

## Action plan for intermodal rail freight

The European Commission has published an **Action Plan to Boost Long-Distance and Cross-Border Passenger Rail**<sup>1</sup> on 14 December 2021. Reading the text, the European Road-Rail Combined Transport sector requests that a similar action plan is issued to target long-distance and cross-border rail freight without delay.

The similarities between long-distance and cross-border passenger rail and rail freight are striking:

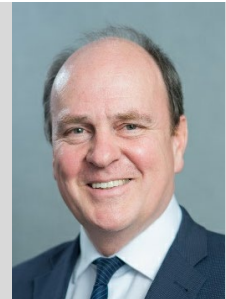
- **“Rail is not used to its full potential”, while “utilising this potential is a matter of urgency”** in order to reach the ambitious goals of market share doubling contained in the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy.
- **“The intermodal rail services cannot be provided at the level and quality deemed necessary”** since the full and correct implementation of the existing Union regulatory framework by the Member States is lacking.
- **“The lack of train drivers and skilled railway staff”** hinders the service offering and the quality performance of long-distance cross-border rail freight.
- **“High and diverse track access charges, notably in terms of mark-ups, are a decisive cost factor”** as intermodal trains are frequently charged extra for their length, gross weights and loading gauge requirements.
- **“A level playing field with other modes of transport”** is lacking for the moment. This undermines competitiveness and could be compensated with “refunding track access charges to compensate for unpaid external costs of competing modes”.

The **two seemingly conflicting areas** of passenger rail and rail freight should be addressed comprehensively, and not in a one-sided manner from the perspective of only one of the two interested sides as suggested in the Action Plan<sup>1</sup>:

1. **“Optimal capacity management that takes into consideration all relevant elements for both passenger and freight traffic ... as cross-border services often face a disadvantage vis-à-vis domestic services in the competition for scarce capacity”** which points to the zero-sum game of accessing the rail infrastructure, as well as in traffic management decisions.
2. **“A major investment by the sector into rolling stock is required”** which should be equally assisted by funding programmes in the case of cross-border rail freight as proposed for passenger services.

**UIRR calls on the Commission to issue an Action Plan on Long-Distance and Cross-Border Rail Freight Services.** It must be noted that nearly 9 out of 10 intermodal freight trains are cross-border trains, while overall, about every second European freight train crosses at least one internal border between Member States of the European Union. In 2020 the average intermodal freight train covered a distance of 921km.

<sup>1</sup> [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news/action-plan-boost-passenger-rail-2021-12-14\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news/action-plan-boost-passenger-rail-2021-12-14_en)



Ralf-Charley Schultze

*“Optimal capacity management should be based on the socio-economic cost-benefit analysis method proposed in the recently published Commission proposal on the revision of the TEN-T Regulation. The rail infrastructure is uniquely suited for carrying heavy loads, such as 740m-long 2000t freight trains, which should be better exploited for society, climate, environmental protection and the economy.”* – pointed out 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).