



Economic Commission for Europe**Inland Transport Committee****Working Party on Rail Transport****Seventy-eighth session**

Geneva, 13 (pm)–15 November 2024

Item 14 of the provisional agenda

Railway Reform and Review**The Future of International Rail Passenger Transport****Note by the secretariat****Workshop summary****I. Introduction and Mandate**

1. Recognizing the importance of cooperating to foster rail passenger transport, during the second day of the seventy-seventh Working Party on Rail Transport (SC.2), the Workshop on “The Future of International Rail Passenger Transport” took place.
2. The Working Party welcomed the interventions and discussions that emerged during the Workshop and requested that the secretariat prepare the following summary document to discuss the issue during the next sessions. A list of topics arising from presentations and discussions enriched with examples has been provided. The Working Party requested that the secretariat prepare a summary of the discussions (ECE/TRANS/SC.2/243, paragraph 9).
3. About 70 participants were registered for the event and 13 presenters from national and international institutions, railways and the private sector described their point of view on this issue.
4. The following speakers attended the Workshop:
 - Mr. Erekle Kezherashvili, Rail Transport Agency of Georgia
 - Mr. Hinne Groot, Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, Netherlands
 - Ms. Magdalena Kossowska, Ministry of Infrastructure, Railway Department, Republic of Poland
 - Mr. Benn Hall, Department for Transport, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
 - Mr. Dejan Lasica, Transport Community
 - Mr. Howard Rosen, Rail Working Group
 - Mr. Ugo Tortori, Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane



- Mr. Ömer Tangül, DG for Regulation of Transport Services, Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, Türkiye
 - Mr. Blaž Pongračič, Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies
 - Mr. Christopher Irwin, European Passenger Federation
 - Mr. Robert Dobre, Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, Romania
 - Mr. Roumen Markov, Large Infrastructure Project LLC
 - Mr. George Emmanoulopoulos, Transport Planner – Engineer.
5. A document titled “Austrian experience on international rail passenger transport”, submitted by Austria, has also been included in the informal documents of the SC.2 meeting.
6. A presentation prepared by the secretariat describing the report “Railways at the centre of a post-pandemic recovery, Measures to support international rail carriers” is also part of the analysis. The report contains a summary of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on rail transport and of the initiatives implemented by states to support the railway sector.

II. Main interventions

7. This section highlights the main themes raised by the speakers during their interventions.

A. Rail Transport Agency of Georgia

8. The Rail Transport Agency of Georgia presented the country’s current rail infrastructure system. To date, more than 1,500 kilometres of fully electrified rail lines and 100 freight and 31 passenger stations are used in the country to provide rail services.

9. The country is also putting significant effort in developing the legal framework to regulate rail transport in the country. To do so, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia has defined and implemented a new policy in rail transport which included:

- Establishing a National Railway Safety Authority;
- Introducing a safety certificate for railway operators and safety authorization for infrastructure managers;
- Introducing rules on dangerous goods transported by rail; and
- Elaborating requirements to obtain a train driver’s license and certificate.

10. This was supplemented by an approximation of legislation to the EU Regulation 1370/2007 on public service obligations and in an improvement of the passenger services, especially regarding their safety and protection of their rights.

11. In 2020 and 2021, Georgian Railways experienced a major decrease in passenger transport due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, but in 2022, the number of people transported increased again.

12. A new infrastructural project to connect Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye is being developed. This project requires the reconstruction of the existing 180 km line and building 27 km of new rail lines, with an estimated construction cost of \$775 million.

13. JSC Georgian Railways is implementing the Tbilisi-Makhinjauri modernization project to ensure an improvement in the safety of rail transport, an increase in the capacity of the line and a decrease in the travel time for trains.

14. The Government is conducting a study to verify the feasibility of a High-speed railway in Georgia.

B. Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, Netherlands

15. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management of the Netherlands presented the Platform International Rail Passenger, a European project to enhance the collaboration between countries to strengthen international rail passenger services.

16. The Platform is divided into four different subgroups to focus on significant issues:

- Customer Experience and Digitalisation
- Network of International Passenger Services
- EU Green Deal: infra bottleneck and interoperability issues.
- Regulatory Framework

17. The meetings of the subgroups have helped to share good practices and experiences. Three progress reports have been presented to member States: in 2021, 2022, and 2023.

18. A pilot project on the development of a night train connecting Amsterdam, Brussels, Lille, and Barcelona, that will be operational from 2025, has been chosen to demonstrate the opportunities that could emerge thanks to the Platform.

C. Ministry of Infrastructure, Railway Department, Republic of Poland

19. The Ministry of Infrastructure of Poland described the Polish initiatives that will be implemented in the coming years focusing on improving the competitive position of the rail sector.

20. A key initiative will be the introduction of a horizontal timetable in 2030–2031 to favour the liberalization of the market. The new public service contracts for inter-provincial and international services will be concluded based on a tendering process. As a result, the national passenger undertakings will face competition from other operators. This could constitute a problem for the infrastructure managers which will face difficulties arranging the timetables, but the revenues will grow thanks to the more efficient use of the infrastructure's capacity. The competition will benefit the passengers who will experience an increase in the number of rail connections and more affordable ticket prices.

21. A new High-speed rail network has been planned in the Central and Eastern European region; thanks to this infrastructure, rail passengers would save about 100,000 hours per year in travel time. The studies highlighted that the project will also lead to major economic benefits.

D. Department for Transport, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

22. The Department for Transport of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland presented the UK perspective on promoting international rail passenger transport.

23. In 2019, 21 million travelled through the Channel Tunnel, setting a record. However, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the number of passengers decreased sharply in 2020, but recent data show a strong recovery. A service between Amsterdam and London was inaugurated in 2020 and is showing significant growth.

24. There are still opportunities to grow, such as favouring greater competition (international rail holds over 75 per cent of the market share on routes to France and Belgium). To do so, the government introduced a new legal framework assuring equitable conditions to access the infrastructure and granting discount schemes by infrastructure managers. This will result in a greater number of services at more favourable prices for the passengers.

25. The UK government is also cooperating with partners to establish new direct connections from the UK to European cities. Some barriers, such as border controls, regulatory requirements, and safety approvals, still need to be studied fully.

E. Transport Community

26. The Transport Community discussed the Rail Action Plan implementation process in the Western Balkan. Six different objectives are included in the plan:

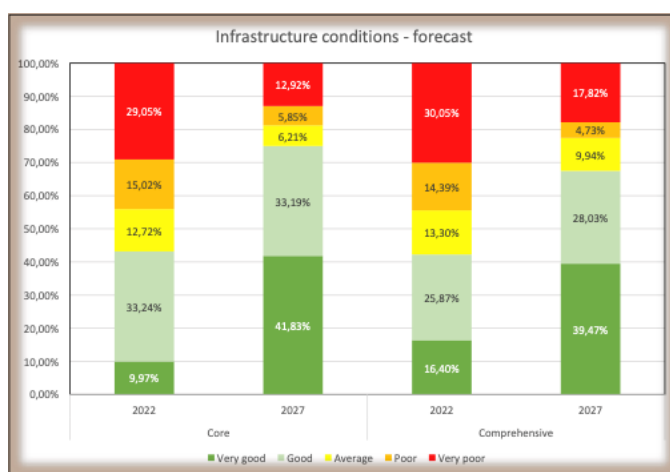
- Opening the rail market
- Developing passenger rights
- Developing governance in the rail sector
- Foster the development of interoperability in the region.
- Improving rail-border crossing operations
- Modernizing the railway infrastructure.

27. To date, the requested market opening, and passenger rights levels still need to be satisfied, but in some countries, there will be improvements by the end of 2023. An overall progress in the six objectives of the Rail Action Plan is expected in all the region's countries.

28. All the countries are investing in modernizing the rail infrastructure, contributing to an increase in the number of kilometres of rail lines in operation since 2021. However, there has also been a decrease in the percentage of lines electrified and of the lines with a minimum axle load of 22.5 t/axle. The network is fully compliant with a 1,435 mm gauge, but train lengths are limited to 740 m. Only a few lines are equipped with ERTMS, but the length of tracks with a design and operating speed higher than 100km/h has been increasing since 2021.

29. Overall, investments in infrastructure will be crucial to improve the lines' conditions (figure), increase the percentage of lines with a minimum operating speed of 100 km/h and deploy ERTMS by the end of 2027.

Infrastructure Conditions-Forecast



Source: Transport Community.

F. Rail Working Group

30. The Rail Working Group explained the supporting effort that the organization is posing to enhance the role of the private sector in the railways.

31. The representative highlighted the role of the Luxembourg Rail Protocol to the Cape Town Convention in providing a legal framework for securing creditor rights when financing rolling stock. The Unique Rail Vehicle Identification System (URVIS) was also explained.

32. The Luxembourg Protocol will have an essential role in encouraging private investments in rail and reducing the costs for rolling stock finance. It will also make it easier to move rolling stock between countries.

G. Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane

33. Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane (FSI), the rail undertaking owned by the Italian State, described the characteristics of the multinational company and its effort to enhance international passenger transport in Europe, particularly high-speed rail transport.

34. FSI operates in different transport sub-sectors, including rail passenger and freight transport, rail certification and homologation, bus passenger transport, and design and engineering solutions worldwide.

35. Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane controls or is affiliated with more than 100 companies; in 2022, it achieved €13.7 billion in revenues and an EBITDA equal to €2.2 billion.

36. The industrial plan of FSI for 2022–2031 seeks to increase the rail capacity by 20 per cent and reduce the journey times. Some of the main objectives are to increase the share of multimodal collective transport and double rail transport compared to 2019.

37. Thanks to the experience developed in Italy, FSI aims also to replicate the successful high-speed rail transport model across Europe. Since 2021, high-speed connections to France (to Paris and Lyon) have been opened, and since November 2022, FSI has been operating high-speed trains in Spain through the company Iryo. Two pilot projects connecting Italy and Germany, and Spain and Portugal are under consideration. High-speed rail shows a high potential for routes between 600 and 800 kilometres, but the introduction of new laws and regulations aiming to liberalize the market and ban flights on certain connections could foster improvements.

H. Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, Türkiye

38. TCDD Transport JSC, the rail undertaking owned by the Turkish state, operates in different fields, as explained by the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure:

- Passenger rail transport (High-speed; Conventional; Urban)
- Logistics operations and rail freight transport
- Freight and passenger Ferry Transport
- Fleet maintenance.

39. Several passenger rail routes connect Türkiye with the neighbouring countries. With a travel time of about 12 hours, the Istanbul-Sofia Express allows you to travel by train to the Balkan countries. Van-Tabriz-Teheran was a service connecting Türkiye and Iran which was interrupted during the COVID-19 Pandemic, but thanks to the Trans-Asia Express, it is still possible to travel between Ankara and Teheran by train. The rail service Baku-Tbilisi-Kars is also being developed. Since 1993, a motorail train has operated between Edirne (Türkiye) and Villach (Austria). Other special tourist passenger trains enable transport to the country from all over the world.

I. Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies

40. The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) focuses on improving the international passenger network and is studying the possible development of high-speed services and solutions to foster connections in Europe.

41. To foster international rail passenger transport, CER is promoting ways to simplify transboundary transport, such as extending train driver licenses to the entire network, integrating timetables, simplifying rolling stock authorization, and providing additional services to passengers when buying tickets.

42. CER identifies high-speed rail development as essential in fostering international passenger transport, but integrating the timetables and financial support will be crucial to its success. The financial support could also consider the better environmental performance of

rail and implementing taxation incentives favouring less polluting means of transport. It was noted that by 2050, most Europeans will have convenient access to an HSR service.

43. CER notes that by 2050, it would be necessary to build about 50,000 kilometres of high-speed rail lines to connect European urban areas. The construction costs would be about €550 billion, but the project would create a benefit for society equal to about €750 billion. In fact, the investments would contribute to reducing CO2 emissions but would also create 1.5 million jobs annually by 2050.

J. European Passenger Federation

44. The European Passenger Federation (EPF) started by highlighting its primary objectives. Six different goals were listed:

- Promoting sustainable mobility
- Enhancing transport from the users' perspective
- Improving the end-to-end journey experience
- Tackling transport poverty
- Developing and improving passenger rights
- Representing the passengers' view at the European level.

45. EPF highlighted the complexity of the current European transport system, in which the modal split of journeys in recent years has remained the same. In addition, the number of international high-speed services doubled from 2001 to 2019, but only a minor share runs at more than 160 km per hour.

46. The speaker reminded the priorities of passengers when travelling by train:

- Affordable and competitive ticket prices
- Punctuality and reliability
- Travel comfort.

47. To provide an efficient and satisfactory service to passengers, work needs to be done to address: the lack of access to journey information, poor service quality, poor disruption management, and the limited provisions for passengers with reduced mobility.

K. Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, Romania

48. The Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of Romania shared the Romanian vision of the future of rail transport.

49. Romania is planning investments of about €27 billion on rail projects. Four main corridors run through Romania. The primary network comprises more than 3,200 km of railway lines connecting the leading economic centres in Romania. The rail projects are prioritized based on five scientific and independent research criteria. Twelve different government measures are aimed at fostering the growth of the rail sector in the future. Planned investments are focused on increasing rail speed, axle load, and capacity.

L. Large Infrastructure Project LLC

50. Large Infrastructure Project explained its work on a project building a high-speed railway connecting Bulgaria with neighbouring countries. The new infrastructure would connect Athens, Sofia, and Bucharest, significantly reducing travel time. The project would be financed jointly by Bulgaria and neighbouring countries.

M. Mr. George Emmanoulopoulos, Transport Planner –Engineer

51. Mr. Emmanoulopoulos explained the key future role of the C11 corridor connecting Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda. The corridor consists of rail, road, and river links. The corridor is not operative because of the poor conditions of many sections and the conflict in Sudan. Another problem that should be faced is the non-harmonization of the networks particularly in relation to the different gauges in the four countries. However, corridor implementation would have a positive effect in fostering economic development in the region, also thanks to the connections between the ports of Volos and Alexandria.

N. Austria

52. Austria submitted a paper titled “Austrian experience on international rail passenger transport”. The document provides information on the rail services connecting Austria with neighbouring countries offered by state-owned and private undertakings. Trains run from Vienna to major European cities daily, with different frequencies depending on the destination. During the last few years, there has also been an increase in the number of trains operating during the night; further growth in this market is expected.

O. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe secretariat

53. The secretariat provided a presentation on the study “Railways at the Centre of a post-pandemic Recovery, Measures to Support International Rail Carriers”. The paper highlights the decrease in the number of passengers transported by rail due to the COVID-19 Pandemic in the rail passenger sector: in Europe, the volumes almost halved between 2019 and 2020. Due to this decrease, most countries implemented policies to support the rail sector, including discounts on track access charges and aid to rail undertakings and infrastructure managers. The report recognizes that the policies have been crucial in supporting the rail sector, but it also notes that the aviation sector benefitted from more aiding economic measures. Therefore, continuous financial aid to rail would be necessary in the future to avoid a disadvantage in the competition with air transport and to guarantee a sustainable mobility service.

III. Final considerations

54. The secretariat concluded the Workshop on “The Future of International Rail Passenger Transport”, summarizing the emerging issues arising from the presentations and discussions.

55. The Workshop was seen as a starting point for further reflection on how to stimulate the use of rail as a sustainable means of transport replacing the aviation and road sectors for international journeys. The development of high-speed rail transport was frequently indicated as a possible solution. Facilitating modal shift is crucial in this period in which the rail sector is still economically recovering from the COVID-19 Pandemic, but it is also fundamental for the future development of sustainable transport. Several speakers highlighted that investments will be required to achieve this goal, and passengers' needs should always be considered in the process.

56. Several pilot projects under development or still under consideration showed the potential for international rail transport. Once the projects have been implemented, the sharing of lessons learned will facilitate the successful outcome of future projects in this area.

57. The Working Party welcomed the interventions and discussions at the Workshop and agreed to continue the dialogue on this topic in the future.