

## PRESS RELEASE

# Reaction of Europe on Rail on the European Commission Action Plan to boost long distance and cross-border passenger rail

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On Tuesday 14th of December, the European Commission published its Action plan to boost long distance and cross-border passenger rail. While making a positive step towards recognizing the shortcomings of the status quo, it should be strengthened to effectively contribute to the Green Deal objectives and the European Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. In reaction to this release, the Europe on Rail coalition stresses the importance of actual implementation, and calls on national governments to support this strategy.

First of all, the Commission has rightfully identified the difficulties related to **access to rolling-stock**, and the coalition positively welcomes the proposal of financing cross-border trains via the European Investment Bank. However, the Commission's proposal does not go far enough: Jacob Rohm, Germanwatch policy advisor and Europe on Rail coordinator, clarifies the order of magnitude: *"For the goal of doubling high-speed traffic by 2030, we need about 1,000 additional trains in the EU. Procurement must now start quickly, because building trains takes years."*

The Commission also highlights the current complexity of **planning cross-border connections** and supports the launch of an European entity for international rail management, similar to Eurocontrol for air traffic. Yet, the coalition regrets that the measures proposed remain vague, given the importance of better coordinating cross-border traffic, and suggests looking into strengthening the **European Railway Agency** (ERA) for this purpose.

The Europe on Rail coalition salutes the Commission's willingness to promote pilot projects on **track access charges**, and wonders when and how they will be decided and supported. These should be open, transparent and inclusive processes, focusing on strategic corridors where modal shifts from road or air to train can offer main climate benefits. According to Łukasz Janeczko, Policy Advisor at the Civil Affairs Institute, *"national governments should now send a quick signal in support of the Commission's initiative and, as a first step, arrange for the rail toll to be reduced for cross-border connections."*

On **passenger rights**, the Commission has noted the importance of guaranteeing a **seamless booking experience** and the insufficiency of the status quo, though the actual means of implementation remain uncertain.

Lastly, the Europe on Rail coalition very positively receives the Commission's will to assess the need for an **EU-wide exemption of international rail tickets from VAT**, as it will help to set up a level playing field with other modes of transport that do not include their full environmental negative impacts.

Surveys<sup>1</sup> show that people are willing to use rail instead of air, even for longer distances. But for that, they need well-timed and easy-to-book international connections at reasonable prices. *"The EU Commission has understood the need to increase affordability, attractiveness and offer of cross-borders trains , but the action plan should be rapidly implemented if we want to reach ambitious climate objectives for the benefits of European citizens "*, says Jeremie Fosse, president of eco-union. The coalition also stresses the importance of getting support from Member States: ***"Without strong support from the European governments, the action plan faces the same fate as previous EU Commission initiatives to Europeanize and improve rail transport."***

## **About Europe On Rail**

EuropeOnRail is a European initiative led by Civil Society Organizations to reduce carbon emissions from international mobility by promoting night and day passenger trains between European cities and countries. [www.europeonrail.eu](http://www.europeonrail.eu) - [info@europeonrail.eu](mailto:info@europeonrail.eu)

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<sup>1</sup> Read our [paper](#) on how opinion polls show support for shifting flights to rail.