

# Rail transport: European rail network for competitive freight

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The Commission presented a report on the application of Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 on the European rail network for competitive freight, which entered into force in November 2010.

The Regulation lays down rules for the establishment and organisation of international rail corridors (rail freight corridors) with a view to creating a European rail network for competitive freight. It encourages cooperation between the main rail freight stakeholders and promotes, in particular, coordination in the areas of capacity offer, traffic management, infrastructure works and investment planning.

The nine initial rail freight corridors provided for in the Regulation have been implemented (six rail freight corridors were established in November 2013 and the last three in November 2015) and are now fully operational. One additional rail freight corridor is under establishment and another one has been proposed by the Member States concerned and Serbia.

This report was to be submitted for the first time no later than 10 November 2015. It is submitted with some delay as the Commission wanted to fully reflect the feedback received from those rail freight corridors only established at the end of 2015 and because it was decided to launch a large stakeholder consultation in 2016.

Initial conclusions: the report concludes that the implementation of the Regulation has clearly created a momentum for the development of international rail freight. The implementation of rail freight corridors has helped to strengthen the cross-border cooperation that was lacking in the rail freight sector before the entry into force of the Regulation, in particular as regards the management of operational infrastructure.

The report refers in particular to facilitating operational contacts at international level or encouraging the development of coordination processes and IT tools, for example within RailNetEurope.

Progress to be made: some areas have mixed or modest results, e.g. dedicated rail freight corridor capacity, coordination of works or coordination of traffic management. These are key areas where progress is needed to improve the quality and reliability of cross-border rail freight services.

The report highlights the following points:

- the services and capacity products offered by the rail freight corridors are within the spirit of the Regulation but feedback or a limited uptake by the market suggest that they are not sufficiently adapted to the needs of the rail freight customers;
- in general nationally oriented rules and processes continue to hamper more efficient and seamless international freight traffic;
- more experience is needed on issues such as coordination of work and capacity management across borders. Processes and tools in these areas are still being developed or planned;
- a standardised approach cannot be applied for an ambitious implementation of rail freight corridors as regional diversities have to be taken into account as regards, for example, market expectations or the availability of infrastructure capacity;
- the provisions of the Regulation can be implemented in different ways - more or less ambitious - which have an impact on the attainment of the general objectives of the Regulation;
- as a market tool an rail freight corridor can offer quality and competitive services to direct and end customers. As a policy/cooperation tool their role is to improve the operational conditions along the corridor, including coordination/harmonisation of national practices in many areas. The degree to which one or the other approach is used varies between rail freight corridors;
- the effectiveness of the rail freight corridor concept depends to a large extent on the commitment of the participating parties to its effective implementation, if necessary through high-level support with the clear aim to make changes happen, in particular through changes in mind-set and in nationally oriented processes;
- the rail freight situation in Europe remains fragile: rail freight competitiveness is also influenced by exogenous factors such as the wider economy, industry patterns, the state of the infrastructure and related investments, the degree of fair competition between transport modes, the degree of ambition of national rail freight policies, etc.

A formal Commission evaluation of the Regulation will be conducted in 2019, fully taking into account the latest developments and ongoing sector initiatives undertaken to implement the Rotterdam Sector Statement adopted in 2016.