

EPF feedback to “Connecting Europe through high-speed rail”

https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14576-Connecting-Europe-through-high-speed-rail_en

The European Passengers' Federation welcomes the Commission's initiative “Connecting Europe through High-Speed Rail”.

Availability of an attractive offer, in terms of travel time & cost, is key in order to drive a shift to rail and multimodality. Investment in high-speed rail is welcome, to address missing links (including cross-border), and to strengthen rail as the backbone of a European-wide, multimodal, sustainable mobility network.

That being said, by focusing solely on high-speed rail infrastructure, the “Connecting Europe through High-Speed Rail” initiative should take care not to overlook first- and last-mile connectivity challenges that impact the accessibility and usability of the network. Coordinating multimodal access to the HSR system and providing clear guidelines on this is essential to creating a network that is truly citizen-centered, convenient, and inclusive.

Public transport works best for people when it provides a seamless network of services – the first and last mile of any journey being no less important than the high-speed journey in between. A plan for a high-speed network must therefore be complemented by good local and regional connections. The TEN-T network needs to be designed in a way that maximises interconnectivity with the wider public transport network (at its best, a key element of a network of networks). Hubs are a vital part of this: they need to be designed thoughtfully.

The implementation of a European high-speed rail network requires substantial construction works to upgrade the current infrastructure, and measures are needed to minimize the impact on passengers. Replacement timetables should be simple, understandable and barrier-free. Access to replacement services must be clearly signposted and accessible to all travellers, especially those with limited mobility. Replacement services must offer sufficient seating capacity, and must offer a level of comfort comparable to that of railway travel. Real-time information on replacement services is another important element. The timely announcement of railway works ensures that replacement timetables can be published in due time. As a rule, passengers must be informed of upcoming railway works on the day when they book their tickets. In the case of trackworks scheduled at short notice, passengers should be informed as early as possible regarding the extent to which they will be affected, and regarding travel alternatives available for their journey. Consistent

and realistic information via various channels is important, supported by competent accessible staff to inform and guide travellers.

Finally, EPF wishes to stress that any infrastructure investments should be accompanied by efforts to increase integration at various other levels too, to maximise positive impact:

- **Timetables and connections:** An “Europatakt” should be a basis for infrastructure investment, enabling integrated timetables, striving for optimal use of the network capacity and optimal connectivity for passengers;
- **Information and ticketing:** Passengers should have access to unbiased, dynamic journey information, enabling them to compare and combine different transport operators and/or modes as suits their needs;
- **Passenger protection:** Passengers must be treated fairly when things go wrong with their journey and their rights adequately protected, with journey continuation guarantee across all (rail) operators being the main priority;
- **Understanding costs:** Internalisation of external costs and consistency as to the basis of charging between transport modes, would allow for a level playing field and fair competition between modes, and steer end-users’ sustainable mobility choices;
- **Overcoming administrative and political boundaries:** Prospective operators of new international rail services, in particular, would benefit from a common regulatory approach, e.g. in terms of train service planning cycles, track access policies, etc.

For more information, please refer to EPF’s priorities for EU action, available <https://www.epf.eu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/EPF-priorities-24-04-10.pdf>.

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