

EDF recommendations on the draft Council Conclusions “Putting Rail at the Forefront of Smart and Sustainable Mobility”

European Disability Forum

**April 2021**

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# Preface

### The European Disability Forum

The European Disability Forum is an independent NGO that represents the interests of 100 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a unique platform which brings together representative organisation of persons with disabilities from across Europe. EDF is run by persons with disabilities and their families. We are a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe.

# Easy to Read

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|  | | This document explains what EDF thinks about the position of the Council on rail travel. |
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# EDF recommendations on the draft Council Conclusions “Putting Rail at the Forefront of Smart and Sustainable Mobility”

## Introduction

Rail transport is an environmentally friendly means of transport and the Commission is right in putting it at the forefront of the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy. However, in reality, rail travel is still not accessible for millions of persons with disabilities in the EU. Physical access to stations, platforms, and rolling stock is still impossible for many, but also accessibility of information and ticketing is not a given. This should also be reflected in the Council Conclusions to ensure that Member States take action to implement the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy with accessibility in mind – because only accessible transport can also be sustainable in the long run. With an ageing society and more need for a “future-proof” transport system that will be able to serve us for the years to come, accessibility should be at the core of all considerations.

## EDF recommendations

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| **Draft Council text of 19 April 2021** | **EDF recommendations** |
| **Putting Rail at the Forefront of Smart and Sustainable Mobility**  **-Draft Council conclusions-**  HAVING REGARD TO:   1. the European Council conclusions of 12 December 2019 in which the European Council endorsed the objective of achieving a climate-neutral European Union by 2050[[1]](#footnote-1); 2. the EU transport ministersʼ continued commitment to rail[[2]](#footnote-2), as expressed last year in   a) the political statement supporting a European agenda for international passenger rail presented at the informal video conference of EU transport ministers on 4 June 2020, and  b) the ministerial declaration on innovative transport in rail freight corridors of the Berlin conference on 21 September 2020;   1. the Commission communication of 9 December 2020 on a ʻSustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy – putting European transport on track for the futureʼ**[[3]](#footnote-3)**; 2. Decision (EU) 2020/2228 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 December 2020 on a European Year of Rail (2021)[[4]](#footnote-4); 3. Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility**[[5]](#footnote-5)**, and to the forthcoming adoption of a second Regulation establishing the Connecting Europe Facility; 4. the European Economic and Social Committeeʼs exploratory opinion of 24 March 2021 on ʻThe Single European Railway Areaʼ requested by the Portuguese Presidency[[6]](#footnote-6); 5. the EU transport ministers’ informal video conference of 30 March 2021, where ministers took a stance on the Portuguese Presidency’s non-paper ʻHow to Accelerate Modal Shift to Rail: different paths to a common goalʼ,   THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION   1. NOTES that the EUʼs railway systems have undergone fundamental regulatory reforms through four legislative packages adopted in 2001, 2004, 2007 and 2016. WELCOMES the positive effects of these reforms in market opening and technical harmonisation that have been partially achieved and are partially awaited; 2. ACKNOWLEDGES that the regulatory framework at EU and national level is highly complex and diverse, and UNDERLINES that further efforts need to be undertaken to ensure the economic and operational benefits of harmonisation, in particular for cross-border rail services, while acknowledging the different starting points in the Member States and their varying organisational structures; 3. STRESSES that further technical harmonisation in view of increased interoperability of national networks will support the single market for international rail services, the Union railsystems, will improve efficiency and strengthen the Union industrial base. LOOKS FORWARD, therefore, to Horizon Europe’s next Rail Joint Undertaking which should play a vital role in research on the new digital technologies in rail, thereby delivering a coordinated approach with the sector to the overall evolution of the railway systems; 4. CONSIDERS that the need both to strive for climate-neutral, environmentally friendly[[7]](#footnote-7) mobility and to ensure a resilient and interconnected transport system in times of crisis, as shown during the COVID-19 pandemic, places railways in a key position within the future transport offer; 5. UNDERLINES the importance of a continuous dialogue between public entities, employers, workers and rail transport users in order to ensure that everyone enjoys the benefits of rail transport;   **I. Modal shift**   1. STRESSES that rail transport is responsible for just 0.4% of transport-caused CO2 emissions, despite having a share of 8% of passenger transport and 19% of freight transport across Europe. For that reason, a modal shift to rail is the most effective way to decarbonise transport; 2. NOTES that the considerable efforts towards market opening and technical harmonisation undertaken to date have stabilised the share of railway transport services in a fast-growing market in which customer expectations have also increasingly grown, but that a marked shift to rail has not yet been achieved, despite the progress made in individual market segments; 3. ACKNOWLEDGES that making progress towards this goal will require a significant enlargement and improvement of rail networks and of rail services centred on customersʼ needs; it will require growth in rail traffic volumes that outpaces overall economic growth; 4. CONSIDERS IT IMPORTANT for regular policy evaluations which measure the degree of effective market opening and technical harmonisation to be supplemented by analysis of policy impacts on the modal shift, economic and social cohesion, environmental performance, system efficiency, service levels as well as working conditions; 5. WELCOMES, in this context, the initiatives underway to produce a forward-looking and more operational analysis of the modal shift, by assessing progress possible under given conditions and assuming specific improvements in infrastructure quality and connectivity, as well as the Commissionʼs commitment to develop a ʻrail connectivity indexʼ;   **II. Resilience and connectivity**   1. NOTES that transport, including rail, has been one of the sectors hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic, with economic damage caused by steep reductions in travel and tourism, supply chain disruptions, income loss to railway operators, and with reduced connectivity across the EU. This has also delayed or blocked projects for new investment and services, in particular in passenger transport; 2. NOTES that state intervention has on many occasions prevented the rail system from collapsing, thereby ensuring the survival of this essential service and public good; 3. CONSIDERS that this crisis has had one positive consequence, at least, by exposing the need to strengthen resilience and contingency measures and to improve availability, coherence and coordination in the rail network and give higher priority to the development of cross-border infrastructure;   **III. European rail passenger transport**   1. EMPHASISES that while the share of international rail passenger transport within the overall EU rail passenger market is still very low (7%), there are encouraging signs from both the supply and the demand side which suggest that a considerable increase is possible over the next decade. The projects aiming to revive European night trains are emblematic of the apparent enthusiasm and entrepreneurial spirit; 2. NOTICES wide variations in how international railway passenger services, infrastructure and networks are developed in different parts of Europe, as a result *inter alia* of customer demand, geography, population density, and economic integration between cross-border regions; 3. WELCOMES the creation of, and the practical steps taken by the Platform for International Railway Passenger Transport (IRP), which involves a large variety of stakeholders, and the evolution of the Trans Europa Express 2.0 (TEE 2.0) concept; 4. ENCOURAGES the development of this market segment. In the short and medium terms this should be achieved by complementing existing services, ensuring a level playing field for fair competition, offering multi-service and multi-modal route planning and ticketing, coordinating timetables, providing direct links and connections with regional, local and urban transport, reviewing the policy on infrastructure charges, reviewing capacity allocation procedures and removing technical and operational barriers; in the longer term it requires the removal of the remaining infrastructure bottlenecks in the Union rail system, the realisation of the TEN-T core and comprehensive network, the procurement of interoperable rolling stock and full implementation of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS); 5. RECOGNISES that in certain cases the provision of international passenger services may entail public service obligations for generating a desirable transport offer. In these cases, public service contracts covering the international services should be considered as a possibility, and their use could be facilitated by a revision of the Commissionʼs interpretative guidelines concerning Regulation (EC) No 1370/2007[[8]](#footnote-8);   **IV. European rail freight transport**   1. EXPECTS that the completion of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) core network by 2030, the widespread deployment of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) all over Europe, both trackside and on-board, accompanied by decommissioning legacy signalling systems, and the further harmonisation of technical and operational requirements will lead to more efficient, less costly and better integrated rail transport, thus enabling the continued growth of rail freight; EXPECTS rail freight to be further boosted by the coordinated deployment of new innovations, in particular digital automated couplings and automatic train operations; 2. As regards the European Green Deal[[9]](#footnote-9), in which the European Commission lists rail freight as a top priority, EXPECTS that this initiative will build on all the experience gained and the best practice already developed through the rail freight corridors, while also fostering innovation, not only in new technologies and digitalisation, but also in business models and operational concepts in order to achieve a more integrated operating network for competitive rail freight; 3. NOTES that the Union rail network for competitive freight, formed by the rail freight corridors, has proven to be very effective in developing concerted actions and common measures among stakeholders in charge of operations, whilst facilitating, amongst other things, the enhancement of rail freightʼs resilience in the event of major crises and the implementation of necessary contingency measures; 4. RECOGNISING the work already accomplished by the rail freight corridors, WELCOMES the Member Statesʼ commitment to continue their cooperation with the European Commission and the coordinators of the TEN-T core network corridors, UNDERLINES the importance of developing further infrastructure capacity and the routes of the rail freight corridors in accordance with market requirements and customer needs, and ENCOURAGES strengthening the functioning of the rail freight corridors in a coordinated way focussing on the review and improvement of performance using harmonised key performance indicators, and on bundling all actors in the suppl chain;   **V. Networks and investment**   1. NOTES the fact that the TEN-T network has been extremely important for developing a coherent high-capacity interoperable rail network across the Union, and also for connecting it to ports, airports and road and inland waterway terminals. Although it has not been able to singlehandedly overcome the large asymmetries in rail network coverage and density, through the Connecting Europe Facility and other EU financing instruments the TEN-T network has allowed many Member States with smaller investment capacities to steadily, albeit slowly, upgrade their networks; 2. BEARING IN MIND the political aim of a climate-neutral economy, ACKNOWLEDGES that national budgets in many Member States remain strained from the previous economic crisis and the current one related to the pandemic, and that public investment in transport has remained barely at the level required to ensure maintenance; 3. STRESSES that the rail sector will need to make the best possible use of EU financing instruments. Railway transport infrastructure has been identified as the segment most in need of investment to finalise the TEN-T network and modernise the existing network. CALLS on Member States, accordingly, to use the resources being made available by the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-27 to enhance the competitiveness of the rail sector and support related investment in rail infrastructure; 4. UNDERLINES that systemic integration with other transport modes, including maritime, inland waterways, air transport and road transport, is essential to keep territories connected and achieve the modal shift. As a result, an increase in intermodal transfer opportunities, enlargement of the capacity of existing transfer and transhipment facilities, and better intermodal traffic management are necessary; 5. RECOGNISES that major investment is required in rolling stock, so as to make use of innovations, upgrade to new technical specifications, increase flexibility, safety and comfort, and diversify the service offer; 6. CALLS on the Commission to study and propose, as a matter of priority, European-level schemes to support rail operators , while also reviewing the rules for financial support offered by Member States with a view to their simplification. | **Putting Rail at the Forefront of Smart and Sustainable Mobility**  **-Draft Council conclusions-**  HAVING REGARD TO:   1. the European Council conclusions of 12 December 2019 in which the European Council endorsed the objective of achieving a climate-neutral European Union by 2050[[10]](#footnote-10); 2. the EU transport ministersʼ continued commitment to rail[[11]](#footnote-11), as expressed last year in   a) the political statement supporting a European agenda for international passenger rail presented at the informal video conference of EU transport ministers on 4 June 2020, and  b) the ministerial declaration on innovative transport in rail freight corridors of the Berlin conference on 21 September 2020;   1. the Commission communication of 9 December 2020 on a ʻSustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy – putting European transport on track for the futureʼ**[[12]](#footnote-12)**; 2. 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Commission Regulation (EU) No 1300/2014 of 18 November 2014 on the technical specifications for interoperability relating to accessibility of the Union's rail system for persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility; 8. Regulation (EU) No 283/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 on guidelines for trans-European networks in the area of telecommunications infrastructure 9. Article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)   THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION   1. NOTES that the EUʼs railway systems have undergone fundamental regulatory reforms through four legislative packages adopted in 2001, 2004, 2007 and 2016. WELCOMES the positive effects of these reforms in market opening and technical harmonisation that have been partially achieved and are partially awaited; 2. 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CALLS on the Commission to study and propose, as a matter of priority, European-level schemes to support rail operators , while also reviewing the rules for financial support offered by Member States with a view to their simplification and to propose new and revise existing legislation to ensure rail transport becomes more accessible for persons with disabilities so that all passengers can make a sustainable transport choice. |

# Document credits

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1. EUCO 29/19. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The transport ministers of Norway and Switzerland regularly participate. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. COM(2020) 789 final, ST 14012/20 + ADD1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. OJ L 437, 28.12.2020, p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. EESC TEN/727, ST 7614/21. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Railway provides for a low carbon footprint, low emissions, low land use, a long lifecycle of its rolling stock and it reduces congestion and increases air quality in urban areas. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Interpretative guidelines concerning Regulation (EC) No 1370/2007 on public passenger transport services by rail and by road, OJ C 92, 29.3.2014, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. COM(2019)640 final, ST 15051/19 + ADD 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. EUCO 29/19. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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