

## Rail Freight: A key driver of Europe's competitiveness and security

**Rail freight industry leaders gathered with high-level representatives from Polish authorities and European institutions in Warsaw on 28 and 29 November to discuss the future of rail freight within the context of the current political agenda. Organised by the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) with the International Union of Railways (UIC) and hosted by PKP Cargo, the event highlighted the essential services rail freight offers, underscoring the need for recognition and support from decision-makers.**

The EU aims to advance the competitiveness of its economy by developing clean industries, strengthening the single market, and enhancing strategic autonomy in areas such as energy, technology, and defence. Efficient, resilient, and sustainable logistics chains are crucial to achieving both the European Green Deal's policy objectives and improving EU security, with rail freight expected to play a significant role. These points were emphasized by representative of the Polish Ministry of Infrastructure Adrian Mazur and NATO Assistant Secretary General for Executive Management Carlo Borghini during the event.

Good capacity management is key to enhance cross-border train efficiency, an area particularly crucial for freight, where 50% of movements are cross-border. With the EU Regulation on Capacity Management currently under revision in Brussels, discussions with MEP Tilly Metz – the Rapporteur in charge of the file in the European Parliament – and representatives from the Council and Commission highlighted the railway sector's priorities, which include making cross-border train circulation seamless, supporting a sustainable single market, clean industrial logistics, and the EU's defence objectives.

Discussion also underlined the role of Combined Transport, including a presentation of the latest market report by the sector. The ongoing revision of the EU Directive on Combined Transport is essential to establish the right incentives and freight CEOs welcomed the insights of MEP Flavio Tosi, the Rapporteur guiding the file through the EU Parliament. Strengthening coordination between non-road modes is crucial, with each mode valued for its unique benefits. Rail transport, with its extensive reach across the EU, must be recognised and work in harmony with road transport.

Developing the EU's defence industry and enhancing readiness for external threats were key topics. NATO's Mr Carlo Borghini and Colonel Gert Dobben from the EU External Action Service discussed with CEOs the crucial role of rail freight in supporting logistics, emphasizing the urgent need for the preparedness of transport services.

Looking ahead, the event also addressed improving rail services in the digital era, focusing on integrated digital services in rail freight. Full Digital Freight Trains will enhance efficiency, customer service, and safety standards for operations, the workforce, and society. A dedicated panel discussion highlighted the challenges of deploying digital technologies and the benefits of integrated data sharing within logistics chains.

Facts to consider:

- Rail is 9 times more CO<sub>2</sub>-efficient than road transport.
- Rail is 7 times more energy-efficient than road transport. This is of critical importance at a time when Europe is dependent on outside supply for 58% of its energy needs.
- One locomotive driver can replace up to 40 lorry drivers – a significant advantage considering the severe shortage of lorry drivers in Europe.
- Rail makes use of the low-carbon energy produced within the EU, and with an increasing contribution from renewables and other sources of low-emission electricity, providing zero-emission mobility for passengers and freight already today.
- The European Rail Industry is a benchmark worldwide and strengthens the EU's competitiveness and strategic autonomy on technology.

**CER Executive Director Alberto Mazzola** said: *"This annual High-Level Meeting is a unique forum for freight CEOs. The 2024 event offered an excellent opportunity to address the significant challenges in the EU's political agenda and the key developments needed for rail freight. Rail freight and its diverse services must be recognised, promoted, and supported to achieve a strengthened, sustainable, and interconnected Single Market. Clean and decarbonised logistics chains are vital for enhancing Europe's competitiveness, strategic autonomy, security, and defence. We are extremely pleased with the high level of representation at the event, which greatly enriched our discussions."*

**UIC Director General François Davenne** said *"The UIC-CER High-Level Freight Forum stands as a unique platform for collaboration among rail freight leaders, addressing the sector's most pressing challenges and opportunities. Rail freight is not merely a mode of transport but a cornerstone for achieving sustainable, resilient, and interconnected global logistics. By aligning our efforts at forums like this, we amplify our collective impact and ensure rail freight remains at the forefront of solutions for decarbonisation, digital transformation, and economic growth. The dialogue and commitments forged here today will shape the strategic priorities for rail freight in the years to come, reinforcing its role as a driver of sustainability and competitiveness."*

**PKP Cargo CEO Marcin Wojewódka** said *"I am delighted that we were able to host this year's high-level meeting for freight CEOs. Especially since it takes place just before Poland takes over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It is good that we managed to touch on so many topics for rail freight transport. I would like to add that combined transport plays a very important role for PKP CARGO, this is the area which we are most interested to develop and strengthen, which is why we are waiting with great hope for the amendments to the directive on combined transport. We hope that the Polish Presidency, with the support of all EU institutions, will take a big step in this direction."*

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**About CER**

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) brings together around 70 railway undertakings, their national associations as well as infrastructure managers and vehicle leasing companies. The membership is

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made up of long-established bodies, new entrants and both private and public enterprises, representing 78% of the rail network length, 81% of the rail freight business and about 94% of rail passenger operations in EU, EFTA and EU accession countries. CER represents the interests of its members towards EU policymakers and transport stakeholders, advocating rail as the backbone of a competitive and sustainable transport system in Europe. For more information, visit [e](#) or follow us on Twitter [@CER\\_railways](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

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### About UIC

UIC is the worldwide organisation for the promotion of rail transport at a global level and collaborative development of the railway system. It brings together some 200 members on all 5 continents, among them rail operators, infrastructure managers, railway service providers, etc. UIC maintains close cooperation links with all actors in the rail transport domain around the world, including manufacturers, railway associations, public authorities and stakeholders in other domains and sectors whose experiences may be beneficial to rail development. UIC's main tasks include understanding the business needs of the rail community, developing innovation programmes to identify solutions to those needs, as well as preparing and publishing a series of documents such as reports, specifications, guidelines and IRS that facilitate the implementation of the innovative solutions. For more information, visit [www.uic.org](http://www.uic.org) or follow us on [LinkedIn](#).