

Unlocking quicker rail network expansion and modernisation in Europe

European railways welcome forthcoming plans to simplify permitting procedures across the European Union. Announced by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at her State of the Union address, the initiative holds the promise of faster infrastructure permitting for quicker rail project delivery. The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) has published a new paper emphasizing the importance of efficient permitting for the timely completion of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and the successful implementation of Europe's High-Speed Rail Master Plan. It proposes targeted measures to fast track infrastructure development while maintaining high environmental and safety standards.

Lengthy and complex permitting processes remain a significant barrier to delivering rail infrastructure projects on time. While planning and authorisation stages already take eight to ten years for many conventional rail projects, timelines can stretch to fifteen years for high-speed and complex cross-border infrastructure. As a result, projects vital to Europe's competitiveness, connectivity and climate objectives face substantial delays. These concerns are echoed in CER's recently adopted position paper on the simplification and acceleration of infrastructure projects, which identifies permitting procedures as a major obstacle to meeting the legally binding TEN-T deadlines.

The challenge is not only administrative. The impact assessment underpinning an existing EU law designed to simplify and speed up permits for major transport projects on the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T Streamlining Directive (EU) 2021/1187) estimates the cost of the administrative burden associated with TEN-T permitting at approximately EUR 1.1 billion between 2018 and 2030. At the same time, delays postpone the economic, social and environmental benefits that new rail infrastructure can bring. CER estimates that a European high-speed rail network connecting all capitals and major cities could generate more than EUR 1,200 billion in benefits, making timely project delivery an economic imperative as well as a transport policy priority.

In its position paper, CER stresses that simplification must not come at the expense of environmental, social or safety standards. Instead, the objective should be to make procedures more coherent, transparent and predictable while maintaining high levels of protection.

To support the European Commission's simplification agenda, CER calls for:

- Clear permitting targets, including a maximum three-year permitting timeframe for strategic projects or a 50% reduction in permitting timelines by 2030.
- Consistent implementation of the TEN-T Streamlining Directive across all Member States.
- EU guidance on balancing climate and environmental objectives.
- Exemptions from the requirements of the Birds, Habitats and Water Framework Directives for already permitted existing rail infrastructure that needs to be maintained, renewed, modernised or upgraded, or alternatively the introduction of simplified and more standardised procedures.
- Stronger administrative capacity and greater digitalisation of permitting authorities.
- Better coordination of planning and permitting procedures, particularly for cross-border projects.
- Earlier and better-structured public consultation processes.

- Greater legislative stability throughout the delivery of infrastructure projects.

Quicker, more predictable permitting processes will help unlock rail investment, reduce costs and accelerate the completion of projects essential to achieving a seamlessly connected European transport network and the fulfilment of the European High-Speed Rail Master Plan.

The European Commission's planned Transport Omnibus, a package of measures aimed at reducing administrative burdens and simplifying transport legislation, together with a potential revision of the TEN-T Streamlining Directive, provides an opportunity to deliver meaningful improvements to infrastructure project implementation across Europe. CER looks forward to engaging with the European Commission, European Parliament and EU Member States as work on these important proposals advances.

CER Executive Director Alberto Mazzola said: *"The European Union has set ambitious targets for sustainable mobility, economic competitiveness and territorial cohesion, but these ambitions will remain out of reach if critical rail infrastructure takes more than a decade to move from planning to construction. Europe needs permitting procedures that are faster, more predictable and fit for purpose. A government that launches a major rail project should be able to see construction begin within its term of office."*

- The CER position paper *Simplification and Acceleration of Infrastructure Projects* is accessible [here](#) on the CER website.

Contact person

Laura Henry
CER Head of Communications
E: laura.henry@cer.be
M: +32 491 16 21 73

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 social media.