two Member States. It shall be part of, or at least compatible with, the TEN-T or, where applicable, with the ERTMS corridors. It should take account of major trade flows and goods traffic and allow better interconnections between border Member States and neighbouring third countries.

The creation or modification of a freight corridor shall be decided by the Member States concerned, after they have notified the Commission of their intentions. Interested railway undertakings may participate in the process, whenever substantial investments concern them.

Governance of freight corridors: MEPs consider that the steering role and the respective responsibilities of Member States along a corridor should be clarified. They therefore stress the need to distinguish between a "governance body" of which only infrastructure managers and railway undertakings should be member and an "executive board" of which only Member State representatives can be member.

Measures for implementing the freight corridor: some flexibility in the definition of the implementation plan should be guaranteed to the governance bodies of the corridors, in order to allow them to define their needs and procedures. The content of and the procedure establishing the market study should be defined in a flexible way and should be adapted to the needs of the governance body.

Consulting applicants: applicants, including rail freight operators, passenger operators, shippers, forwarders and their representative bodies, for the use of the freight corridor shall be consulted by the governance body before the implementation plan is approved and when it is updated.

Investment planning: the investment plans referred to in paragraph 1 shall include a strategy for the growth of the capacity of freight trains which may run in the freight corridor (in other words, for removing

the identified bottlenecks, upgrading existing infrastructure and building new infrastructure). The strategy may include measures to increase the length, track gauge, loading gauge, speed management and load hauled.

Coordination of works: infrastructure managers should coordinate all their works on the infrastructure as soon as these works may restrict the available capacity. Works should be coordinated according to multi-annual agreements (or multi-annual contracts) agreed by infrastructure managers in application of Directive 2001/14/EC.

Strategic terminals: the freight corridors have to contribute to the creation of an integrated and intermodal transport system, in particular by focusing on the major role of strategic terminals in the development of intermodal transport and logistics.

One-stop shop for requests for international train paths: the use of one-stop-shop should not be made mandatory for the requests of train paths for freight trains, but should remain optional. Individual infrastructure managers of a corridor may be assigned to function as the front office of the one-stop shop for the applicants requesting train paths.

Facilitated freight: the categories of goods transported by rail should be defined in a broad and flexible way. According to MEPs, the term “priority freight” is not appropriate and could lead to a misleading interpretation of the objectives of these categories. They prefer the term “facilitated freight”.

Train paths allocated to freight trains: the requests for freight train paths have to be made in the most compatible way with passenger traffic, in order to create as little traffic disruption as possible for passenger trains. Infrastructure managers shall include in their conditions of use a fee for paths that are allocated but ultimately not used. The level of this fee shall be appropriate, dissuasive and effective.

Traffic management: in case of disturbance, infrastructure managers should give priority to “priority freight” trains. In this context, the governance body shall, in conjunction with applicants, develop and publish: (a) train regulation principles that shall ensure that facilitated freight trains receive the best treatment possible regarding the allocation of the reduced capacity; (b) contingency plans in case of disruption on the corridor.

Quality of service: the definition of performance indicators should be formulated in consultation with the stakeholders providing and using rail freight services.

Financial support: the report stresses that the creation of freight corridors should be supported financially within the framework of the TEN-T, research and Marco Polo programmes, and other Community policies and funds, such as the Cohesion Fund. The creation of a freight corridor should take into account the particular importance of the planned extension of the TEN-T network to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) countries with a view to ensuring better interconnections with the rail infrastructure of third countries.