

Report of the Platform on International Rail Passenger Transport (IRP)

29th of March 2021: at the occasion of the EU kick-off event Year of Rail,

Version 1.00

The European Year of Rail 2021 as well as the European Green Deal present the appropriate timing for in-depth consideration of the means for a broad revitalisation of the European rail passenger market. Within that the current initiative on the TEE 2.0 concept might be one of the significant frontrunners.

The European railway undertakings and infrastructure companies experienced significant economic losses in 2020 (e.g. the sector noted between 40% and 70%, and on international routes even over 95%, revenue losses) due to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, where cross-border rail passengers transport was confronted with new barriers justified by the health crisis.

The call for a substantial role for railways in the EU Green Deal was underlined by the declaration of Ministers on international railway passenger transport from the 4th of June 2020. The declaration stressed the importance of a European agenda for international passenger rail services and working together between the countries concerned. This ambition of developing a European agenda on railway passenger transport is also highlighted by the Commission's Strategy on Sustainable & Smart Mobility as presented on 9th of December 2020.

The German Presidency of the Council of the EU presented the TransEuropeExpress (TEE) 2.0 concept at the Ministerial Conference on "Innovative Rail Transport – connecting, sustainable, digital" on the 21st of September 2020. This initiative has led to a Letter of Intent from March 2021 showing nearly 40 existing and possible new international rail passenger services. This Letter of Intent describes a network of TEE 2.0 connections, which signatories consider important. The efforts of the IRP address instruments that can be used to support this development, within the framework of applicable European legislation. Therefore, following the Declaration of Ministers on International Railway Passenger Transport from the 4th of June 2020, a platform of Ministry representatives was set up and cooperation with the sector was developed.

In the Sustainable & Smart Mobility Strategy, the Commission announced its intention to work towards creating enabling conditions for transport operators to offer travellers by 2030 carbon-neutral choices for scheduled collective travel below 500 km within the EU. The strategy contains a proposal on the revision of the energy taxation directive; The strategy also calls for support of <15> pilot international rail passenger services by 2030 and stresses the demand for new and innovative solutions; the strategy underlines the intention to propose legislation in 2022 to support the development of multimodal digital mobility services and also announces a revision of the technical specifications for rail interoperability in 2022 to integrate digitalisation and modernisation regarding rail rolling stock, rail infrastructure, command and signaling systems (ERTMS), and operating rules for train running. This revision will be incremental for cross-border rail traffic. In addition, it will deliver a more efficient management of infrastructure in times of saturation, and is expected to lead to cost reduction within a highly complex, national technical and safety rules-based European rail system.

The European Commission is evaluating the TEN-T regulation 1315/2016 and the regulation on rail freight corridor 913/2010. The European Commission also intends publishing in 2021 revised interpretative guidelines on the application of the land PSO-regulation which will include the issue of cross-border passenger rail services.

The UN ECE Inland Transport Committee approved on the 26th of February 2021 the establishment of a new Group of Experts tasked with drafting a new legal instrument on international rail passenger hubs, on the basis of its Terms of Reference as contained in ECE/TRANS/2021/6, Annex II.

The platform is working on four areas:

- A. Customer experience and digitalisation
- B. Network of international passenger services
- C. EU Green Deal: infrastructure bottlenecks and interoperability issues
- D. Regulatory framework

The platform is preparing an integrated report covering the above mentioned four areas. After finalisation of this integrated report, it will be sent to the Ministers and to express further support to development of a European agenda for international rail passenger services.

Sector representatives from railway undertakings, infrastructure managers, railway industry, passenger and consumer organisations, travel agents and third party ticket vendors have set up a sector mirror group to work with the platform¹. This group aims to develop common positions on a range of issues relating to the development of international rail passenger transport.

European bodies, such as Shift2Rail Joint Undertaking, participated to the activities to ensure the necessary link with future rail research and innovation to support concretely international passenger mobility and services. Railway undertakings and infrastructure managers are encouraged to work together in the framework of Shift2Rail and its successor programme to ensure the alignment of the research and innovation programme to the objectives defined above, including demonstration activities to accelerate the market deployment of innovative technical and operational solutions in the period 2021–2031.

There is a wide variety in the development of international railway passenger services and infrastructure networks in different parts of Europe depending on for example: customer demand, geography, population density, economic integration between cross-border regions, etc. The international rail passenger market share was 7% of the whole EU rail passenger market in 2018 and shows significant growth potential. Developing competitive international railway passenger services including those leading to a shift from air to rail may lead to considerable reduction in CO₂ emissions.

People choose their mode of transport based on five factors: availability, punctuality, quality, accessibility and price. Looking at the current offer of international train services we consider there is room for further development with regard to all these factors in order to achieve the international train's fullest potential.

Based on these considerations the four subgroups have already done a substantial amount of work and comprehensive discussion to develop a wide-ranging report on the different topics they were assigned. The final report will provide an important insight into these topics which are considered vital in the context of the further development of international rail passenger traffic.

The COVID-19 crises and the related travel restrictions have led to very substantial losses in international rail passenger numbers. Beyond the major damages created by the COVID-19 crisis, it also offers opportunities for the development of new railway services and innovative market concepts.

In this context the subgroups focus on the following topics. These reflect preliminary results of the platform, but do not preclude further discussions in the platform and subgroups.

¹ Reservation:

Switzerland, as a Non-EU Member, concluded a bilateral land transport agreement with the EU. PSO prescription and market opening regulations differ from the ones within the EU. Switzerland therefore states a general reservation regarding statements and recommendations concerning market opening and competitive tendering. In national and international rail passenger transport, Switzerland's focus is primarily set on the cooperation model.

Subgroup A

- The customer is to have access to simple, reliable and comprehensive online platforms where he/she can check timetables, prices, up-to-date and real-time information, make reservations and buy tickets for international rail transport services, including national (urban, regional and long-distance) and international rail services. Solutions might be necessary at the European, State or Railway Sector level. They involve legal, contractual as well as technical aspects (and possibly financial incentives) and should not exclude multimodal solutions.
- The implementation of the existing obligations for all railway undertakings as defined in Interoperability standards TSI TAP for extensive (real time) data exchange of service-related data is important for achieving the objectives and should look at the multi-modal dimension.
- The European Commission with the involvement of the railway sector and interested stakeholders should assess how the railway sector can provide feasible solutions for selling international tickets by third party vendors or MaaS service providers on fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory commercial principles. A timeline for the implementation should be agreed on. Data made available to third-party ticket vendors must be as complete as the data for the purpose of enabling ticket sales provided to, or made available via, the RU's own retail/distribution channels through agreements which are Fair, Reasonable and Non-Discriminatory (FRAND).
- The services for Persons with Reduced Mobility Assistance Booking Tool (PRM-ABT) should be enhanced by deeper cooperation.

Subgroup B

- The concept of a European regular interval timetable ("Europatakt") with more frequent connections based on lines to be combined in nodes in a non-discriminating manner makes rail travel more attractive to passengers and allows a more efficient process for capacity-planning. Based on demand analysis, all stakeholders – within their respective roles – should work together to identify attractive connections at slots to be offered, linking to national and regional services.
- TEE 2.0 connections should be developed and organised by interested railway undertakings, especially in terms of rolling stock availability.
- The discussion between European Commission, EU Member States and RailNetEurope (RNE) on an upgrade of the current European timetabling process, based on the Timetable Redesign (TTR, project of RNE), should take into account the needs and interests of national and international rail passenger and freight services in an open access market and should aim for an implementation for the timetable in 2025 as aimed for by RNE. The European legislator should be asked to foster this approach and welcome the development of an international non-discriminatory capacity strategy by the interested parties for rail passenger services between hubs based on / integrated with the national clock-face timetables.
- The concept TEE 2.0 should be further developed according to market demand by its supporters, amongst other things with the aim of achieving attractive travel times and good and reliable connections in comparison to European short-distance flights. Implementation of a concept such as TEE 2.0 requires removal of barriers for the setting up and operations of international services. The results should be published.
- The European Commission should present a proposal, as stated in the Sustainable & Smart Mobility Strategy, to establish at least 15 pilots of international rail passenger services, taking into account market development, technological innovations, existing concepts such as the TEE 2.0 and the basic principles of the Single European Railway Area. The European railway sector should be encouraged to develop and promote European High-Speed Rail / long distance services connecting European capitals and major cities according to market demand. The platform is preparing a recommendation for these pilot lines.

- Discuss within the platform the framework conditions for development of a sustainable and competitive European Night train network.

Subgroup C

- The European Commission should be invited to explore on a European level further possibilities for optimising the conditions for financial support for all actors if necessary to achieve the defined objectives, consistent with the Sustainable & Smart Mobility Strategy, New Consumer Agenda and for Research & Innovation(R&I).
- The European Commission and the Member States should continue to work on the development of appropriate infrastructure and on the Infrastructure bottleneck alleviation program, as coordinated by the TEN-T program for the core network corridors and the TEN-T comprehensive rail network.
- Railway undertakings need good infrastructure to be able to offer high-speed connections between capitals and major cities.
- The availability of the envisaged rail connectivity index will allow to assess the level of integration between urban hubs by international rail passenger transport at European level. This initiative is highly welcomed.
- The European railway sector and the aviation sector should foster a common European wide action plan, aiming specifically at a multimodal approach to make combined air-rail journeys easier to access for customers.
- The existing European interoperability issue logbook for rail freight may be extended with topics related to international rail passenger traffic.

Subgroup D

- The gradual harmonisation of regulatory and implementation practices among European regulatory bodies to favour regulatory convergence and certainty in the EU internal market should be encouraged.
- The European Commission and the Member States are encouraged to look into possibilities to further reduce economic barriers to develop new international rail passenger services including lowering access barriers to rolling stock.
- Establish a methodology to better align open access services into an existing national network based on an integrated clockwise timetable.
- Member states should increase cooperation and organisation on authority level and enhance regular contact with neighbouring counterparts ("national contact points").

The platform looks forward to the finalisation of the subgroup reports in due time to be included in the final report of the IRP to Ministers in June 2021.

The platform very much welcomes the statement published by the sector mirror group on the occasion of this event as an important contribution.

The platform also wants on this occasion to thank the European Commission for its good cooperation and support. The Chair hopes this good cooperation will continue, especially looking forward to the upcoming strategy and action plan of the European Commission referring to European Rail Passenger Transport.

Finally the platform looks forward to the conclusion of the report of the IRP and its subgroups, to be presented to the Ministers in June 2021.