

European Rail Freight leaders call for stronger connections between transport modes to bolster EU competitiveness and security

The CEOs of European rail freight companies were joined in Copenhagen by high-Level representatives from the Danish Authorities, the European Commission, and industry leaders for a two-day strategic meeting hosted by DB Cargo and organised by the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) and the International Union of Railways (UIC). The event, held under the sponsorship of Danish MP Thomas Jensen in the Danish Parliament and featuring Mr Jacob Heinsen, Permanent Secretary of State of the Danish Ministry of Transport, brought together 70 participants to discuss the future of rail freight and its critical role in Europe's economy, competitiveness and security.

Military Mobility as a strategic priority

Rail plays an essential role in military transport services and readiness by 2030, as acknowledged in the European Commission's newly adopted military mobility package. Rail freight CEOs welcomed the communication as a milestone for civil-military cooperation. Their debate with representatives from NATO and the EU External Action Service touched upon the need for robust rail infrastructure, improved port and terminal connections, adequate rolling stock to ensure capacity, resilience and recovery preparedness, and faster authorisation processes. All sides agreed on the importance of cooperation and engagement of military and civilian authorities.

Enhanced rail freight services for clean industry

With guests including the European Association for Forwarding, Transport, Logistics and Customs Services (CLECAT) and the European Chemical Industry Council (Cefic), the gathering provided a forum for rail freight CEOs to engage with counterparts from major industry and trade bodies of the sectors they serve, such as chemicals, steel and paper. Recalling the assessment of the Mario Draghi Report on the future of European competitiveness, participants underlined the need to sustain rail freight services, which are pivotal to these crucial EU sectors but facing increasing economic pressures. Certain segments such as single wagon load services are increasingly under threat. Rail freight operators reaffirmed their commitment to innovation, noting progress on technological advances such as Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC) of freight trains, where real-world testing is ongoing under the PioDAC project. They called on decision makers to dive deeper into the challenges and opportunities of enhancing rail freight for the EU's industry, trade, and security.

Poll reveals strong public support for intermodal rail freight

A recent EU-wide poll presented at the meeting reveals strong public support for rail freight as the backbone of European logistics. Of the 5,400 citizens surveyed across all 27 Member States, fewer than half knew that most goods (78% of inland transport) move by road, while nearly one-third believe that the transport of goods is balanced

between road and rail. Still, 97% agree improvements are needed, notably to cut pollution (32%), ease road congestion (28%), and enhance safety (20%). Most want to see stronger cooperation between long-haul rail and last-mile road transport, along with increased railway capacity for sustainable freight. Interestingly, as the EU considers making it possible for longer and heavier trucks to cross borders with the ongoing reform of the Vehicles Weights and Dimensions Directive, just 2% of respondents favour this solution.

Reinforcing connectivity between transport modes

To achieve stronger intermodal rail freight, rail freight companies are engaging with relevant transport infrastructure managers, notably from ports and road/rail land connections. Representatives present in Copenhagen, including the European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) and the Federation of European Private Port Companies and Terminals (Feport), agreed on the importance of effective interconnections between transport modes and discussed policy prospects with delegates from the European Commission's Directorate General for Mobility. The forthcoming EU Port Strategy was identified as an opportunity to strengthen links between ports and rail, easing pressure on road networks and supporting the EU's modal shift ambitions.

Why rail matters

- Rail is **9 times more CO₂-efficient** and **7 times more energy-efficient** than road transport. (This is of critical importance at a time when Europe is dependent on outside supply for 58% of its energy needs.)
- One locomotive driver can replace up to **40 lorry drivers**, addressing the severe shortage of lorry drivers in Europe.
- Rail uses low-carbon energy produced within the EU, and with an increasing contribution from renewables and other sources of low-emission electricity, providing **zero-emission mobility** for freight and passengers already today.
- The European rail industry is a **worldwide benchmark** and strengthens the EU's competitiveness and strategic autonomy on technology.

CER Executive Director Alberto Mazzola said: *"This annual gathering of rail freight CEOs once more provided a unique opportunity to engage and exchange on the relevance of rail freight services for the EU's industry, trade and defence. CER and its members remain committed to providing business-friendly mobility services in collaboration with other transport modes, serving the sustainable growth of the EU single Market. It is clear to us that strengthening railway interconnections with the EU's Ports is a fundamental priority, not least to enhance military mobility. We are encouraged by the strong public support to make intermodal transport and enhanced railway capacity the cornerstones of a more sustainable freight transport system."*

UIC Director General François Davenne said *"Today's High-Level Freight Meeting captures a pivotal moment for Europe: rail is no longer a supporting actor, it is a strategic instrument. For the European rail sector, this moment is not only about adapting, it's about driving Europe's competitiveness and long-term performance. As we advance ERTMS, deploy FRMCS, and accelerate the rollout of Digital Automatic Coupling and digitalising services for operations and sales, we are laying the foundations of a truly interoperable, resilient and competitive network. DAC, in particular, marks a decisive leap into a fully digital freight system, and I am proud to present our sector's collective commitment to this transformation. In this context, UIC's mission becomes even more central: to provide the technical backbone Europe needs by translating vision*



into harmonised standards, by steering coordinated implementation across borders, and by ensuring that innovation strengthens both Europe's economy and its capacity to act."

The full report of the public perception poll on freight transport in Europe is accessible [here](#).

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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 79% of the rail network length, 77% of the rail freight business and about 90% 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](https://twitter.com/CER_railways) or [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cer).

About UIC

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UIC is the worldwide organisation for the promotion of rail transport at a global level and collaborative development of the railway system. It brings together some 200 members on all 5 continents, among them rail operators, infrastructure managers, railway service providers, etc. UIC maintains close cooperation links with all actors in the rail transport domain around the world, including manufacturers, railway associations, public authorities and stakeholders in other domains and sectors whose experiences may be beneficial to rail development. UIC's main tasks include understanding the business needs of the rail community, developing innovation programmes to identify solutions to those needs, as well as preparing and publishing a series of documents such as reports, specifications, guidelines and IRS that facilitate the implementation of the innovative solutions. For more information, visit www.uic.org or follow us on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/uic).