

Press Release – Developments of Rail Infrastructure Fees Have Potential to Undermine Europe’s Modal Shift Objectives

26 June 2023

Over the past months, many Infrastructure Managers have presented plans to revise fees such as cancellation fees, parking fees and quality penalties throughout Europe. It must be recognized that, like Track Access Charges, such fees have a direct role to play in growing rail freight volumes. It is essential that infrastructure charging fees, including cancellation fees, are proportional, fair and do not undermine rail freight’s growth potential.

Today, rail freight undertakings need to book buffer capacity which may need to be cancelled or park trains due to delays. This is because of global supply chains disruptions (particularly in continental and maritime traffic) and the unreliability of many rail networks due to extensive construction works and traffic interruptions. Rail Undertakings need to react with flexibility to preserve trains and to act in a manner to be adaptable to meeting customer needs. Strongly increased cancellation fees being proposed by DB Netz in Germany for 2024, increased parking costs by ProRail in the Netherlands in 2023, the introduction of quality penalties at Italian border stations by RFI, to name but a few, will have a direct impact on how rail freight functions.

Sharp increases in these fees, without taking into consideration market needs, will make rail freight less flexible or may lead to a situation where railway undertakings only book capacity in short-term bookings. This will make it more difficult for infrastructure managers to plan rerouting effectively in the case of works and may make an already difficult situation worse.

The proposed changes in fees are also not reciprocal. There is no requirement for railway undertakings to be compensated in the event of a route being cancelled – even at short notice.

Whilst commercial conditions have a positive role to play in incentivizing efficient booking of capacity, there is a need for infrastructure managers to accept the reality that during the current period it has become nearly impossible to keep timetables due to the above-mentioned reasons.

ERFA President, Dirk Stahl, stated, “modal shift is not just the responsibility of railway undertakings, but also infrastructure managers and policy makers. We fail to see how increasing cancellation fees under current conditions, without any reciprocity, will have a positive impact on the European Union’s modal shift objectives. A change of approach is needed.”

For more information, you can Contact:

European Rail Freight Association asbl, info@erfarail.eu, Tel +32 470 11 66 46;
Rue Montoyer 39, B-1000 Brussels ; Reg nr. 0478.440.721. Belgian official gazette 26.11.2007



ERFA Secretary General, Conor Feighan, concluded, *“whilst these are domestic decisions, namely by national infrastructure managers, they have a European impact. Over 50% of European rail freight crosses at least one border. Any change to national fees and charges will have a direct impact beyond domestic traffic.”*