

The rail industry is on the right track

The technical pillar of the 4th Railway Package is designed to reduce the technical obstacles that different national standards and procedures create for rail operators and rolling stock manufacturers.

The changes approved last April are the first part of the 4th Railway reform Package, which aims to boost performance and attract investment in the rail sector, encourage rail service quality improvements for passengers and boost the use of rail transport. Ultimately, it should also help to achieve EU emissions objectives for the transport sector.

by Elena Ilie

The ‘technical pillar’ of the 4th Railway Package covers updates to three important pieces of existing legislation. The aim of the changes is to cut administrative costs for rail operators and make it easier for new operators to enter the rail market. One of the main changes concerns the European Railway Agency (ERA). At the moment, it plays a key role in promoting interoperability and harmonising technical standards for the whole EU market. However, national technical and safety rules remain alongside the EU ones drafted by ERA, which creates unnecessary complexity for rail operators. The proposed revisions would make ERA the sole body responsible for issuing vehicle authorisations and safety certificates across the whole EU.

“Once again: we have to understand that this is much more than a mere ‘technical’ pillar, as if it was all about solving engineering puzzles. Rather, this legislation represents the major contribution to rail transport policy that we’ve seen

in years: once in force, the EU domestic and international markets will be truly open, and competition between operators and business models will truly be possible”, CER Executive Director Libor Lochman mentioned.

“It is important that the railway industry continues to push for greater competition and innovation”, ERA Executive Director, Josef Doppelbauer asserted.

Alongside the changes in responsibilities for ERA, the 4th railway package also includes updates to existing legislation on interoperability and rail safety. These changes aim to remove the remaining administrative and technical barriers to the creation of a single European rail area.

“This adoption is just a starting point; rail suppliers are already working intensively with ERA to ensure a smooth transition in three years and, more importantly, a swift and effective implementation of the Technical Pillar as of 2019”, UNIFE Director General Philippe Citroën commented after the vote.



Easier procedures

Authorisation procedures for new rail vehicles can currently take up to two years and cost up to EUR 6 million. Rail operators also have to pay the national safety authority for the cost of the approval process.

This makes it hard for new operators and new vehicle manufacturers to enter the market.

ERA is currently responsible for drafting EU technical specifications for interoperability (TSIs) and proposing safety methods and targets for rail safety. However, although there are harmonised standards, rail authorisations and safety certificates are still issued by member states.

Under the proposed changes, ERA would have sole responsibility for issuing authorisations for railway vehicles, safety certificates for railway operators and authorisations for trackside control-command and signalling systems. It would also have other new tasks, including monitoring national railway rules and the performance of national authorities in the areas of railway interoperability and safety; providing independent and objective technical support, mostly to the European Commission and a more important role in ensuring the consistent development of ERTMS.

A seamless rail system

The existing Interoperability Directive (No 57/2008) was introduced to ensure technical standardisation of rail networks and interoperability - a key factor in developing and establishing trans-European rail networks. The proposed changes establish a common approach to interoperability rules, which would increase economies of scale for rail operators. The changes would also speed up administrative procedures and therefore lower administrative costs. The revision would also bring the 2008 Directive in line with other elements of the 4th Railway Package.

In particular, the proposal includes a new provision in the technical standards for interoperability (TSIs) to cover existing subsystems. This also enables railway operators to check the compatibility between vehicles and routes where these vehicles will be operated. Other changes include clarification of the use of ERA opinions while pending

the amendment of TSIs after discovery of deficiencies; a new provision on vehicle authorisation for placing on the market and the clarification of the role of rail operators and infrastructure managers in checking the technical compatibility of a vehicle with a path.

Safer railways

The existing Safety Directive (No 29/2004) established a framework for railway safety but stopped short of introducing a single safety certificate. The 4th Railway Package proposes that the EU should move towards a single safety certificate, issued by ERA. This means that the 2004 Directive needs to be updated, to revise the role of the national safety authorities and reallocate responsibilities between them and ERA. The proposed changes also take into account recent changes in the rail market, and ensure correct safety monitoring and risk control measures are used.

In particular, the revised directive aims to facilitate the creation and implementation of a single EU safety certificate, while only granting access to railway infrastructure to rail operators with a safety certificate. For cross-border services, applications for safety certification and authorisation of locomotives and carriages will be made to ERA, says the text of the 4th Railway Package. For services within a member state, operators and manufacturers would be able to choose whether to apply either to the ERA or to the national authorities.

“This could be the breakthrough for the European Railway Area. We have managed to overcome separate national procedures and create EU-wide rules that will help industry to make trains cheaper and safer. Instead of 26 national procedures, manufacturers will be able to use just one procedure in Europe. The ERA will help overcome more than 11,000 national rules. This lays the foundation for the European Railway Area”, Michael Cramer, TRAN Committee chair and rapporteur for the railway safety directive believes.

“The European railway sector still faces continuous problems such as barriers to competition, discrimination and the lack of a dynamic business-friendly environment. The role of the new ERA will also be strengthened with regard to moving towards a system of truly transparent and impartial railway rules at Union level and a gradual reduction in national rules”, Roberts Zile, rapporteur for the European Railway Agency regulation said. For the European rail industry the technical pillar is of extreme importance. It will reform the way authorisations are issued in Europe and help create an internal market for rail products. With the Fourth Railway Package, the authorisation process in Europe would become more centralised, ensuring that common European procedures are followed across the EU. The European Railway Agency would become a one-stop-shop for multi-country authorisations, issuing authorisations for the entire intended area of use. In this process, the National Safety Authorities would continue to play a role.



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