

## Railways warn of reverse modal shift as EU Transport Ministers reach agreement on longer, heavier trucks

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) warns that the common position adopted today by EU Transport Ministers on the Weights and Dimensions of Road Vehicles Directive risks triggering a reverse modal shift towards road freight, undermining EU climate and rail targets. Gathered in Brussels for the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (TTE), Ministers also heard from the European Commission on their new High-Speed Rail (HSR) Action Plan and Military Mobility Package. CER welcomes the engagement on these critical topics and urges high ambition in HSR and the swift adoption of the military mobility package. Only a strong, well-funded and interoperable rail system can deliver Europe's sustainability, connectivity, and security objectives.

While recognising the Danish Presidency's efforts and the Council's focus on zero-emission and intermodal mobility in the Weights and Dimensions Directive, currently under revision by the EU, CER cautions that harmonising cross-border circulation of longer and heavier European Modular Systems (EMS) risks diverting freight towards road-only transport, undermining rail-waterborne-road cooperation and the EU's target to double rail freight by 2050.

The public is also not in favour of such measures, with just 2% of citizens in support of allowing longer and heavier trucks across borders. This is according to **a new EU-wide survey of 5,400 citizens** gauging public perception of freight transport in Europe, commissioned by CER and conducted by Polling Europe. Besides revealing widespread misconceptions about freight transport (fewer than half of respondents knew that road carries 78% of inland goods, and nearly one-third believed road and rail are used equally), the survey shows that 97% agree improvements are needed, including better coordination between long-haul rail and last-mile road and increased rail capacity. All the more reason to ensure that the revised Weights and Dimensions Directive strengthens intermodal freight and avoids weakening rail, Europe's most sustainable transport mode, against both public interest and climate objectives.

The Commission's announcement that it intends to withdraw the revision of the Combined Transport Directive (CTD) in its 2026 Work Programme deepens these concerns. The CTD was designed to complement the Weights and Dimensions Directive by strengthening combined transport; without it, the wider deployment of EMS risks weakening the competitiveness of greener modes and jeopardising the efficiency of Europe's freight system. A [joint statement](#) issued today by CER and fellow European associations representing rail and intermodal transport urges EU legislators not to lose sight of the broader, long-term vision of sustainable logistics.

EU Transport Ministers also took note of the Commission's presentation of the newly adopted **European master plan for high-speed rail (HSR)** and **Military Mobility Package**. The HSR master plan outlines an ambitious vision for a seamless, interoperable, EU-wide network connecting capitals and major cities. As highlighted at

a recent CER-Eurocities event in the European Parliament, this will require stable long-term funding in the next Multiannual Financial Framework, harmonised technical conditions, and integrated ticketing linking long-distance and local mobility.

On defence, CER highlights the essential role of a resilient, dual-use rail network in enabling rapid cross-border military support, as presented in CER's recent analysis on EU Military Mobility Readiness up to 2030 and beyond. Reinforcing infrastructure and removing interoperability barriers will be crucial to make the Military Mobility Package operational.

Finally, CER welcomes the Ministers' informal debate on **simplification**. Persistent barriers continue to hinder rail operators and infrastructure managers, ranging from volatile electricity prices and lengthy permitting procedures to European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS)-related costs, changing Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSI), and complex vehicle authorisation processes. CER calls for a targeted Transport Omnibus to streamline procedures, accelerate investment, and support the modernisation of Europe's rail system.

**CER Executive Director Alberto Mazzola** said: *"Today's Council agreement makes positive strides in terms of promoting zero-emission vehicles, a key development for intermodal freight that is unfortunately undermined by the stance on EMS allowing very long and heavy truck configurations on our roads. In freight transport, as in military mobility and high-speed rail, Member State support is crucial for a strong, interoperable rail system. Today's discussions demonstrate real political will to collaborate on all these fronts, working to remove barriers and enhance military-civilian coordination and start laying the foundations for Europe's future high-speed rail network. Railways look forward to tangible results in the year to come."*

The Council's General Approach on the Weights and Dimensions Directive revision is available [here](#).

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

The Joint Statement by European associations representing rail and intermodal transport 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 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](http://www.cer.be) or follow us on Twitter [@CER\\_railways](#) or [LinkedIn](#).