Press release

Brussels, 05 November 2025

European Rail Sector applauds Commission's vision for high-speed rail, urges accelerated network completion

A new EU-level action plan to connect the continent by high-speed rail is set to revolutionise the way travel distances are perceived in Europe. The plan announced today by European Commission Executive Vice President for Cohesion and Reforms Raffaele Fitto and Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism Apostolos Tzitzikostas will bring Europeans closer together, in a greener, stronger, more competitive economy. The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER), with over 40 years of high-speed rail experience within its membership, welcomes this initiative and praises the European Commission for its ambition. CER and its members have worked intensively towards a high-speed rail master plan in the last 4 years and stand ready to help bring the vision to life.

Building and operating high-speed rail (HSR) boosts the economy and facilitates the green transition. Studies confirm the profound economic and climate benefits: every €1 million invested in European HSR generates 2.8 job-years, even before factoring in the benefits from ongoing operations. A comprehensive HSR network across Europe is projected to save the continent the equivalent of 11.6 billion barrels of oil and 5 billion tonnes of CO_2 by 2070, with net positive benefits estimated at €750 billion.

To make Europe's HSR master plan a success, clearly defined new and upgraded infrastructure is key. This will not only ensure capacity for more commuter and freight services but also drastically improve the quality of existing services, making travel more comfortable, reliable, and significantly faster. Projected journey times in 2040 will see passengers travel from Warsaw to Berlin or Vilnius and from Budapest to Prague in around 4 hours. In around 6 hours travellers can go from Berlin to Brussels, Madrid to Paris, Munich to Rome, Sofia to Budapest, Prague to Belgrade, and Frankfurt to Vienna or Milan, among other destinations.

CER commends the Commission for endorsing standard speeds of 250km/h or well above for new high-speed lines, a benchmark that ensures rail can effectively compete with short-haul air travel and attract a meaningful shift to rail. This will bring the same level of high-speed rail excellence to the whole of Europe and maintain competitiveness with countries such as Japan and China.

A well-functioning high-speed rail network is far more than just tracks. CER welcomes the planned efforts to accelerate vehicle certification through a strengthened European Union Agency for Railways, harmonise train path allocations, and improve rolling stock compatibility across borders, and ensure the widespread deployment of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS). CER notably looks forward to the 2026 ERTMS Deployment Plan and a strong European deployment manager to drive the roll-out effectively.

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Completing the HSR network will require massive investment, but once the lines are in place, they will sustain commercially viable services capable of attracting over 50% of long-distance travellers. Nevertheless railways count on a genuine level playing field with other transport modes through policy measures like exemption of VAT for international journeys and taxation on kerosene and negative externalities. Furthermore, for rail services to truly compete with flights, railways aim to ensure a seamless and user-friendly ticketing experience, driven by integrating the Open Sales and Distribution Model (OSDM) into EU standards.

CER Executive Director Alberto Mazzola said: *"The true ambition of today's High-Speed Deal is not only an investment in infrastructure but a direct investment in the quality and competitiveness of European travel. With a credible definition of high-speed rail infrastructure now in place, the focus must shift to rapid delivery. CER urges Member States and EU institutions to prioritise the dedicated funding and coordination necessary to build up the European High-Speed Rail network and unlock its massive benefits for all citizens."*

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About CER

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) brings together around 70 railway undertakings, their national associations as well as infrastructure managers and vehicle leasing companies. The membership is made up of long-established bodies, new entrants and both private and public enterprises, representing 78% of the rail network length, 81% of the rail freight business and about 94% of rail passenger operations in EU, EFTA and EU accession countries. CER represents the interests of its members towards EU policymakers and transport stakeholders, advocating rail as the backbone of a competitive and sustainable transport system in Europe. For more information, visit www.cer.be or follow us on Twitter @CER_railways or LinkedIn.