

Proposal for a Regulation concerning the European rail network for competitive freight

Questions/Answers

1) Why develop a European rail network for competitive freight?

Rail freight, for which international activity represents 50% of total activity, will not be able to develop if the rail infrastructure does not deliver a better service to freight operators. The Commission proposes therefore the creation of a European rail network for competitive freight, consisting of international corridors. This option was preferred to the creation of dedicated rail freight corridors, which was judged to be over-sized, too expensive and take too long to be implemented.

2) What are the principal guidelines of the proposed Regulation?

The creation of international corridors has three principal objectives: to strengthen cooperation between rail infrastructure managers as regards both investments and the management of capacities and traffic; to guarantee to freight trains appropriate treatment in terms of allocation on lines that cater also to passenger trains; to allow the development of multimodality, in particular in ports. The Member States define together the corridors they wish to create. Their projects are validated at Community level. The creation of a corridor is accompanied by the setting up of a governance structure in charge of supervising the creation of the corridor and the services that it provides.

3) How does this initiative fit in with all the other actions carried out at the community level?

This proposal supplements current initiatives and provisions, such as the trans-European networks program and the Community legislation on rail freight transport. It builds on the "ERTMS corridors" initiative and the actions carried out by the infrastructure managers under RailNetEurope.

4) Why a legislative proposal? Would a voluntary approach not be more appropriate and coherent with the dynamics of the internal market?

The idea of creating international freight corridors is already old. To date, however, few initiatives have been undertaken to carry out them. Certain stakeholders, extensively consulted by the Commission, judge that it is time for the Community to provide a stronger impetus so that such corridors finally materialize and so that trains can better compete with trucks. In addition, the Commission carried out an impact assessment showing that a legislative initiative would produce the most significant results. Lastly, similar legislative actions have already been carried out in the fields of electricity and air transport.

5) What are the costs and risks?

The principle of this initiative is to optimise the use of the existing freight network at a European scale. The proposed measures will generate set-up costs (primarily due to coordination and modification of procedures). But they should allow at the same time to produce benefits, for example via increased freight competitiveness and better planning of investments.

6) *Why define a category of priority freight trains and not give the same advantages to all freight trains?*

The priority freight trains will transport very time-sensitive goods, which need efficient transport and guaranteed punctuality. This transport is often currently carried out by road because rail cannot guarantee a sufficient performance level. With limited rail capacities, it is difficult to offer the same performance level to all trains, including those which do not require it.

7) *By giving more priority to freight, what will be the impact on passenger trains?*

One of the principal stakes of this initiative is to allow priority freight trains to have guarantees in terms of service provided by the infrastructure. This is essential to enable them to gain in competitiveness with respect to trucks. In the very vast majority of the Member States, such guarantees exist today only for passenger trains. The Commission thus proposes to rebalance the situation and – on the international corridors for competitive freight – to grant a better treatment to priority freight trains versus what they currently receive.

The impact of this measure on services to passengers should be limited because the proposed measures leave considerable room for manoeuvre to the infrastructure managers regarding the implementation of this “improved treatment”.

The aim of this proposal is not to increase journey times for passengers but to reduce the cumulative journey times of freight trains and passenger trains.

8) *Does this initiative contribute to the development of competition between freight operators?*

Freight operators will be able to benefit from a wider and better quality offer of slots. The transparency as regards informing operators on the terms of use of infrastructure will be improved. The competitiveness of rail should also be improved. Moreover, candidates other than rail companies or their umbrella organisations will also be allowed to request slots on the corridor, as it is already the case in certain countries. All this should allow the development of competition between freight operators and, on the whole, of the supply of rail freight transport.

9) *What are the competences of the governance structure?*

The governance structure of each corridor, which brings together the concerned infrastructure managers and strategic terminals managers, will be in charge of the development and monitoring of measures aimed at the creation of the corridor and its operation. It will thus mainly be a coordination structure, whereas the infrastructure managers maintain their individual competences as regards e.g. investments and management of capacities.

10) *Does more coordination mean more bureaucracy?*

The corridor structure can be very light. The strengthening of coordination between infrastructure managers, strategic terminal managers, and operators should lead to better use of the infrastructure. It is interesting to point out that the impact assessment carried out by the

Commission showed that the additional costs generated by this reinforcement should be compensated by the savings made by railway companies.

11) How will the creation of international corridors lead to the creation of a European network?

The approach proposed by the Commission is based on the one hand on obligations for the infrastructure managers and Member States as regards the creation of corridors, and on the other hand on their proposals for the choice of corridors. It is thus both a bottom-up and a top-down approach.

To achieve a coherent network of corridors, the Commission proposes two things: selecting the corridors according to predefined criteria and a so-called ‘comitology’ procedure – inviting regularly all infrastructure managers to examine the progress made on the corridors, the difficulties encountered, the possible inconsistencies, and to exchange best practices. The Commission can in addition stimulate the creation of this network by encouraging, at the highest level, the Member States to coordinate and create the corridors necessary for competitive freight.