Making policy on the hoof

EUROPE: At the beginning of last year, we reported that the European Commission had failed to publish the draft proposals for its Fourth Railway Package before the end of 2013, amid suggestions that various member state governments were trying to water down the more controversial proposals for unbundling of infrastructure management and liberalising the operation of domestic passenger services.

Fast forward a year, and the package remains mired in the EU's complex legislative procedures. While the Council of Ministers has reached compromises on the safety and vehicle authorisation proposals, it has not yet addressed the unbundling and liberalisation pillars. Now all eyes are focused on the Transport & Tourism Committee of the European Parliament, which had been due to discuss the Fourth Railway Package in November and come up with recommendations to be put to a plenary vote in the parliament. But just hours before the meeting came the news that the committee had postponed its vote until December 17.

One of the reasons given for the postponement is the large number of amendments tabled by MEPs, these have been reported to exceed 2,000, although it can be assumed that many will cover the same points. Nevertheless, the rail industry associations are increasingly concerned that the proposals may be significantly altered without consultation in the search for a political compromise, as the committee is rumoured to be looking for a 'quick fix' by getting the package pushed through parliament before it is discussed for the European elections in May 2014.

CEIR hopes the compromise amendments would be conducive to the emergence of a Single European Railway Area that is open, flexible, and interoperable whilst allowing several governance models (p26). It wants to see greater flexibility in the tendering, direct award or in-house operation of Public Service Obligations, which should 'remain the legal and political responsibility of each competent authority'....