

Europe must lead the next generation of high-speed and digital rail

In a joint statement released today, the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) and the European Rail Supply Industry Association (UNIFE) outline the key conditions needed to deliver a European high-speed rail network that strengthens connectivity, competitiveness and sustainability across the continent. Published on the occasion of the 2026 Connecting Europe Days event, the statement sets out the organisations' recommendations to transform political ambition into a pipeline of projects delivered on the ground, with close cooperation between EU and national decision makers, financial and research partners, and Europe's railway undertakings, infrastructure managers and rail supply industry.

High-speed rail has the potential to transform how Europeans travel between countries, offering faster, more attractive and sustainable connections. Realising this vision, however, will require sustained commitment to infrastructure delivery, digital technologies, interoperability and cross-border coordination, in addition to stable financing.

Europe has built up considerable experience in high-speed rail, facilitated by leading railway companies, infrastructure managers and rail manufacturers. Existing high-speed rail networks have already demonstrated their ability to connect regions, expand labour markets and enhance the competitiveness of regional and national economies.

Yet other countries in the world are developing their networks at a higher pace, mainly because of stronger public support, more impactful investments and more decisive authorisation. Europe therefore needs to move up a gear, delivering projects faster, scaling innovation across the network and strengthening the competitiveness of its rail supply industry.

The European Commission published its High-Speed Rail Action Plan in November 2025, setting out a roadmap for a more integrated European high-speed rail network. To support the plan, CER and UNIFE have identified a series of enabling conditions required to accelerate project delivery and maximise the benefits of rail connectivity across Europe.

The two organisations call for:

- The mobilisation of sufficient and predictable public funding in the EU's next long-term budget to move projects from planning to construction and operation, and a supportive framework for complementary private investment when conditions are suitable.
- Measures that enable the rail industry to build the industrial capacity required to deliver equipment at scale.
- A holistic approach encompassing infrastructure, rolling stock and the deployment of modern digital communication, signalling and traffic management systems.
- Stable European technical specifications that facilitate fast, coordinated and cost-efficient implementation.

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- Stronger links between research and deployment, including continued support for a dedicated public-private partnership for rail innovation under the next EU research programme.
- Enhanced European coordination involving Member States, railway undertakings, infrastructure managers, suppliers, financial institutions and EU bodies to establish priorities, responsibilities and long-term planning.

Funding will be particularly critical. CER and UNIFE therefore welcome the ongoing work on the European Commission's forthcoming financing strategy, which aims to mobilise the investment needed to deliver priority projects across Europe through a future "High-Speed Rail Deal".

As Europe advances implementation of the High-Speed Rail Action Plan, both organisations stress that success will depend on close cooperation across the entire rail ecosystem. The Connecting Europe Days, as the EU's flagship mobility event, offers an opportunity to align policymakers, financiers and rail sector stakeholders behind a common delivery agenda. Each has a vital role to play in ensuring Europe's place at the forefront of modern, comfortable, clean mobility that sustains the economy and benefits citizens across the continent.

CER Executive Director Alberto Mazzola said: *"Europe has set itself an ambitious objective: to make high-speed rail a backbone of European connectivity. The challenge now is delivery. This requires stable funding, streamlined procedures, industrial readiness, digital innovation and effective cooperation between railway undertakings, infrastructure managers, suppliers and public authorities. By working together, we can build a genuinely European high-speed rail network that brings citizens, regions and economies closer together."*

UNIFE Director General Enno Wiebe said: *"At InnoTrans, we demonstrated Europe's position as a world leader in rail supply. Now, facing intensifying competition, price pressure and growing security challenges, Europe must act together: policymakers, investors, the rail supply industry and operators must create a simple, predictable framework with sustainable funding, ensure a level playing field and harness Europe's engineering and innovation strength. Only by joining forces can we tackle the challenges ahead, turn our rail ambition into reality and secure Europe's global leadership in the mobility of tomorrow."*

Read the full CER-UNIFE Joint Statement [here](#).

For further reading on railways' recommendations to bridge the high-speed rail funding gap, please find [here](#) the recent CER paper *"Financing Europe's HSR Deal: building a long-term rail asset class in Europe"*.

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About CER

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) brings together railway undertakings, their

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About UNIFE

UNIFE represents the European Rail Supply Industry in Brussels since 1992. The association gathers more than 120 of Europe's

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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 [LinkedIn](#).

leading large and medium-sized rail supply companies active in the design, manufacture, maintenance and refurbishment of rail transport systems, subsystems and related equipment. UNIFE strives to effectively represent its members' interests at both the European and international levels. Our mission is to proactively foster an environment within which members can continue to provide high-quality railway systems needed to meet the growing demand for rail transport – both passenger or freight services – in Europe and beyond. UNIFE also brings together 13 national rail industry associations of European countries. For more information, visit www.unife.org or follow us on [LinkedIn](#).