

Strengthening Europe's Port-Rail Interface

Joint position of CER and ESPO

Europe's ports and railways are key components of the European transport system. Together, they connect Europe to global markets, support industry and territorial cohesion, and contribute to the functioning of the internal market. In the current geopolitical, economic and climate context, strong and efficient port-rail connectivity is important for Europe's competitiveness, resilience, military mobility and sustainability. Building on their long-standing cross-modal cooperation, CER and ESPO set out shared priorities to strengthen the port-rail interface, unlocking the potential for rail to increase its contribution to port hinterland transport while improving overall logistics performance.

(1) **Simplification of regulatory framework to adapt to the port-rail interface**

specificities: The operational reality of the port-rail interface deviates from that of the national rail network, with significantly lower train travel speed, mainly freight runs with only few passenger trains and a large proportion of shunting runs. As a result, the port-rail area has different operational and infrastructural needs, which should be reflected in the legal regime applicable to the port-rail interface. In light of the Commission's current pursuit of simplification of EU policies and laws, **CER and ESPO therefore jointly call on the EU legislators to examine together with sector experts to what extent the existing European rail regulatory framework and requirements applicable specifically to the port-rail interface could be simplified**, without undermining safety and interoperability of the operations. The aim of such simplification efforts must be to improve the efficiency and operational effectiveness of rail operations to, from and within ports, without introducing additional administrative or regulatory requirements that would undermine the objective of simplification. Such a simplified legislative framework that takes into account the specificities of the port-rail area can be instrumental in improving the port-rail interface.

(2) **Better coordination between port - rail ecosystems:** Infrastructural bottlenecks and operational challenges at the port-rail interface continue to affect efficiency, capacity and reliability. These often result from fragmented planning, complex interfaces between actors, different IT-systems, limited data exchange and last-mile cost challenges. Successfully identifying and addressing these shared challenges requires **closer coordination between the port and rail ecosystems, with a joint commitment from all key players**, including port authorities, infrastructure managers, rail freight undertakings and terminal operators. Priority actions include better coordinated planning and investment, streamlined operational

frameworks, and enhanced digitalization, including data sharing and standardized IT systems, to support planning, predictability and operations to and within ports.

(3) A coherent European framework and adequate funding: Strengthening rail connections in the port hinterland, including the rail lines linking ports with inland corridors, as well as the port-rail interface, requires a coherent European policy and funding framework that is aligned with transport, industrial, security, resilience and climate objectives. EU instruments including the TEN-T, the Connecting Europe Facility and Military Mobility funding are key to support investments with European added value. In the context of the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework, it is essential to ensure sufficient EU budget for transport and a strong Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) with a budget of at least €100 billion, as widely supported by the European transport sector. Adequate EU grants remain indispensable to address infrastructure gaps, strengthen dual-use readiness and support projects with high European added value. Priorities include recognising the importance of the rail-port interface and the port hinterland, in EU policies, ensuring substantial dedicated EU funding and prioritising relevant projects to address capacity, connectivity and resilience needs, while recognising the diversity of European ports and operational contexts.

As such, strengthening the port-rail interface is instrumental to Europe's strategic objectives. Ports and railways need to function as a coordinated system to support efficient and resilient supply chains and seamless connectivity. EU policy can and should support ports and railways to make this happen. CER and ESPO will continue to deepen their cooperation, to promote a more coherent approach to port-rail connectivity and are ready to work constructively with EU institutions.

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 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 www.cer.be or follow [@CER_railways](https://twitter.com/CER_railways) on X or [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cer).

About ESPO: The European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) represents the port authorities, port associations and port administrations of the seaports of 22 Member States of the European Union including Norway at political level. ESPO has also observer members in Albania, Iceland, Israel, Montenegro, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. ESPO is the principal interface between the European seaport authorities and the European institutions. In addition to representing the interests of European ports, ESPO is a knowledge network which brings together professionals from the port sector and national port organisations. ESPO was created in 1993. For more information, visit www.espo.be or follow [@ESPOSecretariat](https://twitter.com/ESPOSecretariat) on X or [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/espo).