

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

Rail Freight Corridors: The Future of Rail Freight in Europe

Ministerial Conference “Innovative Rail Transport – connecting, sustainable, digital”

Berlin, 21 September 2020

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis of 2020 is not only having an exceptionally negative impact on societies and economies on a worldwide scale, but is also hitting rail freight and the railway undertakings hard as many industries and businesses are cutting their production, thereby significantly reducing demand for freight transport by rail. Nevertheless, the importance of the Rail Freight Corridors and the relevant stakeholders in safeguarding the supply of industries, businesses and people while maintaining international freight flows and logistics chains during the crisis cannot be overemphasised.

For the foreseeable future, rail freight and the relevant stakeholders will have to struggle with the adverse economic effects caused by the crisis, which has brought some stakeholders to the very brink of their existence. The enormous challenge for rail freight and the rail freight undertakings stemming from the crisis calls for focused action by the Transport Ministers in cooperation with the European Union and all relevant stakeholders.

Tomorrow, it will be ten years since the European Parliament and the Council adopted Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 concerning a European rail network for competitive freight, thereby laying the foundation for today’s network of rail freight corridors and starting a development which is still ongoing. The Rail Freight Corridors have also created connections to freight routes beyond the European Union borders, such as the Eurasian rail freight routes.

In 2016, the Rotterdam Ministerial Declaration on “Rail Freight Corridors to boost international rail freight” was adopted by the Transport Ministers of the EU Member States, Switzerland and Norway, showing the strong political support for rail freight. It was accompanied by the Sector Statement, which was adopted by the Sector Statement Group of relevant railway stakeholders. This Sector Statement was supported by the Management Boards of the Rail Freight Corridors. In 2018, the Vienna Declaration “Progress on boosting rail freight” by the Austrian Presidency underlined the necessity of ongoing strong cooperation of the Transport Ministers and the stakeholders involved in rail freight. This 2020 Berlin Ministerial Declaration continues this development.

Already before the COVID-19 crisis, the existing eleven Rail Freight Corridors had developed into a crucial element of freight transport in Europe, helping to make

progress in overcoming organisational, technical and political obstacles while moving forward to a coherent rail freight market in Europe. One important element of this success is the exchange of knowledge and best practice between the corridors and their infrastructure managers, another one is the exemplary cooperation of all Rail Freight Corridor member states and stakeholders. Furthermore, cooperation and mutual exchange of information with the TEN-T Core Network Corridors has always provided important support for both structures.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, rail has proven to be reliable and punctual and an essential element of a resilient multi-modal transport system. Rail freight has continued to run largely without interruption. This has highlighted the key success factors of rail freight, namely good quality and high-capacity infrastructure.

In its **Green Deal**, the European Commission includes rail freight as a top priority for shifting towards climate-friendly transport, as rail is one of the most environmentally friendly modes of transport. We expect this initiative not only to bring fresh approaches and ideas to rail freight, but also to build on all the experience gained and best practice already developed by the Rail Freight Corridors. The outstandingly low carbon footprint of rail freight resulting from the wide-scale use of electric traction, the high energy efficiency inherent in the rail system, the suitability for high transport volumes and other environmentally friendly drive systems encourage us to continue the development of fully carbon-neutral rail freight. Effective mitigation of the impact of rail noise is another substantial contribution towards further enhancing the environmental advantage of rail freight.

A major opportunity for rail freight is digitalisation. The **digitalisation** of infrastructure networks, capacity management and allocation, including the management of temporary capacity restrictions, as well as the automation of transport processes and related information flows using interoperable IT systems will contribute to a more efficient use of existing and future investments.

The completion of the TEN-T Core Network by 2030 and the widespread deployment of the current version of the European Rail Traffic Management System / European Train Control System (ERTMS/ETCS) all over Europe, both trackside and on-board, and the move to digital railway operations will lead to more efficient and better integrated rail transport, thus enabling a breakthrough transformation of rail freight. The deployment of Digital Automatic Coupling throughout Europe will be essential for rail freight to become more efficient and even safer. Largely harmonized digitalisation is essential to effectively link rail freight and the Rail Freight Corridors to the other parties in multimodal logistics chains.

Research and innovation in rail transport and the uptake of common European solutions resulting from innovation and research by the sector are a vital challenge where closer cooperation of the Rail Freight Corridors with the Shift2Rail Joint Undertaking and its potential successors is encouraged. The Rail Freight Corridors

are able to provide market driven needs as identified by the logistics stakeholders, which will then benefit directly from any progress made. The focus here should be on efficiency gains, increased capacity and reliable services within the Single European Rail Area to make rail freight the preferable logistics alternative to aviation and road, allowing it to fully benefit from the digital transformation of transport.

Progress can only be achieved with highly competent and trained staff, who are the vital human backbone of rail freight in general and of the Rail Freight Corridors in particular. A continuing challenge for stakeholders is attracting skilled personnel to the railway sector and providing a highly motivating working environment, thereby decisively contributing to boosting rail freight.

The Military Mobility initiative of the European Union launched on 10 November 2017 fosters civilian-military synergies and leverages existing political instruments. The military relies almost entirely on civilian infrastructure as well as private transport operators. A large part of the military movements is in turn carried out on the railways, also making use of freight trains running on Rail Freight Corridors. The Military Mobility initiative makes it possible to make better use of the existing and future European rail freight infrastructure and at the same time enables Member States to act faster and more effectively in the context of the Common Security and Defence Policy as well as national and multinational activities.

This Declaration has been endorsed by the undersigned Transport Ministers at the Ministerial Conference on Innovative Rail Transport in Berlin, who have thereby renewed their strong support for international rail freight and the Rail Freight Corridors.

This Declaration does not create any legal or financial obligations for any party.

We, the Transport Ministers,

Considering

- The Rotterdam Ministerial Declaration “Rail Freight Corridors to boost international rail freight” of 21 June 2016,
- The Vienna Declaration “Progress on boosting rail freight” of 6 December 2018 presented by the Austrian Council Presidency,
- The Graz declaration “Starting a new era: clean, safe and affordable mobility for Europe” of 30 October 2018,
- The report of the European Commission on the application of Regulation (EU) 913/2010, COM(2018) 189 final.

Noting

- The Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Rail (2021),
- The EU financial support provided to the rail sector, notably through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), which dedicated, in the period 2014-2020, about 16 billion EUR to rail projects, which represents two thirds of the total CEF transport budget,
- The Communication from the Commission on the European Green Deal, COM(2019) 640 final of 11 December 2019,
- The ongoing evaluation of the European Commission regarding Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 and Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013,
- The European Rail Infrastructure Managers Handbook for International Contingency Management of 23 March 2018 and the Railway Undertakings` Handbook for International Contingency Management of 17 December 2019,
- The Rail Technical Operational Issues Logbook – Issues Logbook since May 2018,
- The Rail Freight Forward Initiative “30 by 2030” and the coalition of European Rail Freight Companies since 2018,
- Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/6 of 5 January 2017 on the European Rail Traffic Management System – European Deployment Plan C/2016/8973 (EDP),
- The Sector Statement on Rail Freight Corridors “Boosting International Rail Freight” of 20 May 2016,
- Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of 11 December 2013 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network and repealing Decision No 661/2010/EU (TEN-T Regulation).

We, the Transport Ministers, want to support international rail freight and further strengthen the Rail Freight Corridors,

and hereby

A. Commit to further strengthen and develop the Rail Freight Corridors

1. Recognise the work already accomplished by the Rail Freight Corridors, their cooperation with the European Commission and the Coordinators of the TEN-T Core Network Corridors and continue the work to reach the priorities of the Rotterdam Declaration within the Rail Freight Corridors and the Network of Executive Boards.

2. Recall that the European rail network for competitive freight, formed by the Rail Freight Corridors, has proven to be very effective in developing common measures, facilitating, inter alia, the enhancement of the resilience of rail freight in the event of major crises and the implementation of necessary contingency measures.

3. Propose that the experience gained so far and especially in addressing the COVID-19 crisis be used to further develop, together with the stakeholders, resilience measures and that further issues, such as language barriers, the availability of diversionary routes and diverging national rules, be addressed. Suggest ensuring that lessons be learnt from coping with the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the key success factors for rail freight, namely good quality and high-capacity infrastructure.
4. Propose that infrastructure capacity products and the routes of the Rail Freight Corridors be further developed in accordance with market requirements.
5. Emphasise the importance and value of the Rail Freight Corridors' one-stop shops in serving customers and accordingly further encourage strengthening the Rail Freight Corridors' one-stop shops in a coordinated way. Encourage the utilization of harmonized Key Performance Indicators as a means of measurement.
6. Contribute to the further development of Rail Freight Corridors by affirming our ongoing political support, while emphasising that any development of the underlying framework has to maintain a reasonable degree of flexibility for all parties involved, with the focus being on market needs, operational flexibility and efficient coordination from a network perspective.

B. Support the rail freight stakeholders to enable them to better adapt to market needs

1. Encourage all relevant stakeholders to make full use of the opportunities for the digital sharing of information on train movements, such as provided by the project "Estimated Time of Departure and Arrival", to enhance the attractiveness of rail freight and to better align intermodal logistics processes.
2. Invite the Infrastructure Managers to take the necessary action, and support them in doing so, to conclude the Timetable Redesign Project (TTR), which has the potential to become the main instrument for enhancing and improving international traffic in Europe by providing a more flexible and timely allocation of infrastructure capacity. Invite the Infrastructure Managers to provide the Executive Boards of the Rail Freight Corridors with a final evaluation report on the TTR pilots that includes a description of the legal aspects examined by the TTR pilots. Invite the European Commission to facilitate the uniform implementation of these objectives, taking into account the final evaluation report.
3. Encourage Infrastructure Managers to develop virtual European Traffic Management by establishing standardized cooperation of national traffic management centres to allow for a quick response to disturbances to international rail freight and joint preparations for anticipated capacity restrictions.

4. Remind the Infrastructure Managers of the importance of the coordination of temporary capacity restrictions at Rail Freight Corridor level to reduce the impact on available capacity and thus railway undertakings and end customers.

C. Enhance rail freight transport as one of the most environmentally friendly ways of moving freight

1. Recognise the **Green Deal** initiative of the European Commission and consider it important in delivering sustainable and carbon-free rail freight transport. A level playing field among all transport modes is essential to reach this target, as is the continued greening of rail itself by moving to carbon-neutral energy sources.

2. Call for enhanced EU support for rail infrastructure projects essential to develop rail freight by developing a high-capacity network, removing bottlenecks and interoperability barriers and increasing the capacity of intermodal terminals. Welcome in particular the Connecting Europe Facility's objective to further support key rail projects in the period 2021-2027.

3. Welcome a sustainable policy of adopting and enhancing rail infrastructure to the needs of rail freight without affecting rail passenger operations. We consider the TEN-T provisions and parameters for railway transport infrastructure and especially the unlimited possibility to run **740m** trains within the core network as sufficient and appropriate, also to gain additional capacity.

4. Continue cooperation with the **TEN-T Core Network Corridors**, which provides mutual input, and support the Infrastructure Managers and the Railway Undertakings in providing an overview of their needs at the Core Network Corridor fora in terms of market and investment needs and rail freight issues.

5. Acknowledge the need to work with all players in the **logistics chain** on the quality, performance and economic viability of rail freight transport and encourage **intermodal cooperation** with road and waterborne transport in providing complete and efficient transport chains in the most eco-friendly way, including enhanced cooperation with terminals and ports.

6. Welcome measures for **mitigating rail noise** to increase acceptance of rail freight by citizens, taking note of funding possibilities provided by CEF, especially for retrofitting freight wagons.

D. Further technical and operational harmonisation

1. Consider the technical and operational harmonisation of the railways in Europe to be most important in safeguarding and improving the competitiveness of rail freight. Express our support for the European Union Agency for Railways in this process and invite all stakeholders to cooperate and to remove redundant national rules which are covered by the Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSI). Consider the full implementation of the Technical Specifications for Interoperability with the related national implementation plans as essential in order to achieve an interoperable rail system to facilitate the modal shift towards rail.
2. Enhance cross-border cooperation to boost borderless rail freight transport in Europe and to act jointly in addressing subjects detailed in the Issues Logbook.
3. Recognise the continuous importance of ERTMS for enhancing the competitiveness of rail by creating a uniform platform and increasing capacity. Commit to foster coordination for the implementation of ERTMS/ETCS on the TEN-T Core Network Corridors based on an overall concept taking into account the interests of railway undertakings and market requirements. Work actively with the European Union Agency for Railways for the progressive reduction of national technical rules for the implementation of ERTMS.
4. Recognise the need for a coordinated approach at EU and national levels on supporting the fitting of ETCS Onboard Units and the development and authorisation strategies to enable a smooth ERTMS trackside deployment, taking into account the availability of financial resources and the need to maintain economic viability and competitiveness vis-à-vis other modalities.
5. Stress the importance of innovations for rail freight at European level and the need for the successor of Shift2Rail to focus more specifically on rail freight.
6. Identify the implementation of Digital Automatic Coupling, automated train preparation and other digital platforms as one of the main priorities and aim to agree in this regard on one EU-wide migration strategy, including common standards and the sharing of potential burdens, by 2022.

E. Strong rail freight requires skilled workers

1. Recognise skilled railway staff as essential for the commercial success of international rail freight and the achievement of modal shift and climate targets.
2. Welcome corresponding measures to target future skill needs and to make employment in the rail freight sector more attractive for everyone by maintaining high occupational standards.

3. Support initiatives of the rail freight stakeholders to address labour market needs with appropriate measures and support further enhancement of the attractiveness of the sector, in particular with a view to forecasting and preparing for future demands.

On behalf of the Federal Ministry for Transport and Digital Infrastructure of Germany:

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Place and date:

Signature:

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On behalf of the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility,
Innovation and Technology of Austria:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Federal Ministry of Mobility of Belgium:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications
of Bulgaria:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Works of Cyprus:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure of Croatia:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry for Transport of Denmark:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda of Spain:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Infrastructure of Estonia:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland:

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On behalf of the Ministry for an Ecological and Solidary Transition of France:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport of Greece:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology of Hungary:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry for Climate Action, Communication Networks and Transport of Ireland:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry for Infrastructure and Transport of Italy:

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On behalf of the Ministry for Transport and Communications of Latvia:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Lithuania:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Mobility and Public Works of Luxembourg:

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On behalf of the Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects of Malta:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management of The Netherlands:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Infrastructure of Poland:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Housing of Portugal:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure and Communications of Romania:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry for Infrastructure of Sweden:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Transport and Construction of Slovakia:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Ministry for Infrastructure of Slovenia:

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Place and date:

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On behalf of the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications of Switzerland:

Name:

Place and date:

Signature:

Switzerland is not a member of the European Union and does in general not participate in EU initiatives, including the initiative concerning Military Mobility.

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On behalf of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Norway:

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Place and date:

Signature:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Transport and Local Government of Iceland:

Name:

Place and date:

Signature:

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On behalf of the Ministry of Infrastructure, Economic Affairs and Sport of Liechtenstein:

Name:

Place and date:

Signature:

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