

Intermodal transport: a pillar of EU transport policy



Modal shift as a concept, as well as the user-pays and polluter pays principles remain mainstays of European Union transport policy in the future – this is what we have learned from the European Commission's Strategy for Smart and Sustainable Transport¹ that was unveiled yesterday, 9 December by Commission First Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans and

Transport Commissioner Adina-loana Valean.

"Rail and waterborne-based intermodal transport (should be) fully price-competitive with road-only transport in the EU (by 2030)" – declares the document. Nevertheless, the Commission sees only a 50% rail freight traffic increase (from 2019 levels) feasible by 2030, which would deliver only half of the growth foreseen by the Rail Freight Forward² coalition. The doubling of performance desired by the sector is expected to be achievable, according to the European Commission, by 2050.

The European Green Deal³ objective of *"a substantial part of the 75% of inland freight carried today by road (should) to shift to rail and inland waterways"* is complemented by shortsea shipping (coastal navigation) which is also to contribute to delivering this objective.

Intermodal transport should be strengthened through the following measures:

- *"The existing framework for intermodal transport needs a substantial revamp and the Combined Transport Directive must be turned into an effective tool fully capable of supporting the necessary modal shift."* – states the strategy.
- Transshipment terminals are also mentioned since their scarcity is *"pronounced in certain parts of Europe"*. EU funding and state aid measures should be employed to overcome this obstacle.
- Rail Freight Corridors and TEN-T Core Network Corridors are foreseen to be instrumental in providing for the infrastructure needs of intermodal transport – train length and loading gauge – as well as they will be key to secure improved operational rules.
- Finally, Urban Mobility Planning will be required to *always include a freight dimension* to secure the necessary conditions for first and last mile connections.

80 concrete measures grouped into 10 flagship clusters are to be fulfilled by the European Commission between 2021 and 2025 in order to deliver the objectives contained in the strategy. A robust European regulatory framework is an absolute pre-requisite for the transformation needed from the transport sector – and longer distance surface freight transport in particular – if Europe is to deliver on its decarbonization, congestion-, accident- and pollution-reduction objectives, while building a resilient and competitive economy for the 21st Century.

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¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/legislation/com20200789.pdf>

² <https://www.railfreightforward.eu/>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en



Ralf-Charley Schultze

"UIRR members applaud the strategy and will work hand-in-hand with our partners to deliver even more ambitious results than foreseen by the Commission. The European citizens can count on intermodal transport to materially contribute to decarbonisation, to overcome the looming truck driver shortage, and to ease road congestion, boost transport safety and curb air pollution." - stated UIRR President Ralf-Charley Schultze.

Who is UIRR?

Founded in 1970, the **International Union for Road-Rail Combined Transport (UIRR)** represents the interests of European road-rail Combined Transport Operators and Transshipment Terminal Managers.

Road-Rail Combined Transport (CT) is a system of freight forwarding which is based on efficiently and economically inserting electric rail into long-distance (road) transport-chains through the use of intermodal loading units (ILU).