POSITION PAPER – 22 June 2022

Better Management and Coordination of Cross-border Rail Traffic

Summary

The European Union's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy has set ambitious targets for the growth of rail freight – namely an increase in volumes of 50% by 2030 and a doubling of volumes by 2050. These objectives need to be viewed in the context of stagnant growth in the European rail freight market over the past decade of roughly 18% of modal share for rail freight - and in some Member States under 10%.

A significant reason behind the lack of growth of the rail freight market is due to how railway capacity is allocated today. Capacity planning at a national level is understandable from a passenger traffic perspective – given that most passenger traffic is domestic – whereas the opposite is true for large and growing rail freight markets such as intermodal traffic. It is also usually very unclear how traffic is prioritised in cases of disturbances or works on a network.

It should be recognised that good work is being carried out by Infrastructure Managers and Railway Undertakings on the Redesign of the International Timetabling Process (TTR), but there remains a required effort over the long term to ensure that fundamental rights of allocation and management of capacity are also enshrined in European Union legislation.

In light of the above, ERFA believes steps should be taken at European level to ensure better management and coordination of cross-border rail traffic. Particular focus should be paid towards:

- **Commonly agreed rules on capacity management and how to prioritise traffic;**
- **Creation of a framework for capacity allocation in the event of disturbances;**
- **Simplification of booking international capacity.**

Commonly Agreed Rules on Capacity Management and how to Prioritise Traffic

There are currently few, if any rules, on how infrastructure managers develop timetables and train paths. For rail freight, this leads to difficulties given that there is little transparency on how train paths are developed, when and where international traffic is taken into consideration and what priority this traffic has in the development of train paths. Although the creation of one single body which manages timetables

and train paths is unrealistic, binding rules on how this process should take place in a **standardised** and **coordinated** manner, in line with the provisions agreed upon in the TTR Project, is required.

Railway Undertakings need legal certainty on how capacity will be managed given that rail freight traffic is often reliant on capacity allocation by numerous infrastructure managers. This should be achieved through guaranteed capacity for rail freight which is predictable, secured and reflects the diverse nature of rail freight planning – namely that this capacity should remain available for rolling planning.

Crucially, for rail freight to increase in reliability, it is necessary that clear priority rules are set to ensure that the train on time, be it a freight train or passenger train, has its slot respected and is treated with priority. For rail freight to be able to operate seamlessly across borders, it is essential that there are simple and clear rules at European level establishing how capacity is allocated and what trains get priority on the network.

There should be a European layer for regulatory supervision which acts as a means of escalation for when railway undertakings are faced with continued non-compliance with newly introduced rules regarding coordination on planning and management of capacity.

Creation of a Framework for Capacity Allocation in the Event of Disturbances

Whereas Annex VII of Directive 2012/34 sets out rules for coordination between infrastructure managers on temporary capacity restrictions and subsequent communication on capacity limitations, there is no requirement to further clarify how diversion routes are developed and how users should be consulted on temporary capacity restrictions and subsequent operations. In managing capacity in cases of disturbances, there should be equal rights for freight and passenger train in the planning phase regarding restrictions and capacity loss.

In terms of larger works, the relevant infrastructure managers should establish a working body which involves Railway Undertakings for the approval of works, including agreements on diversionary routes, in cases where it is foreseen there will be disruptions of more than 50% of rail capacity. This should include infrastructure managers from neighbouring countries where appliable as, in some cases, using limited capacity in neighbouring Member States may assist in traffic flows.

Although it is welcome that provisions exist on how coordination should take place on the planning of temporary capacity restrictions, it is also essential that this is extended to include the creation of diversionary routes so as to ensure works impact train runs as little as possible.

Simplification of booking international capacity

Regulation 913/2010 introduced the concept of Pre-arranged Paths (PaPs) for rail freight traffic. This was a welcome initiative which ensure capacity for rail freight could be booked in advance. However, the success of PaPs has been limited for a number of reasons. PaPs cannot therefore be viewed as a solution to rail freight capacity needs.

Although pre-arranged paths have an important role to play, they do not reflect the needs of rail freight. Unlike passenger traffic, it is difficult to plan freight flows over one year in advance as customer needs change. Therefore, as referred to earlier, capacity needs to be guaranteed for rail freight which allows for rolling planning and ad hoc solutions.

The booking of this capacity should be simplified through interoperable national systems using Digital Capacity Management (DCM). In the short term, this can be assisted by improving language competences on the side of infrastructure manager staff but over the long-time digitalisation of all capacity services in a standardised manner will be essential. It must be possible for railway undertakings to reserve capacity at short notice using only one interface.