



CEO Summit

Declaration
on the Role of Railway
in the New Era

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Europe is entering a new era marked by profound and interconnected challenges. Energy security has become an urgent issue amid global instability and digital transformation is reshaping industries and societies at an unprecedented pace. Geopolitical tensions and emerging security threats further amplify the need for infrastructure that is resilient, adaptable, and strategically aligned with Europe's long-term objectives. We are experiencing real impacts of global warming and climate adaptation has become an imperative for entire sectors of the EU economy. Meanwhile, transport demand continues to grow.

Both the report by Mario Draghi on European competitiveness (December 2024) and the report by Enrico Letta on the future of the Single Market (April 2024) place transport — particularly rail — at the core of the EU's economic resilience and strategic autonomy. Both reports underline the essential contribution of rail to the European Single Market, highlight the key role of international and high-speed connections, and emphasise that completing the Trans-European Network – Transport (TEN-T) and accelerating ERTMS deployment are preconditions for competitiveness in a continent-sized market. Importantly, both reports converge in treating transport not as a sectoral policy, but as a foundational enabler of growth, strategic autonomy, and the deepening of the Single Market.

Especially in times of crisis — whether caused by natural disasters, pandemics, or geopolitical upheavals — railway has consistently proven its ability to maintain essential services. This resilience underscores railway's strategic importance for Europe's security and connectivity. Our vision is to make railway the preferred choice for both passenger and freight transport by ensuring a high quality of service, efficiency, sustainability, interoperability, and resilience.

In this context, railway stands out as a mode of transport uniquely suited to addressing these challenges. It combines energy efficiency, environmental sustainability, and operational resilience, offering comprehensive mobility solutions that serve both civilian and defence needs. With an economic footprint of EUR 247 billion and 3.2 million European jobs, combined with its indispensable role in the geopolitical situation Europe currently finds itself in, it is imperative that rail transport receives clear and decisive prioritisation in the ongoing negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034.

We, as European rail CEOs, reaffirm that rail transport is essential for achieving the EU's connectivity, resilience and climate goals.

- Rail infrastructure is a fundamental driver of Europe's industrial competitiveness. The rail network contributes significantly to the performance and dynamics of both national and European economies.
- Interoperability in the rail sector is a cornerstone for achieving a seamless, efficient, and sustainable European transport network. It guarantees that trains, infrastructure, and operational procedures across different countries and regions are fully compatible, enabling cross-border services without technical or administrative barriers. By harmonising technical standards, interoperability reduces costs, improves safety, and enhances competitiveness.

- Railway is crucial to achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal and the EU's commitment to climate neutrality by 2050. As the most energy-efficient mode of land transport, railway significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions compared to road and air transport. Investment in sustainable rail infrastructure is therefore not only an environmental imperative but also a strategic economic choice.
- The Fourth Railway Package represents a milestone in creating a single European railway area. Its consistent implementation is essential to ensure a level playing field, transparent access conditions, and regulatory stability while balancing market opening with the preservation of resilient and integrated railway structures.
- The TEN-T forms the backbone of Europe's connectivity and economic integration. It is critical to complete the TEN-T network to ensure seamless cross-border mobility for passengers and freight. This requires sufficient funding for the rail sector, particularly within the framework of the Connecting Europe Facility.
- The European Commission's High-Speed Rail Plan underlines the strategic importance of connecting EU capitals and major hubs via European transport corridors, increasing capacity and frequencies, reducing travel times, and fostering the exchange of best practices on funding models. Within the upcoming EU Financing Strategy, innovative schemes, such as regulated asset base model (RAB) and Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), should be further explored in order to mobilise third-party investment complementary to public funding and bundled at scale to meet the EU's ambitions for rail transport.
- The Regulation on the use of railway infrastructure capacity in the single European railway area, expected to enter into force this year, will transform planning processes with the first timetable under the new regime due to be introduced in December 2030. Its successful implementation will be decisive in determining both the effectiveness of the Regulation and the extent of additional capacity it ultimately delivers for rail freight and passenger services.
- The EU framework for military mobility published in November 2025 sets ambitious goals for rapid, secure, and interoperable transport of military forces and equipment, requiring infrastructure and rolling stock adapted to dual use and resilient against cyber and hybrid threats.
- As also highlighted in the context of the Danish Presidency conference on 'Making rail competitive by cutting technical and administrative costs through European harmonisation and deployment', there is an urgent need to enhance rail's competitiveness through harmonised technical solutions, reduction of national specificities, and streamlined administrative processes with simplified rules.

While significant progress has already been made, challenges remain in ensuring technological harmonisation, interoperability, resilience and capacity management across Member States. Therefore, we call on the EU and national decision makers to take coordinated action in five strategic areas:

Funding adequacy and predictability

- Secure dedicated and ring-fenced funding for rail within the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034, ensuring that budgetary allocations reflect the contribution of the transport sector. Complement the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) with additional ring-fenced funding windows under instruments such as the National Reform and Partnership Plans (NRPP) and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) to meet rail investment needs.
- Guarantee predictable and stable funding for TEN-T and other strategic rail investments by establishing binding earmarking for transport across all relevant EU instruments. Ensure that long-term rail infrastructure is not disadvantaged by an excessive shift from grants to financial instruments, as such reliance reduces budgetary certainty for capital-intensive long-lead projects and risks delaying the timely implementation of core European transport corridors. Strengthen the use of grants where needed to secure planning stability and enable Member States to advance critical cross-border and high-capacity rail infrastructure.
- Provide funding of military mobility within the upcoming MFF and CEF for further improvements of rail infrastructure including the removal of bottlenecks, its assets and rolling stock to help the military mobility convoy move more easily without undermining funding for civilian purpose of rail infrastructure.
- Ensure, with regard to the High-Speed Master Plan, the practical use of European funding instruments together with various funding models including blended-finance structures to maximise the delivery.
- Establish a dedicated successor programme for the EU-RAIL Joint Undertaking (EU-RAIL) within the next MFF in form of an institutionalised partnership ensuring tangible and measurable results.

Military mobility

- Establish uniform rules and standards for military mobility across Europe to improve rail capability to handle military transport demands.
- Guarantee the involvement of and coordination by infrastructure managers in capacity allocation and digital information management for military transport.
- Provide greater coordination between infrastructure managers and network access points (e.g. terminals, logistics hubs) to facilitate cross-border military transit.
- Establish that only newly acquired capabilities funded through dedicated EU programs are subject to mandatory inclusion in the Solidarity Pool.
- Further continue with the concept of Military Mobility Corridors including single infrastructure standards which shall be detailed in Chapter III of the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing a framework of measures to facilitate the transport of military equipment, goods and personnel across the Union.
- Provide funding within the upcoming MFF (see chapter on Funding adequacy and predictability above).

- Integrate military mobility requirements directly into the civilian rail system by ensuring that dual-use needs are met through a robust, high-performance and resilient civilian rail infrastructure, rather than by developing separate military-specific assets. Large-scale, heavy and rapid military transport must build on the strength of the overall civilian network.
- Set up clear and consistent requirements for military transport scenarios, which are necessary to avoid fragmentation and delays, while ensuring adequate compensation mechanisms for railways to cover financial detriment (e.g. short notice cancellation of train paths).

High-speed rail development

- Make progress on the completion of TEN-T network including high-speed rail network and ensure its operation with modern interoperable high-speed trains without undermining upgrade and modernisation of the conventional network and the completion of the TEN-T network.
- Ensure seamless integration of high-speed rail with international, national, regional and local transport systems to guarantee time savings along the entire travel corridor including smart solutions for saturated network bottlenecks and nodes.
- Recognise the need to accelerate passenger cross border (including high-speed) service development on the existing network or on the existing network with minor adjustments. This will already deliver short-term benefits for passengers and also improve business cases for future large-scale investments, such as high-speed ones.
- Achieve true interoperability to allow seamless cross-border travel by optimising the use of technical requirements set by the current TSIs.
- Implement the European Action Plan. The high-speed rail shall be perceived as a set of projects of European significance connecting cities across countries. The projects' parameters may go beyond national needs to fulfil the requirement of competitive connection, which requires full interoperability.
- Ensure the practical use of European funding instruments (see chapter on Funding adequacy and predictability above).

Balance of rail freight and passenger transport development

- Ensure that capacity planning and infrastructure development systematically take freight and passenger transport needs into account to support modal shift and strengthen Europe's logistics resilience.
- Create a fair and balanced competitive environment between transport modes by internalising external costs, ensuring that all modes pay for infrastructure use, phasing out disproportionate tax advantages, and providing targeted support to Single Wagon Load and Combined Transport services.
- Support the general simplification of regulatory and approval procedures at both national and EU level to enable a flexible business environment.

- Safeguard rail freight and combined transport objectives by preventing inconsistencies between the Weights & Dimensions framework and EU intermodal policy, which could shift traffic back to road and weaken existing logistics chains.

Interoperability and Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSIs)

- Maintain stability and backward compatibility of TSI specifications, which is crucial for long-term planning and investment security.
- Set cost efficiency as a paramount objective for the evolution of TSIs and other regulations, introducing new requirements only when a robust cost-benefit analysis demonstrates a clear and measurable improvement in the efficiency of the rail sector.
- Ensure a truly integrated European rail system through solutions that are harmonised and focused on mature specifications.
- Rationalise planning and implementation roadmaps, taking into account the available financial, technological, and supplier resources both at governmental and sectoral levels.
- Strengthen the role of the European Commission in ensuring appropriate specifications and effective coordination of ETCS deployment across Member States, ensure backward compatibility for ETCS, speed up the transition to FRMCS, and deliver the promised benefits such as interoperability and cost reduction.
- Ensure the conditions and resources for the timely deployment of ETCS enhanced with FRMCS functionalities as well as further digital innovations such as the Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC) and Digital Capacity Management (DCM).

We herewith invite all stakeholders – national authorities, EU institutions, and industry partners – to collaborate in delivering these priorities. Together, through coordinated action, we will build a rail system that is safe, secure, efficient, interoperable, and future-ready – serving both civilian and defence needs while driving Europe’s green and digital transition.

Declaration on the Role of Railway in the New Era was agreed upon in Prague on 31 March 2026.