Press release

Brussels, 10 June 2026

Railways call for EU budget to support local opportunity through enhanced regional connectivity

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) is urging EU decision makers to ensure that the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) becomes a delivery tool for Europe's emerging Right to Stay Strategy, designed to help Europeans thrive in the places they call home. As a partner in the SGI Europe Freedom to Stay coalition, CER presented its recent joint declaration to European Commission Executive Vice-President Raffaele Fitto, highlighting the essential role of rail and other services of general interest (SGIs) and calling for coherence across EU regulatory and investment frameworks. Mr Fitto confirmed that investment in infrastructure and in railways should have a place in National and Regional Partnerships Plans.

The Freedom to Stay agenda complements the EU's ambition to revitalise a Single Market that works for all regions. Its purpose is to ensure that citizens can benefit from EU integration and build their future wherever they choose to live, without being compelled to relocate due to a lack of opportunity. Access to essential services such as rail transport, which provides reliable connectivity within and between regions, is crucial to giving citizens a genuine choice between staying in their area or pursuing prospects elsewhere.

Recognising the role of service providers is vital, but recognition alone is not enough. To be effective, the Right to Stay Strategy must be backed by concrete support in wider EU policy and investment priorities. Maintaining rail infrastructure, linking regions by high-speed lines, digitalising operations and modernising services all require sustained investment and stable, long-term funding. The Right to Stay Strategy and the next MFF must therefore reinforce one another.

A coherent combination of three MFF instruments can make a decisive difference for rail services:

- **A strong Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)** as a dedicated, predictable EU transport fund supporting the rail links, corridors, cross-border connections, digitalisation and interoperability projects foreseen in the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).
- **Well-designed National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs)** that prioritise the everyday rail infrastructure (like regional lines, stations, commuter services and last-mile connections) linking smaller cities, rural areas and peripheral regions to jobs, education and essential services.
- **A European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) that recognises connected territories as competitive territories**, with a clear share of resources channelled to rail investment to support local economies, labour mobility, tourism, industrial value chains and regional attractiveness.

CER presented its recommendations to European Commission Executive Vice-President Raffaele Fitto, who is preparing the EU's Right to Stay Strategy, and calls on all EU

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legislators negotiating Europe's next budgetary framework (2028-2034) to adopt a consistent, mutually reinforcing approach. Railways will continue to work within the Freedom to Stay coalition towards a more connected, competitive and cohesive Europe.

CER Chair and CEO of Polish State Railways (PKP) Alan Beroud said**:** "*Railways, together with other essential service providers, are ready to ensure that no citizen feels forced to relocate due to a lack of access to basic services. To keep regions connected and protect both the freedom to move and the freedom to stay, the EU must put connectivity at the heart of its next long-term budget."*

CER Executive Director Alberto Mazzola said: "*The Right to Stay must be matched with the means to deliver it. Rail is essential to keeping regions connected and ensuring that citizens and businesses can build a future where they are. The next MFF must provide the long-term investment tools needed to make this ambition real. CER thanks Executive Vice-President Fitto for recognising rail's role and the importance of ensuring a supportive financing approach."*

Join the movement at www.freedomtostay.eu.

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About CER

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) brings together railway undertakings, their national associations as well as infrastructure managers and vehicle leasing companies. The diverse and comprehensive membership made up of long-established bodies, new entrants and both private and public enterprises, covers the large majority of the rail infrastructure network, rail freight business and rail passenger operations in EU, EFTA and EU accession countries. CER represents the interests of its members towards EU policy makers and transport stakeholders, advocating rail as the backbone of a resilient, competitive, and sustainable transport system in Europe. For more information, visit www.cer.be or follow us on social media.