

Rail Forum Europe seeks measures to smoothen international rail links

Members of the European Parliament and rail stakeholders gathered on 28 January in Brussels to discuss current issues related to international rail connections and possible solutions. The event was sponsored by the European Passengers' Federation (EPF).

EPF Chairman Trevor Garrod gave a summary on customers' expectations on European public transport, such as easy and reliable information, linked networks of public transport and integrated ticketing. He mentioned a number of cases where cross-border connections in Europe are rather problematic for various reasons related, for example, to old national rules or lack of cooperation between rail stakeholders. *"Barriers at borders should be broken down and customer satisfaction should be the top priority as the passengers are financing the railway-sector, both as a tax-payer and by paying fares. Both sides can benefit from an improved cross-border service. In this respect, existing and upcoming EU laws and initiatives, such as Shift2Rail and the Fourth Railway Package, should ensure cross-border services for all sorts of customers"* he said.

Karl Schambureck, Member of ProBahn Austria, described the issues of the Pontebbana-Meridionale across the Austrian-Slovenian-Italian borders. For example, only one Intercity train per day proceeds from Vienna to Venice, facing strong competition from bus services. The lack of cooperation between Italian, Slovenian and Austrian stakeholders is also the main reason for the poor intercity service between Vienna and Trieste via Ljubljana. *"In order to improve the current critical situation, a mediation of the European Union will be necessary,"* he concluded.

Patrizio Grillo, DG MOVE Acting Head of Unit for Single European Railway Area presented the legislative framework for international rail transport, starting from the Third Railway Package that entered into force on 1 January 2010. According to Commission figures, from 2010 to 2012, international rail passenger transport increased in 13 Member States, however the international segment represents just 6% of total rail passenger transport. *"The current negative trend for international rail links has various causes, such as the competitive pressure from low-cost air carriers, the lack of capacity and lengthy and costly procedures for rolling stock authorisation as well as remaining operational and administrative barriers. The Fourth Railway Package is meant to address several of these issues. The Commission also has adopted and will adopt implementing acts expected to facilitate international rail services. Moreover, Member States may award public service contracts for domestic sections of international services in coordination with the neighbouring authorities even on the basis of the existing PSO Regulation"* he said.

Lucy Anderson, Member of RFE and of the European Parliament's TRAN Committee emphasised the importance of all stakeholders campaigning for more action by Member States to prioritise international rail services. *"We need a concerted effort to ensure that governments give cross-border rail services the attention needed, including through taking advantage of EU funding and being prepared to ensure appropriate partnerships and public service obligations are in place"*.

Luc Aliadière (French FIF – Fédération des industries ferroviaires) highlighted that interoperability mostly depends on infrastructure and not on rolling stock. *"The Interoperability Directive of the*

4th Railway Package should address this issue” he declared. He added that the lack of capacity is a problem that should be reviewed by regulators in Member States.

Libor Lochman, Executive Director of CER, agreed that interoperable and high capacity infrastructure is the starting point for enhanced rail services and addressed the issue of intermodal competition. *“Unfair intermodal competition caused by different rules for infrastructure user charging, internalisation of external costs and taxation are hugely detrimental to international rail services”* he said.

Philippe Citroën, Director General of UNIFE, highlighted the urgency to adopt the Technical Pillar of the 4th Railway Package and start operations of the Shift2rail Joint Undertaking and called on the EU institutions to take into account the social and environmental importance of rail in the selection of projects that will be financed under the Juncker plan.

RFE President Michael Cramer thanked the participants and closed the breakfast by highlighting some good examples of issues that have been solved with little money on the German-Polish border. *“There is no real lack of money, but just lack of political will. I fear that the money allocated to the Juncker plan will be only used to finance big projects”* he concluded.

Rail Forum Europe will hold its next dinner event on 11 March 2015 in Strasbourg. On this occasion, the MEPs will address the upcoming review of the European Commission’s Transport White Paper.