Joint Declaration by Germany's Railway Sector and Civil Society

Relaunch on Rails

Europe's drive towards more environmentally friendly rail transport is a key issue for both the EU and Germany in the new EU legislative period

The railways can make a major contribution to achieving the European and German climate targets. They offer accessible, convenient, fast and environmentally friendly mobility for everyone as well as transporting goods across Europe in an ecologically sound manner. Furthermore, the rail sector safeguards around 550,000 sustainable jobs and adds around 50 billion euros in value every year in Germany alone. The railway is by far the most environmentally friendly means of transport in Europe.[1] While transport accounts for 25 per cent of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions, rail transport is responsible for a mere 0.4 per cent and as such is 28 times more climate-friendly than air travel. The reason is that the train uses energy highly efficiently. It is over 6 times more energy-efficient than a heavy goods vehicle and 4 times more energy-efficient than a car.[2] Furthermore, the railways connect both people and markets in Europe and – as recent years have shown – form an important transportation backbone in times of crisis.

The EU intends to be the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. By 2030, doubling high-speed rail transport and increasing rail freight transport by half are key European goals. In addition, the modal share of further long-distance, night and regional rail operations needs to be significantly increased. Increased rail transport translates into greater climate protection.

In order to achieve the European and German climate targets, a consistent modal shift from environmentally harmful transport to climate-friendly rail transport is a must. **However, in order for rail transport to fulfil its role as the mainstay of sustainable European mobility, the EU must make rail a focus of legislation and investment decisions immediately after the European elections in 2024.** The goal should be to significantly increase the capacity and appeal of rail transport throughout the EU. The EU now needs to set the appropriate regulatory framework to achieve this objective. Only then will the necessary expansion, rapid modernisation and European harmonisation of the railways be achieved and only then will the EU and Germany hit the targets they have set themselves. Investment cycles in the rail sector are lengthy, and there are only a few years left between now and 2030.

As the biggest economy and transport hub at the heart of Europe, Germany plays an important role in shaping the European framework – and is particularly dependent on the success of European transport policy. Germany now has a duty to drive forward the transition to climate neutrality in the transport sector at the EU level and to ensure that the next European legislature is a legislature for the railways.

The first key steps towards implementing the existing targets have already been taken. The European Year of the Rail in 2021 focussed attention on these challenges in many EU countries. The Greening Freight Package presents European strategies for shifting freight to rail. The first proposals for a Pan-European rail network are on the table with the reform of the European core corridors, ideas for a metropolitan network and a relaunch of the historic Trans Europe Express.

The ramp-up of investment in the railways now needs to be accelerated. Among others, the following processes in the next EU legislature should be consistently exploited for this purpose: the ongoing development of the European Green Deal to achieve the 2040 climate target, the review of EU policy coherence to achieve the targets by 2030 as well as the negotiations on the upcoming multi-year financial framework and the Connecting Europe Facility, on the further development of the TEN networks and the legislative proposals in the Greening Freight Package, on simplifying processes and speeding up administrative practice in the rail sector and on protecting passenger and employee rights.

We, companies and associations from the rail sector and climate protection civil society, call on the European Parliament, the European Commission and the EU Member States to initiate a radical change in the EU framework to shift investment and transport to rail. To this end, the following priorities need to be addressed immediately after the EU elections.

1. Developing the European Target Framework

We support the European Commission's proposal for a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 90 per cent by 2040. The transport sector bears an increasing responsibility for achieving this target.

- The European Commission should set ambitious targets for all rail transport as a proportion of total transport, including freight transport and night trains. In order to strengthen competition between the different modes of transport, further measurable targets for the modernisation, digitalisation and further expansion of rail infrastructure are also required – in addition to the targets under the EU strategy for sustainable and smart mobility. Proportion and infrastructure targets should be set from 2025 onwards, for periods of three years, until 2040. The European authorities must clearly set their sights on these modal shift targets.
- In order to achieve the reduction targets, we are calling for the EU to recommend and support the Member States in consistently pursuing the reduction targets in the transport sector.

2. Accelerating the Rail Expansion throughout the EU

In order to drive forward the shift to rail, Europe needs an escalation of investment in the European rail network with a clear political prioritisation of rail in terms of transport investment and long-term planning horizons. This is the only way to achieve the targeted expansion and development of high-speed sections between European metropolitan regions[3] as an attractive alternative to environmentally harmful short-haul flights, to achieve dense regional coverage and the development of additional capacity for freight transport beyond the current objectives of the EU regulation on trans-European networks.

- In the next EU financial framework, the funds for the rail network in the Connecting Europe Facility for Transport need to be at least tripled or quadrupled.

- The EU and Member States must, at the earliest opportunity, take greater account of climate criteria, including utilisation emissions and energy efficiency over the entire service life cycle, in their decisions on infrastructure investments. Priority must therefore be given to the railways in order to master the triad of renovation, digitalisation and new construction and expansion.

- The EU should investigate the introduction of an infrastructure fund for the trans-European rail network. Following the example of Switzerland, the Member States should also use such funds to simplify national financing and secure it for periods beyond individual financial years and legislative periods. This would ensure security in planning for construction, logistics, industrial and transport companies and authorities.

- The digital, standardised European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) is capable of moving more people and goods on existing lines. The core technology, the European Train Control System (ETCS) needs to be rolled out at an accelerated pace on the nine trans-European transport corridors, six of which run through Germany. To achieve this end, Europe needs clear timelines, secure funding, further harmonisation of the versions, simpler approvals and monitoring. This includes, in particular, equipping the existing train fleet with ETCS by means of European and national funding programmes and unified coordination in the Member States.[4] The Future Railway Mobile Communication System (FRMCS) and the digital automatic coupling are also important for digitalisation and increasing capacity.

- Smaller infrastructure measures, such as the construction of connecting tracks, sidings and intermodal terminals, are also important and need to be implemented more rapidly, particularly at border stations. Border crossings need to be electrified. The European Commission should be furnished with additional resources to work together with the Member States to eliminate bottlenecks as quickly as possible, especially for cross-border transport.

- A two-yearly European infrastructure monitoring system is required, to enable the progress of the expansion and digitalisation of the European rail network to be tracked on the basis of key performance indicators.

3. Sustainably Financing the Transformation

What is now required is a revision of the framework for financial flows that promote climate protection, and increased, targeted investment in environmentally friendly rail transport. State funds are limited.

- To finance rail expansion, the EU and Member States urgently need to reduce subsidies that are counterproductive in terms of climate and environmental policy and make meaningful use of revenue from emissions trading.[5] The flow of funding needs to be organised across all modes of transport, in

accordance with climate criteria. To this end, the Member States should, among other things, make full use of the opportunities created by the EU for a toll on heavy goods vehicles[6] and the EU should consistently pursue the path of internalising environmental costs.

- The European Social Climate Fund to address the social impact of the Emissions Trading Scheme for buildings and road transport (ETS2) on vulnerable groups within the EU offers the opportunity to support zero- and low-emission mobility, including public transport. In order to combat transport poverty in the form of a lack of, or limited access to means of transport or to the public transport network itself, the fund should be used to provide targeted support for vulnerable groups in their use of public mobility. A minimum portion of the milestones in the national Social Climate Plans should therefore focus on the transport sector in order to contribute to the implementation of the European Green Deal in a socially just manner.

- Building on the EU emissions trading system, greenhouse gas emissions in the transport sector, including additional climate effects, should be consistently priced.[7] This would generate investment funding and promote the requisite fair competition between the different modes of transport to achieve climate-neutral transport in the future.

- Travel should be open to all. Price-based measures such as climate taxes must be structured in such a way that low-income groups are not penalised. This will strengthen acceptance and cohesion.

- The potential of EU taxonomy should also be used specifically for the railways by simplifying and standardising verification of the classification of investments in locomotives, passenger trains and freight wagons as taxonomy-compliant.

4. Expanding European Train Services Now, Making them More Affordable and More Accessible

To encourage people to switch to climate-friendly rail transport, the framework requirements for a dense European rail network need to be strengthened.

- By the end of 2026, the European Commission needs to develop a masterplan for a cross-border European train network for 2030. This should include provisions for improved framework conditions so that transport companies can gradually establish a pan-European train network with twice today's capacity by 2030. The master plan should continue to mobilise political, investment and regulatory support for the expansion of heavily flown and frequently travelled European routes by rail transport companies.[8] As a first step, the network should include several connections a day in both directions between all major metropolitan areas[9] and well-synchronised connections to national long-distance and regional transport. The masterplan should also specify targets and provisions for a European night train network that also provides services to regions outside the EU. It should be implemented in consultation with the sector as of 2027 and gradually developed into a European synchronised network over the period beyond 2030.

- The EU needs to accelerate the much-needed ramp-up of cross-border train services in an efficient, co-operative pan-European approach together with the Member States and the railway companies.[10]

- The competitive balance between the different modes of transport should be geared in favour of climate transformation and energy efficiency. The tax on electricity for the railways should therefore be abolished and the rail track access charges reduced to as close as possible to the direct costs of train operation. Infrastructure operators should receive full compensation for revenue shortfalls that cannot be offset by improvements in efficiency or additional traffic. Infrastructure operators should retain the

ability to set incentives in order to achieve a steering effect between different rail transport modes for more effective use of the infrastructure. A favourable category of track access charges should be introduced throughout Europe for night trains, where this does not already exist.

- Booking train tickets for journeys in Europe must become as easy for consumers as booking plane tickets. Appropriate services for the simple purchase of tickets should be expanded and promoted. To this end, data access and commissions should be fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory (FRAND principles) in order to create a level playing field in online rail ticket sales. This would also contribute to booking night trains more easily. Booking and ticket payment should be technologically based on cost-effective, industry-friendly EU standards. It should also be possible to purchase tickets in person and pay in cash.

- To facilitate seamless travel sectors, cross-regional and cross-modal networking needs further technical development, for example by means of 'Mobility as a Service'. In order to avoid further delays in pan-European implementation, technologies available on the market that have already been tried and tested should be implemented.

5. Shifting Freight onto the Energy-Efficient Railways

The transformation to modern, intermodal, climate-friendly logistics can only succeed with a high-performance rail freight system as its backbone. To this end, it must be made even more attractive for companies to participate – with improved framework conditions, simple access and harmonisation.

- In order to achieve the required modal shift targets for freight transport from 2025 onwards, the EU needs to adopt a mechanism that commits especially Member States with low freight rail market shares and supports them in making corrective measures.

- The framework conditions for trains with a length of of 740 metres and above need to be established and harmonised in all the countries in the European Economic Area.

- Options for transhipment and loading need to be significantly increased and simplified. The EU needs clear objectives and a corresponding implementation strategy for the targeted expansion of a dense, EU-wide network of combined transport terminals and transhipment facilities. European and national subsidies for combined transport, which is mostly cross-border, should be expanded and harmonised. The purchase of craneable truck semi-trailers that can be easily loaded onto freight trains should be promoted and made compulsory throughout the EU from 2030.

- In order to make it easier for companies to shift energy-intensive freight transport to efficient rail transport, the evaluation of railway sidings should be made mandatory in regional planning and infrastructure development laws and promoted for all industrial and logistics locations.[11] The promotion of single-wagon transport should be expanded and strengthened.

- Innovations in rail freight transport must be consistently driven forward by the EU on a transnational basis, with the automation of train operations at the forefront. In particular, the introduction of the digital automatic coupling must be adequately funded and coordinated across Europe, especially for small and medium-sized companies.

6. Skills and Good Labour in the Climate-Friendly Rail Sector

The rail sector creates versatile jobs which protect the climate and are thus future-proof in addition to adding industrial value and promoting innovation throughout Europe. The rapid modernisation and reliable operation of rail transport is steadily requiring more and more skilled workers.

- EU training and retraining programmes need to be aligned with the priorities of climate policy. To ensure the rapid modernisation of the rail network and in response to the shortage of skilled workers in the entire rail sector, we are calling for an EU training and qualification programme for those changing to and entering the rail industry. The training and re-training schemes for employees, including those who are affected by transformation and want to retrain for another sector, should be tailored to the requirements of the rail industry and its employees. Seats of learning, teaching and research in the field of rail and transport system management need to be supported throughout Europe. Appropriate collaborative projects between railway companies, trade unions, educational institutions and industry need to be supported and funded, as is currently the case with STAFFER and its follow-on projects and activities.

- Skilled labour initiatives in the Member States need to fulfil the demand for skilled personnel such as planners, industrial operatives and train drivers. To this end, appropriate opportunities for further vocational training and courses of study in specialised fields need to be created and the public relations work intensified. In particular, government personnel need to be deployed as quickly as possible to achieve the objectives of this transition. As a first step in 2025, analyses of how skilled staff for the planning and approval of transport infrastructure are distributed across the carriers should be determined and the requirements to achieve the modal shift targets should be identified. There should also be increased efforts as well as legal and financial support for measures to attract skilled labour from outside Europe.

- The European Commission should strengthen the European sectoral social dialogues of 'Rail' and 'Public Transport' and increase and sustain the financial resources budgeted for them. The European social partner agreement 'Women in Rail' should continue to be rigorously implemented.

- Employees in cross-border rail transport in particular need support. The framework conditions need to be improved and regulations harmonised. The European Commission and the Member States must work together to develop solutions to ensure compliance with European and national regulations governing working time. The frequency of checks on driving and rest periods must be increased across all modes of transport throughout Europe. Easy implementation for companies and employees should be ensured.

- In order to ensure fair competition including when the operator of publicly contracted transport services changes, existing employees throughout Europe should be protected and treated equally in terms of collective agreements where this is currently not common practice.

- When procuring vehicles and other rail transport equipment, compliance with the ILO core labour standards must be mandatory.

7. Optimising the Framework to Accelerate Rail Modernisation

The rail sector needs optimised procedures and regulations to add value in Europe.

- Rail technology for infrastructure, vehicles or communication and control systems is put out to public tender and awarded according to the principle of cost-effectiveness. Cost-effectiveness is primarily defined by a cheap purchase price. European and German public procurement law today already allows other criteria such as sustainability, efficiency, good working conditions, design, customer comfort, life cycle costs or regional value creation to be weighted in the award process.[12] To ensure that these criteria are applied consistently and are legally watertight, the Member States must provide contracting authorities with training and support through public help desks, competence centres and training courses.

- Approval procedures for the authorisation and putting into operation of rail vehicles on the one hand[13] and machinery and equipment for the construction of infrastructure as well as control and safety technology on the other, urgently need to be streamlined if the modal shift to modernised rail transport is to succeed in time. A simplified approval framework must be created for the large number of rail vehicle retrofits required for digitalisation, together with increased responsibility for owners and manufacturers as well as with simplified administrative procedures. In order to avoid time-consuming administrative friction, national approval authorities should implement the European requirements precisely and not add additional demands and obstacles. For the sake of planning security, only complete and unambiguous technical requirements for infrastructure and rolling stock should be adopted.[14]

- In order to rapidly bring the additional trains required for the ramp-up of all rail transport services onto the market, the Member States and the EU should, via their development banks, provide operators and leasing companies with increased loan guarantees for all market participants in a flexible, market and demand-oriented manner.

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Notes

[1] Apart from active transport and practically on a par with other collective transport. EEA 2020, Methodology for GHG Efficiency of Transport Modes, pp. 35–36. https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/rail-and-waterborne-transport/rail-and-waterborne-best/d3b-eea-ghg-efficiency-indicators/view, as well as UBA 2020: Ökologische Bewertung von Verkehrsarten, p. 123, https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/publikationen/oekologische-bewertung-von-verkehrsarten.

[2] Jobs: DZSF (2021): Untersuchung der volkswirtschaftlichen Bedeutung des deutschen Bahnsektors, p. 9, https://www.dzsf.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DZSF/Veroeffentlichungen/Forschungsberichte/2021/ForBe_14_2021.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=5 | Value Added: Bündnis Nachhaltige Mobilitätswirtschaft (2024): Wirtschaftsfaktor nachhaltige Mobilität, https://nachhaltige-mobilitaetswirtschaft.de/2024/04/08/wirtschaftsfaktor-nachhaltige-mobilitaet-studie | GHG emissions: European Environment Agency (2020): Transport and environment report 2020, p. 21, https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/transport-and-environment-report-2020 | Rail 28 times more climate-friendly than planes: Back on Track (2022): GHG emissions by means of transport, p. 6, https://back-on-track.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/220915_B-o-T_GHG-Potential-1.pdf | UBA (2024): Energieverbrauch und Kraftstoffe in Deutschland, https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/daten/verkehr/endenergieverbrauch-energieeffizienz-des-verkehrs#spezifischer-energieverbrauch-sinkt.

[3] DB und PTV Group (2023): Metropolitan Network, https://www.deutschebahn.com/de/presse/pressestart_zentrales_uebersicht/DB-legt-Studie-zum-Ausbau-des-Hochgeschwindigkeitsverkehrs-in-Europa-vor--10878404.

[4] Including better cooperation between the national safety authorities in the case of small border traffic.

[5] Transport & Environment (2023): Aviation Tax Gap, https://transport-environment.vercel.app/articles/every-hour-european-governments-lose-out-on-e4-million-in-aviation-taxes.

[6] In the directive 1999/62/EC, revised by directive 2022/362.

[7] CER (2021), Factsheet on carbon pricing, https://www.cer.be/cer-facts-figures/carbon-pricing-as-a-tool-for-delivering-sustainable-mobility.

[8] To this end, it can draw on concepts and experience from a metropolitan network (DB, PTV et al. (2023): Metropolitan Network, https://www.deutschebahn.com/resource/blob/11083068/bb0f84cddf0b03ca924325579ebdaa55/Studie-Metropolitan-Network-data.pdf) and ten pilot projects. (DG MOVE (2023): Connecting Europe by train, https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/connecting-europe-train-10-eu-pilot-services-boost-cross-border-rail-2023-01-31_en).

[9] In a first step, this refers to regions of 800,000 to 3 million people (Eurostat NUTS 2, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/overview).

[10] For example, how a coordinating body for the integration of the rail network of Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking is conceptualised (Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking, System Pillar: https://rail-research.europa.eu/system_pillar).

[11] VDV (2024): Gleisanschluss-Charta, p. 32. https://www.vdv.de/gleisanschluss-charta-2024-langfassung.pdfx.

[12] Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council 2014/25/EU, Sektorenverordnung über die Vergabe von öffentlichen Aufträgen (2016), § 52 and § 55 Sec. 1.

[13] Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council 2016/797.

[14] Unlike the revision of the Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSI) in Directive 2023/1695.