

Rail transport: European rail network for competitive freight

2008/0247(COD) - 11/12/2008 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to lay down rules for a European rail network for competitive freight which is made up of freight corridors.

PROPOSED ACT: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

CONTEXT: within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment and the sustainable development strategy of the Community, the creation of an internal rail market, in particular with regard to freight transport, is an essential factor in making progress towards sustainable mobility. In this context, the creation of a European rail network for competitive freight on which freight trains can run in good conditions and easily pass from one national network to another would allow improvements in the conditions of use of the infrastructure.

Many initiatives have already been taken in recent years, both at national and Community level, to ensure that the service provided by the infrastructure managers becomes more efficient. They must be increased and their pace accelerated to ensure that the progress necessary for integrating rail transport and developing freight becomes a reality. In the first place this means improving or increasing :

- cooperation between infrastructure managers in order to eliminate border effects for freight traffic and optimising their investment and the use of their capacities at an international level, initially on the most important routes;
- development and management of the intermodal terminals used for the railways;
- the quality and reliability of the infrastructure capacities allocated to freight.

The Commission undertook, in its Communication of 18 October 2007 "Towards a rail network giving priority to freight", to present in 2008 proposals for the creation, in a coordinated manner, of international rail corridors giving priority to freight. This option was favoured over the creation of rail corridors dedicated to freight, which was deemed too one-sided, expensive and slow to implement. Further to making this commitment, the Commission carried out a large-scale consultation of all of the stakeholders concerned. The main conclusion is that the short-term creation of international rail corridors for competitive freight would contribute substantially to improving the competitiveness of rail transport.

CONTENT: the Commission proposal relates in particular to the procedures for the selection of corridors, together with the governance of all the corridors, and to the characteristics that these corridors must have. It is based on the continuance of the initiatives and provisions quoted above, such as the TEN-T programme, the ERTMS corridors and current Community legislation relating to rail transport.

The main points are as follows :

Design and governance of the European rail network for competitive freight: the proposal stipulates the obligations of the Member States in terms of creating international rail corridors for competitive freight and the procedure for selecting these corridors. These provisions must guarantee both the quality of the proposed corridors and consistency between the different corridors proposed. They also provide for all of the Member States which do not have specific geographical features incompatible with this objective to participate in the creation of the European rail network for competitive freight.

The proposed method is as follows:

- (a) the legislation lays down a general obligation for the Member States to create freight corridors within the TEN-T;
- (b) the Member States together define the corridors that they would like to create;
- (c) this choice is validated at Community level, in the comitology procedure, after examining the relevance of the proposed corridor and the consistency between all of the freight corridors proposed.

With regard to governance, it is proposed to put in place an international structure capable of encouraging coordination between Member States and infrastructure managers along a corridor.

Investment: the proposal specifies the obligations to be complied with regarding a freight corridor in terms of coordinating and programming investment and developing interoperability between the different networks covered and improving the capacity for the trains. Developing interoperability will enable significant gains to be made in terms of journey times, capacity and the productivity of rail freight. Increasing train capacity, for example by increasing the maximum length of the trains which can run along the whole corridor, will also improve the productivity of rail freight.

The Commission also proposes defining a network of strategic terminals for each corridor. Each corridor must have an effective strategy regarding the development of intermodal terminals in particular, and also the adequacy of their capacity in terms of the needs of freight running along the corridor.

The operation of a freight corridor: the proposal concerns six essential points:

- the development of interoperable procedures;
- improving coordination of traffic operations between infrastructure managers on the one hand, and infrastructure and terminal managers on the other hand;
- enhancing access to infrastructure and terminals;
- preferential treatment of freight trains in terms of allocating trainpaths and managing traffic; - monitoring the quality of the service along a freight corridor;

- cooperation between regulatory bodies.

Better coordination of the operation of the freight corridor should lead to the improved performance of international freight transport along the corridor for a limited cost. For example, it involves applicants being provided with a one-stop shop for all requests for train paths across several networks. It would lead in particular to a reduction in waiting times for trains accessing the terminals or the main infrastructure from the terminals.

With regard to the balance between freight trains and passenger trains, the objective is to ensure that freight trains have access to good-quality, reliable train paths and that, for international train paths, national train paths are consistent amongst themselves. All these measures must produce positive effects on the performance of freight rail transport which must be measured and regularly analysed. Accordingly, each corridor must define performance indicators which are regularly updated.