

## Rail Forum Europe addresses future challenges and funding for the European rail sector

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Rail transport has a great potential to be the backbone of the Single European Transport Area. However, a number of issues need to be solved at the technical and legislative level in order to fully unleash such potential. In particular, existing EU funding opportunities for rail should be efficiently used and alternative sources of financing should be explored as well. This was the main message from the first Rail Forum Europe dinner debate of the newly elected European Parliament on the subject of “Rail investments: status quo and future perspectives”, held in Strasbourg on 22 October and sponsored by UNIFE.

The new **RFE President Michael Cramer** introduced the RFE concept to new MEPs: *“We are here tonight because we believe in rail as a sustainable and efficient mode of transport for European citizens. At the same time, we are aware of a number of issues that the rail sector is currently facing. Rail Forum Europe plays an important role in bringing together all the stakeholders in the railway industry with politicians and keeping railway issues at the forefront of the political debate”*.

**UNIFE Director General Philippe Citroën** gave an overview of what the Global and European rail market today and the outlook for the next 5 years, based on the work of the recently published UNIFE World Rail Market Study. All in all, the market outlook for the rail supply industry remains positive for the upcoming years, as high order volumes are expected to continue from operators and infrastructure managers despite the fact that the economy has not completely recovered. Moreover, he put forward proposals to unleash the potential of rail transport. He added, *“The rail industry is resilient to economic ups and downs. However, a quick adoption of the technical pillar of the Fourth Railway package, investment in innovation along the lines of the Shift2Rail initiative, further deployment of ERTMS for true interoperability and better use of EU funds for rail are essential measures that must be taken to strengthen our sector for the benefit of European citizens”*.

**Olivier Onidi, DG MOVE Director for European Mobility Network** described the funding opportunities for rail under the Connecting Europe Facility and the EU Structural and Investment funds. In particular, the new TEN-T policy marks a fundamental change from a patchwork to a network approach, with ambitious infrastructure standards and common deadlines of 2030 and 2050 for the completion of the network. *“There is a wide range of funding opportunities for rail under the CEF and Structural Funds, in various areas of interest such as infrastructure, removal of bottlenecks, cross-border projects, ERTMS and rolling stock. It is up to Member States and rail stakeholders to make the best possible use of available funds”* he said.

Presentations were followed by a lively debate focussing on the issue of possible alternative sources of financing for rail projects, such as public private partnerships (PPPs).

**Wim van de Camp, Member of the European Parliament’s TRAN Committee** reminded the Commission about the EUR 300 billion investment plan promised by the new Commission President Mr. Juncker and wondered whether this plan will have an impact on transport projects.

**Christine Revault d’Allonnes Bonnefoy, Member of RFE and of the European Parliament’s TRAN Committee** called on the Commission to carefully assess the long-term economic relevance of PPPs.

**Lucy Anderson, Member of RFE and of the European Parliament’s TRAN Committee** outlined specific aspects that need to be addressed in rail transport: *“Interchanges and connections are as important as performing infrastructure and rolling stock in order to improve rail travel experience. Our main concern should be to properly spend public money to deliver for people”* she stated.

**Inmaculada Rodríguez-Piñero, Member of the European Parliament’s ITRE and INTA Committees**, stressed the need to work in coordination, thus linking transport to industrial and economic policies. *“In Spain PPPs were the only solution to invest without affecting public debt. However, PPPs turned out to be very costly. We need to change current European economic rules in order to invest without affecting public accounting”* she declared.

**Michael Cramer** thanked the participants and closed the dinner by highlighting the need to give priority to cross border sections with high European added value *“The Berlin-Wroclaw rail section is an example of a gap that can be closed with relatively little money and significant benefit for rail users”* he said.