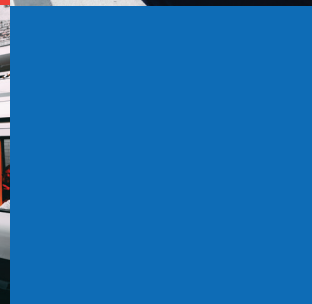




EUROPEAN
TRANSPORT
WORKERS'
FEDERATION



RAILWAYS AS THE BACKBONE OF SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

ETF rail priorities
for the European
elections 2024





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The European railways are crucial for achieving the high ambitions for a green transition. The current European Commission aims to achieve a 90% reduction in the transport sector's emissions by 2050. This can only be achieved with a well-functioning railway sector that serves as the backbone of the European transport system. In its Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, the European Commission set the objective to double rail freight traffic and even triple high-speed passenger traffic by 2050. The ETF Railways Section has welcomed and supported these objectives; however, we do not see sufficient progress to achieve these goals. For a truly sustainable future for the European railways, we identify 5 priorities for the next legislature.

1. Railways are a public service

Railways provide a service that benefits the common good of our society. They provide low-carbon transport for both passengers and goods that benefit our environment, connect communities, and alleviate congestion on our roads. For these reasons, the 'profits' of railways cannot be expressed in merely monetary terms. Railways provide a service that cannot be left to private companies operating in a market competing only on price. They are best provided by integrated companies that are democratically controlled by public authorities. **Rail transport should be declared a sector of general interest and be supported with the necessary public funds.**

2. Make the sector attractive for workers

It takes 300+ different professions to run a train. Currently, many railway companies do not manage to attract the number of employees they need to run their services. The shortage of workers in the sector is only expected to get worse over the next years, as a large share of railway workers are about to retire. The only way for the railway sector to deliver on the green transition is for railway companies to become more attractive employers, especially for underrepresented groups such as young and female workers. **This starts with a good salary, job security, work-life balance, safe working conditions and a well-functioning dialogue with trade unions.** In the same line, the safety and security of workers need to be prioritised. Across Europe we have seen a spike in aggression towards rail staff, leading to people leaving the sector or being on prolonged sick leave. This needs to stop.¹

3. Investment in green mobility

Trains cannot run on green ambitions alone. In order for railways to live up to the goals set out in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, serious investments are needed in rolling stock, infrastructure, and staff. Since 1995 Europe lost 15,000 km of rail, but built 30,000 km of motorway.² In addition, the prevalence of deferred maintenance of infrastructure leads to unnecessary delays and in the worst case accidents. **To turn the tide, policymakers need to put their money where their mouth is and provide short- and long-term public funding for the maintenance and expansion of railway services in Europe.**

4. Stop the ideology of liberalisation – reevaluate the EUs rail policy

The EU's railway policy of the past three decades has been led by unfounded hopes of competition leading to better services, lower prices, and an increased modal share. ETF and our affiliates have objected to this strategy from the start, because we know that the rail sector functions best as an integrated system where companies can cooperate to provide the best service. After 30 years of liberalisation of both passenger and freight transport, we do not see positive results from liberalisation.³ The predicted increases in modal share have not materialized, prices for users are up and working conditions for railway workers have deteriorated. **ETF calls on European policymakers to conduct a thorough and objective evaluation of their railway policies thus far. Going forward we need a coherent railway policy that actively promotes cooperation and public investment.**

5. Actively encourage the modal shift

Rail will never be able to compete with road or aviation as long as these modes of transport are allowed to continue to exploit workers and dump their environmental costs on society. **To create a truly level playing field, the external (social and environmental) costs of all modes of transport must be reflected in their price.** We call on policymakers to actively encourage a modal shift to rail in both passenger and freight transport. This includes the balanced promotion of international and regional rail passenger transport, facilitating multi-modal transport and the continuation of single-wagon loads in freight transport.

1 For further details, see ETF manifesto on 3rd party violence against railway workers

2 Rudolph, F., Riach, N., Kees, J. (2023). Development of Transport Infrastructure in Europe. Exploring the shrinking and expansion of railways, motorways and airports. Berlin/Wuppertal: T3 Transportation Think Tank/Wuppertal Institute.

3 For further information, see ETF policy paper on [Lessons learned from three decades of liberalisation of the European Railways](#)



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