

Rail leads Europe towards energy independence

Amid the latest energy crisis, the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) has reiterated the key role rail transport plays in keeping citizens and goods moving across the Single Market while reducing Europe's fossil fuel dependence. CER calls on the forthcoming long-term EU budget to invest in rail to boost Europe's strategic autonomy.

The European Central Bank's Frank Elderson recently stated that Europe's fossil fuel dependence has become one of the critical vulnerabilities of the European economy.¹ With EU countries releasing fossil fuel reserves and Commissioner for Energy Dan Jørgensen warning of a prolonged energy shock, rail is once again proving its strategic value.

According to CER analysis, **rail freight transport is currently sparing Europe 144,000 barrels of diesel-equivalent oil per day**, delivering economic savings of **€4.5 billion per year**, and avoiding 22.5 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions annually.

At the same time, **passenger rail transport** is sparing the equivalent of about 220,000 barrels of diesel-equivalent oil per day, contributing additional economic savings of roughly €6.9 billion per year and avoiding about 32.3 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions annually. While airlines warn of a potential jet fuel shortage, the EU's **high-speed rail masterplan has the potential to save an additional 660,000 barrels of oil per day**. It is estimated that a future 49,000-km high-speed rail network connecting European capitals and major cities would save 11.6 billion barrels of oil worth €750 billion and more than 5 billion tonnes of CO₂ emissions by 2070.

Rail provides Europe with a resilient and sustainable transport backbone, delivering on many fronts:

- **Energy independence:** Rail uses low-carbon energy produced within the EU. With an increasing contribution from renewables and other sources of low-emission electricity, it enables sustainable transport for both freight and passengers.
- **Efficient freight transport:** 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 nearly 60% of its energy needs. The [Swiss experience](#) with intermodal transport shows that a greater shift from road to rail freight is achievable.
- **Competitive passenger travel:** Since the launch of the CER Rail Ticketing roadmap, European railways have made cross-border travel significantly easier. With new EU high-speed rail ambitions, 3 in 4 citizens would choose high-speed rail over flying when travelling within the EU.

¹ Frank Elderson, "Europe's fossil fuel dependence poses risks to price stability", *Financial Times*, April 7th 2026, <https://www.ft.com/content/6fa21bdb-1387-4fb8-afc9-3d0b53affa58>

- **Sustainable tourism:** As 75% of tourism emissions come from transport, shifting intra-European travel to rail is essential. National rail passes and international offers help redirect tourists to less crowded destinations and promote off-season travel.
- **Economic growth:** Contributing €247 billion to the EU economy and supporting 3.1 million jobs, railways offer one of the largest [economic footprints](#) of any transport mode while preserving the lowest carbon footprint.

It is a long-held EU ambition to grow rail freight and passenger volumes. With increasing stress tests on Europe's resilience and competitiveness, it is all the more pressing to match the ambition with key support and investments in order to capitalise on rail's many economic and societal benefits.

CER Executive Director Alberto Mazzola said: *"The current energy crisis is unlikely to be the last, and Europe must seize this opportunity to reduce future risks, redress the EU balance of payments and reach energy independence and strategic autonomy. Transport is essential to connect people and keep the economy moving, and rail is the only large-scale mode already providing sustainable transport powered by energy produced within the EU. Doubling rail freight and tripling high-speed rail traffic offer potential savings in oil imports of about €1.5 trillion by 2070, which will remain in Europe. We call on the forthcoming long-term EU budget to invest in rail infrastructure and services for a stronger, more shock-resistant Europe."*

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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 [@CER_railways](#) or [LinkedIn](#).