



EUROPEAN
TRANSPORT
WORKERS'
FEDERATION

The future of rail passenger transport According to Railway Workers

Policy Position Paper



Rail transport is expected to play a leading role in achieving climate goals in the years to come. Passengers are encouraged to switch from driving and flying, to using trains and other modes of public transport. The EU even aims at doubling high-speed rail traffic by 2030 and tripling it by 2050. 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 passenger transport has not produced the desired results.

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 five points we share our expertise and vision on what is needed for rail to be the backbone of passenger transport in the future.

1. Public investment

Adequate funding is a prerequisite for well-functioning public transport system. Unfortunately, railway systems across Europe suffer from underinvestment, often as a result of cost-cutting and privatisation policies. Looking back on the past decades, [ETF draws the conclusion that liberalisation has not benefitted the sector and public ownership is the best route](#) to reliable, affordable, good-quality rail services.

Rail transport is a strategic service that is needed to serve the public good. For this reason, it should be publicly owned and managed. The direct awarding of public service contracts must remain a viable option to ensure quality and continuity of service. 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.

2. 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, leading to reduced and poorer quality services. To attract new workers, including young and female workers, working conditions need to drastically improve.

Policy makers must make sure companies do not compete on the backs of their employees. This means working conditions need to be protected, also in tendering procedures and when a contract is awarded to a new operator. Subcontracting should be reduced to a minimum, and prohibited for safety relevant professions. In addition, 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. Companies should strive to provide the best possible service, not operate at the lowest possible cost.



3. Safety & accessibility

Rail needs to be an attractive, safe and accessible mode of transport for all travellers. To this end, trains and stations need to be sufficiently staffed, to make sure all passengers can get the assistance they need. This is especially important for elderly passengers and those with reduced mobility. The presence of staff is also essential for the safety of passengers in the early morning or late evening. Railway companies furthermore have the responsibility to guarantee a safe work environment for their staff. Railway workers must be protected from aggression and violence by passengers.

4. Eliminate social and environmental dumping in all transport

A successful policy promoting travel by train 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.

We also support the introduction of concrete modal share targets at EU and national level, that include a clear timeline.

5. Multi-modal connections

It will not be possible for every destination in Europe to be directly reachable by train. Therefore, rail travel needs to be part of a network of convenient multi-modal transport options. Train stations should be transport hubs from where passengers can choose to travel their so-called 'last mile' by bicycle, foot, or other modes of public transport.

Whereas improving long-distance and cross-border connections is important, most rail travel (93%) is domestic, often as part of people's daily commute. Policymakers at both EU and national level must beware that investments in developing international and long-distance connections do not come at the detriment of regional services. This would be counterproductive to climate objectives.