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EUROPEAN RAIL FREIGHT VISION 2025

RFF meets with the EU Transport Commissioner to discuss rail freight's role and future challenges



On 26 February 2025, five CEOs of the RailFreightForward (RFF) coalition had a productive meeting with EU Transport Commissioner Apostolos Tzitzikostas to emphasise the crucial role of rail freight within the transport logistics chain.

During the meeting, RailFreightForward shared insights into the realities of managing rail freight companies today and discussed strategies for a successful, sustainable future. Sigrid Nikutta, RFF Chair and CEO of DB Cargo stated, *“We need, and we want a renaissance of rail! And we must act now to achieve it. Because without action, there is a real threat that rail freight will no longer exist.”*

Rail freight has proven essential to Europe’s economy, connecting supply and demand across numerous industrial sectors. As the most sustainable, energy-efficient, and CO₂-reducing mode of transport, rail freight is regarded as the future-proof solution for freight transport in Europe.

Bernard Gustin, Chair of Lineas, emphasised that, *“Rail is the backbone of industry and a key driver for the Clean Industrial Deal by connecting the EU hinterland with the main EU ports. With half of all freight trains being international, Europe needs to play a stronger role in coordinating the implementation of the ERTMS security system and the financing of the locomotive on-board units.”*

The sector faces multiple challenges, such as a lack of high-quality cross-border infrastructure capacity, an uneven economic level playing field, and investments in digital solutions.

Clients demand high-quality, reliable, and cost-effective services, and it is the responsibility of the entire sector to meet those expectations, with Frédéric Delorme, CEO of Rail Logistics Europe, emphasising to Commissioner Tzitzikostas that, *“In order to be attractive compared to road transport and for private investors, rail freight truly needs good and reliable capacity on the rail network, especially for international traffic. Freight, passenger, and infrastructure works should be optimised at European level.”*

In addition, Clemens Först, CEO of Rail Cargo Group noted that, *“Besides capacity, rail needs an economic playing field level to that of the roads. First, the state aid guidelines should allow 100% compensation for both the external and infrastructure-use cost differences, as well as direct grants for investment in new rolling stock. Second, the big sector projects like ERTMS and DAC need EU co-funding. Third, the Weights & Dimensions Directive needs to consider rail-road interoperability. The Weights & Dimensions Directive needs to set conditions to favor modal shift through better rail road interoperability instead of focusing on the sole development of road with megatrucks that are largely rejected by the EU citizens.”*



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RailFreightForward highlighted the need for greater European cooperation, with Henrik Dahlin, CEO of Green Cargo saying, *"To boost Europe's competitiveness, we must ensure sufficient capacity and remove barriers to cross-border rail freight. The Train Driver Directive, standardised rules, and digital licenses are key steps toward a more efficient railway sector. Climate-smart freight transport supports both business and sustainability. Running a train through Europe should be as easy as driving a truck – let's make it happen."*

As a conclusion, RailFreightForward asked the EU transport Commissioner for:

- Clear and sufficient EU funding for **investment in the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) and Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC)**. This is why we need a stronger role of Europe in the coordination of the implementation of the ERTMS (On Board Units).
- A **basic network for military mobility** with increased public funding and greater availability of suitable rolling stock and personnel.
- A **Capacity management framework** with clear commercial conditions and key performance indicators (KPIs) aimed at maximising availability.
- A **move towards harmonising** the national additional requirements for the European driving license while maintaining a high level of safety.

RailFreightForward is a coalition of European rail freight companies that are committed to drastically reducing the negative impact of freight transport on the environment through innovation and an intelligent transport mix. The coalition aims to increase the modal share of rail freight in Europe as the better macro-economic solution for European growth.

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