

## **Position Paper**

Brussels, 14 April 2026

# **Speeding-up Environmental Assessments**

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CER welcomes the publication of the Proposal for a Regulation on speeding-up environmental assessments (2025/0391 (COD)). It is a timely piece of legislation as cutting red tape and administrative hurdles can save time and costs. This is notably important for the railway sector, where the construction, maintenance, upgrades and renewals of rail infrastructure can take considerable time, sometimes reaching up to several decades of delays.

CER would like to highlight the following positive aspects in the Regulation:

- The establishment of environmental single points of contact: We believe it is an important step forward for the facilitation and coordination of all aspects of the environmental assessments. CER would like to see an even more strengthened role in the single point of contact for railway projects. They should have real coordination powers across authorities and across borders.
- The transparency of the decisions of other relevant environmental assessments, helpful for the developer in the preparation of the environmental reports.
- The introduction of the possibility of extended timelines in case of complex projects. This is particularly crucial for complex cross-border rail projects.
- Precedence of shorter timelines for the overall permit granting process in other EU or national legislation than the current Regulation
- A toolbox for strategic sectors: CER welcomes Article 14 of this Regulation but calls to explicitly include railway infrastructure among sectors eligible for the toolbox in the Annex. Railways are the backbone of decarbonisation and the only transport mode which has reduced its emissions while increasing passenger and freight volumes.
- The restriction of tacit approval to purely administrative/procedural steps. The exclusion of the final decisions on the outcome of the permit-granting procedure under tacit approval will ensure security of rail projects.

CER would like to propose the following improvements and share the below Amendments to the Regulation:

- **Explicitly define “strategic rail infrastructure projects” in the Regulation**  
Removes ambiguity and ensures rail projects are consistently eligible for streamlined procedures and the toolbox.
- **Strengthen the role of the Environmental Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for rail projects**  
SPOCs should have real coordination powers across authorities and across borders, not just an information role.
- **Allow reuse of environmental assessments for phased rail upgrades, where required by a Member State**  
Enables use of previous Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for electrification, signalling or capacity upgrades where data remains valid, reducing duplication.
- **Make coordinated/joint environmental assessments the default for cross-border rail**  
Prevents fragmented national procedures for international rail corridors and improves legal certainty.

- **Explicitly include railway infrastructure among sectors eligible for the Annex/toolbox**  
Ensures rail is not excluded at national level despite its role in decarbonisation and modal shift.
- **Add safeguards to ensure accelerated procedures do not weaken environmental protection or public participation**  
Protects rail projects from reputational risk and legal challenges under EU and Aarhus rules.
- **Clarify use of “overriding public interest” for rail projects**  
Limits it to essential network, safety or cross-border connectivity projects, with clear compensatory measures.
- **Ensure expedited dispute settlement preserves effective legal remedies**  
Balances speed with legal robustness and avoids challenges based on insufficient technical review.
- **In transport infrastructure, apply EIA requirements only to large-scale projects**  
For multimodal/combined transport, the construction of new terminals should be exempt from these requirements. Regarding rail, only new lines exceeding 20 kilometres should be subject to an EIA, while upgraded lines should be excluded entirely.
- **Exclude maintenance and renewal works** relating to existing transport networks from the scope of certain Articles of Directive 92/43/EEC and of Directive 2009/147/EC.
- **Allow an automatic partial refund of administrative fees** to the proponent in case of delays in the EIA decision.

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### About CER

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) brings together railway undertakings, their 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](http://www.cer.be) or follow us on social media.

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