



To all EU transport ministers

Brussels, 18 October 2022

Dear Ministers,

Priorities to boost European Railways

It has come to our attention that during the informal meeting of transport ministers on 21 October 2022, a significant part of the agenda will be dedicated to the future of railways in the EU. The European Transport Workers Federation represents 700.000 railway workers from 37 European Countries who welcome the great ambitions for improving rail connections and shifting more passengers and goods to the rail.

ETF, its affiliates, and the members they represent have a unique insight into the challenges the railway sector is facing. We would like to share our perspective with you and urge you to discuss these matters in Prague.

1. Shortage of decent jobs

The railway sector is facing a shortage of workers, or rather a shortage of decent jobs. People are no longer eager to work in a sector where in the past decades they have seen their salaries decrease under the pressure of privatisation and their job security deteriorate. Young, skilled workers find their way to other sectors where their skills are better appreciated with decent salaries, secure contracts and a good work-life balance. As a result, the workers that are on the job every day are stretched thin, often working overtime and unable to take their leave when requested.

Numerous European railway undertakings have already scaled down their services due to a lack of sufficient staff. To illustrate the magnitude of this issue: In France, SNCF is missing 10% of the number of workers needed for a smooth operation of services including 1500 train drivers, in the Netherlands, NS currently has 2200 vacancies, and in Austria, ÖBB needs to attract 3000 new workers per year to continue services.

Attracting new workers is the only way to realise the ambitious goals that have been set for the sector. We call on you and your colleagues to make the working conditions of railways workers across Europe a priority in your policy decisions. To turn the tide, publicly owned railway companies need sufficient funding that allows them to hire the staff needed and provide them with decent working conditions. As policy makers, you must ensure that private companies are held to the same social standards, engage in meaningful social dialogue and are prohibited from competing on salaries, working time or safety measures over the backs of their employees. This is essential to prevent a race to the bottom in terms of working conditions as we see in for example the road transport sector.

2. Investment in regional lines

International and long-distance rail connections are a promising way to make passenger transport more sustainable. However, the vast majority of kilometres travelled by rail in Europe are at local or regional level, often as part of citizen's commute to work or school. Investments in long-distance





services must not come at the detriment of regional lines, they need to form a cohesive system, where local and regional lines play an essential role connecting communities to each other and to multi-modal transport hubs. This is not only relevant for passenger transport, but also for freight transport, where local shunting yards and single-wagon loads play a key role in 'feeding' long-distance freight transport.

3. Cooperation for better (international) connections

We see [clear evidence](#) that the European Commission's approach of the last decades – pushing for ever more liberalisation on the railway market – has not benefitted the sector, nor its workers in any way. On the contrary, we see more potential in cooperation between publicly owned railway companies, both at national and international level to provide high-quality services, as has for example proven successful in Switzerland. It allows RUs to cooperate and invest in cross-border connections, and infrastructure managers to create smooth train paths. When discussing how to boost international rail travel in Europe, please keep in mind that with every new company entering the market, the coordination of ticketing, timetables and infrastructure capacity becomes more complex. ETF considers the push at EU level for ever more liberalisation harmful and strives for more freedom for Member States to allow and encourage cooperation on their rail networks.

The ETF therefore has and will continue to bring to the attention of European Parliament and Council the fact that the European Commission is taking a totally unacceptable approach on the PSO regulation, attempting with every opportunity to misinterpret it, by prioritising competitive tendering over direct award. This, by circumventing your powers and competences too. Please see, to this end, the latest ETF letter addressed to the College of Commissioners, and to members of the European Parliament on the PSO guidelines to be soon adopted by the Commission.

Moreover, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that the European Commission takes the liberty to target Member States who intend to extend the direct award, threatening them with infringement procedures if they pursue this course of action – see attached. There is no legal basis which entitles the Commission to do so.

In summary, the railway sector has a number of serious social issues that need to be addressed if European railways are to be the backbone of a sustainable transport system. ETF and our affiliates count on you to take on board our insights and expertise. We consider a dedicated ministerial meeting with ETF on social aspects in railways to be appropriate to address the urgent challenges the sector and its workers are facing.

Respectfully,

Livia Spera
ETF General Secretary

Annex:

- Letter from ETF to the College of Commissioners and MEPs, dated 29 September 2022
- Letter from Commissioner Valean to Ms Heijnen, dated 18 July 2022

