



EUROPEAN
TRANSPORT
WORKERS'
FEDERATION

The future of rail freight transport According to Railway Workers

Policy Position Paper



Rail freight transport has the potential to be the backbone of a sustainable freight transport system: The industry has set itself the goal of increasing the modal share of rail freight transport to 30% by 2030. The ETF Railways Section welcomes these ambitions, but also notes that thus far, the EU's strategy for increasing the modal share of rail in freight transport has not produced the desired results. In fact, the modal share of rail in freight transport has decreased over the past decade. At the same time, railway companies are not successful in making the sector attractive for new (young and female) workers, adding to increasing labour shortages. There is no doubt that labour shortage in rail is triggered in the first place by a decline in job quality and working conditions.

ETF represents 700.000 railway workers from 37 European countries, whose every-day job is to make the railway system of Europe run smoothly. In four points we share our expertise and vision on what is needed for rail to be the backbone of freight transport in the future.

1. Public investments in a comprehensive network

Adequate funding is a pre-requisite for a well-functioning rail freight network. Public investments are urgently needed to maintain and improve the density, capacity, and quality of the available infrastructure that make rail an attractive alternative to less environmentally friendly modes of transport. Investments should not only be focused on long-distance corridors, but aim to expand, improve, and maintain an integrated system of rail freight transport for both long and shorter distance that includes single wagon load, feeder lines and industrial sidings.

The push for [liberalisation of the last decades has not benefited the sector](#) and its workers, nor improved its modal share. For a successful shift of cargo transport to rail, an integrated system, ideally publicly owned, is the best route. This will ensure efficient high-quality services, and intramodal solutions that serve the public good.

2. Cooperation not competition

For technical and operational reasons, most trains cannot simply drive to all corners of Europe. A successful rail freight network that spans across Europe is therefore only possible if companies and infrastructure managers are allowed and encouraged to cooperate. This used to be common practice and we see that some companies are now successfully moving in this direction again. The cooperation between infrastructure managers is furthermore the only way to allow for smooth train paths across borders. Cooperation should be the model for all rail freight transport across Europe.

Cooperation and interoperability with other modes of transport will also be essential in realising more multi-modal solutions. Governments should take action to especially connect important infrastructure hubs such as ports and industrial regions by rail.



3. Working conditions

Railway workers are at the heart of the railway sector, however over the past decades many have seen their working conditions deteriorate under the pressure of competition: Salaries have worsened, contracts are less secure and working hours harder to balance with private life. As a result, the sector is now struggling with a shortage of workers. To attract new workers, including young and female workers, working conditions need to drastically improve. To this end the following points are essential:

- Working, driving and rest times of drivers need to be monitored to ensure safety and eliminate unjustified overtime.
- Drivers must have access to decent sanitary facilities at stations, this is a basic human necessity.
- Legislation needs to be put in place to ensure workers receive the same pay for the same work in the same place irrespective of their country of origin.
- A healthy work-life balance must be possible for all categories of workers.
- Technological and/or digital solutions, such as Digital and Automated Coupling (DAC), can be introduced, but only if they are aimed at making the work safer and less physically straining.
- Workers should be actively involved in the governance of rail corridors.
- The quality and duration of training for railway professions should be standardised at a high minimum level in Europe.

4. Eliminate social and environmental dumping in all transport

A successful policy boosting the modal share of rail cannot only target railways but must be part of a comprehensive policy that makes the whole transport sector fairer and more sustainable. Rail transport is currently in impossible competition with other modes of transport where social dumping is rampant and environmental costs are not paid by the companies but borne by society. Policies should be aimed at creating a level playing field by internalising negative social and environmental costs for all modes of transport. This should also include fair and equal taxation of for example fuel, energy, and VAT.