



Open letter

European Commission

Commissioner Adina Vălean
European Commissioner for Transport
Rue de Mot 28, BE-Brussels 1040

Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure

Andreas Scheuer
Federal Minister of Transport and Digital Infrastructure
Invalidenstraße 44, DE-Berlin 10115

Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure

Volker Wissing
Incoming Federal Minister of Transport and Digital Infrastructure
Invalidenstraße 44, DE-Berlin 10115

DB Netz

Mr. Frank Sennhenn
CEO
Theodor-Heuss-Allee 7, DE-Frankfurt 60486

30 November 2021

Disturbances to European Supply Chains due to unavailability of German Rail Network

Dear Commissioner Vălean,
Dear Minister Scheuer,
Dear Mr. Wissing,
Dear Mr. Sennhenn,

We, the below signed organizations, are writing to you to raise serious concern regarding the amount, gravity and length of disturbances we are facing since the last two weeks on the German rail network. These disturbances, joined with a lack of alternative capacity being made available, has led to a situation where rail freight in and travelling through Germany on main corridors is coming to a near standstill.

Seamless rail freight operations are crucial for the security of supply for European industry and customers, especially in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and taking into consideration the strain being placed on global supply chains. We as railway undertakings, intermodal operators, shippers, freight forwarders, wagon keepers and industry associations are working hard on ensuring freight continuity. In addition to the role of rail freight in supply

chains, rail freight has to become more attractive as set out in the EU Green Deal and Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy and increase its market share.

Currently, very intensive construction works are ongoing on the German rail network of DB Netz as a result of a backlog of investments. However, we expect that these works are completed in a professional and perfectly planned manner, including a high level of coordination and contingency plans addressing disturbances. Over the last two weeks, we faced an unacceptable situation due to disturbances on switches, signaling boxes and non-availability of personal of DB Netz. Many parts of the system – particularly along Rail Freight Corridor Rhine Alpine – have been unable to function efficiently and dozens of international freight trains had to be either parked and/or were heavily delayed. The problem-solving capability of DB Netz has been extremely weak – to the point that the performance of DB Netz has resulted in unnecessary bottlenecks.

This creates a problem of a European dimension. The German rail infrastructure network of DB Netz is central to European rail freight transportation. With six of the nine rail freight corridors transiting through Germany, the current situation therefore has the potential to cause significant reputational and economic damage to European rail freight. It worsens existing congestion problems in European Seaports and their hinterlands and contributes to further supply chain shortages.

The situation for EU rail freight is critical and immediate action of DB and DB Netz is needed. In order to ensure the good functioning of rail freight supply chains, the below associations request the following actions are taken as soon as possible:

- Better coordination at international level between the various infrastructure managers for the planning of major works and construction site planning. The tendency to split construction works in smaller pieces leads to a less integrated view and less international coordination;
- Equal rights for freight and passenger train in the planning phase regarding restrictions and capacity loss. Cost-benefit analysis including the possible loss of transport capacity;
- A “freight reset procedure” should be adopted under which – using additional train paths provided during the weekends – operators of regular freight trains can remedy the delays caused during the weekday construction works and thereby catch-up to begin the new week with a clean slate;
- More intensive monitoring of construction works with the primary goal to avoid timeouts;
- Clear contingency plans (material, personnel, processes) to prepare for possible disturbances;
- Establishment of a commission which involves Railway Undertakings for the approval of works that foresee disruptions of more than 50% of the rail capacity;
- Proactive and comprehensive communication at management level in the event of serious disruptions;
- Strong commitment and priority for providing alternative capacity for international rail freight services, particularly along rail freight corridors;

Again, we recognize the need for works to be carried out and are also aware of the challenging situation, but we cannot accept a situation whereby international freight transportation services are put in jeopardy.

We therefore strongly urge the relevant authorities to implement the above-mentioned measures to avoid permanent damage to European rail freight transport - making modal shift impossible.

We stay at your disposition for further exchange or participation at a possible round table.

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