



DIGITAL AUTOMATIC COUPLING (DAC) IN EUROPEAN RAIL FREIGHT

ETF POSITION

For many years, the ETF has been denouncing the causes behind the decline of rail freight transport, which results on the one hand from lack of investments in the rail system for the transport of goods and on the other hand from unfair intermodal competition based on unfair practices such as social dumping. In addition, the EU railway policy in favour of market opening and intra-sector competition did not result in a modal shift that benefits rail freight transport. Therefore, the ETF demands an in-depth analysis of the results of European railway policies, in particular concerning the political/market pillar and the level of achievement its objectives.

To boost rail freight transport, the ETF recognises the introduction of a Europe-wide coupling system as a possible means to strengthen the efficiency of rail freight operations but we insist that this path to digitalisation must be part of a more ambitious rail freight policy. Such a policy must include:

- Binding target for increasing the modal share of rail freight transport,
- Full internalisation of external costs for all transport modes,
- Promotion of cooperation instead of competition among companies,
- Serious measures to safeguard and/or relaunch a European single wagon load system,
- Link strategic infrastructure (e.g. ports) to rail solutions,
- Heavily invest in industrial sidings,
- Involve large logistics companies in a modal reorientation of their flows,
- Socially exemplary behaviours of the sector because there can be no quality transport without quality jobs and good social conditions.

Furthermore, ETF insists on securing the necessary accompanying measures and jobs in the company for railway employees affected by the change. For the ETF it's not about which coupling system is established in Europe. What is crucial is to ensure that workers' protection, transitional provisions and mixed operations are implemented in the safest way for employees. It is time for concrete steps to be made towards establishing a unified standard and for the EU to support the sector through the transition. In addition, it is important to aim for international standards (e.g. through UN-ECE/OTIF/UIC) to allow circulation beyond the borders of the European Union.

Strong rail freight transport and its benefits for the climate and the economy

Increased rail transport is a major contribution to active climate protection. One freight train is equivalent to 52 heavy goods vehicles or lorries. One tonne of cargo shifted to rail saves 80 per cent of CO₂-emissions compared to transport by truck. Rail freight transport relieves roads and cities and Only through this mode of transport will it be possible to successfully achieve the climate targets set in the European Green Deal.

Rail freight transport fulfils a vital function for European industries and for supplying the population and the economy in Europe. It's an essential part of logistics value chain, especially leading industries, the automotive, chemical, steel and construction materials industries. The current COVID 19 health crises, highlighted the essential function of rail and of railway workers. Improving the efficiency of logistics and rail freight operations **in a socially sustainable way** will be an important element to boost the shift of freight to rail, and could even create and preserve jobs

The future production and value-added structures of key industries are fundamentally changing the demand for logistics services because companies must increasingly pay attention to their carbon footprint. Therefore, the European rail freight sector must be able to exploit its advantages.

Automated coupling is a measure to increase the efficiency of operations. At the same time, the introduction of the automated coupling will have a major impact on railway employees, especially on shunting employees, but also on wagon masters (technical inspection employees) and train drivers.

Social effects of DAC:

- Railway workers deserve to be safe: Due to the manual coupling, workers still have to couple in the space between the wagons. This dangerous activity poses a severe safety risk. The heavy weight of the manual coupling, as well as the bent forward body position required for coupling, represent a substantial physical strain.
- However, the introduction of the DAC will also lead to a negative impact on jobs. In the case of a semi-automatic claw coupling, about 25-30% of jobs will be lost in the shunting process, and in the case of a fully automatic Scharfenberg coupler (combined with electronic consignment note and train documents) about a third to even half of jobs will be lost in the shunting process. Workers must receive further training in order to cope with the new technological changes and to ensure just transition.

Our demands:

- *It is imperative that social effects on employees and the labour law dimensions are taken into account and mitigated.*
- *Investment in DAC and DAC deployment must be subject of social dialogue. Workers' representatives have to be involved in the process from the very beginning to create transparency and ensure a smooth implementation.*
- **A realistic job perspective for employees must be developed already now as integral part of the investment plan. The entire sector must be obliged to take measures to guarantee**



sustainable employment opportunities. These include investments in qualification and further training for employees who wish to be retrained in a different field and the right to maintain at least an adequate job in the company.

- To ensure safe railway operations, an evaluation and adaptation of the **safety-relevant regulations at European and national level** (e.g. requirement for brake tests, clutch condition tests, initial wagon inspection, etc.) is necessary during the conversion phase and for Europe-wide operations.
- Similarly, the **European Railway Agency** and the railway industry must ensure that in the event of a malfunction or manual manipulation of the centre buffer coupler, sufficient attention is paid to health and safety measures of workers.
- The same applies to **mixed operations** with conventional couplings, which will certainly be present during the changeover phase. Experiences from the use of the automatic coupling on shunting vehicles and the simple central buffer coupling on block trains show that mixed operations, in particular, entail new risks for employees in the field of health and safety. There are documented accidents at work. These impact assessments must be made compulsory and taken into account during the stages of development and introduction. Countermeasures to prevent serious and fatal accidents must be developed and implemented.
- As an opportunity for a European initiative to introduce the intelligent automatic central buffer coupler in rail freight transport, the **European Railway Agency** must also make vocational training and requirements for personnel involved in maintenance or manipulation mandatory.
- The ETF reconfirms its demand to establish a Europe wide harmonised high qualification and certification system for all safety-relevant professions, including the profession of shunters and train inspectors. This system must include quality standards for the training centres and the minimum duration of training.