



## Press Release

Luxembourg, 24 May 2016

### EU rail freight: “still not on the right track”, warn auditors

**Despite the European Commission’s objective of shifting freight from road to rail, rail’s share of EU freight has actually declined slightly since 2011, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. Rail is more environmentally friendly and uses less imported oil, says the report. But it is failing to respond to the competition from road.**

The auditors reviewed the performance of rail freight transport in the EU since 2000. They visited five Member States – the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, France and Poland – between mid-2014 and mid-2015.

The EU budget contributed approximately €28 billion to funding rail projects between 2007 and 2013. But despite this and the priority given by the Commission to shifting freight from road to rail, EU rail freight transport has failed over the last 15 years to respond effectively to the competition presented by road, say the auditors. Its performance overall remains unsatisfactory.

The auditors found that shippers clearly prefer road over rail for transporting goods. Although some Member States (such as Austria, Germany and Sweden) have managed to achieve better results, rail freight’s average share at EU level has actually declined slightly since 2011. In addition, the average speed of freight trains in the EU is very low (only around 18 km/h on many international routes).

A single European railway area is still a long way from being achieved, say the auditors. The EU rail network by and large remains a system of separate national networks, with various national authorities and very different rules governing path allocation, management and pricing.

Traffic management procedures are not adapted to the needs of rail freight, even within rail freight corridors: freight trains are charged for every kilometre of rail infrastructure they use. This is not always the case for road transport.

In three of the Member States visited, more EU funds were allocated to road than rail between 2007 and 2013 and when EU funds were allocated to rail they were not primarily used to target the needs of rail freight. Finally, poor maintenance of the rail network can affect sustainability

*The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors. The full report is on [www.eca.europa.eu](http://www.eca.europa.eu)*

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and performance.

*“If the issues identified in our report are not addressed”, said Mr Ladislav Balko, the Member of the Court of Auditors responsible for the report, “then extra funding will not resolve the problem by itself. The Commission and the Member States need to help train and track managers improve rail freight’s reliability, frequency, flexibility, customer focus, transport time and price.”*

The auditors recommend that the Commission and the Member States address the weaknesses observed in rail freight market liberalisation, traffic management procedures, administrative and technical constraints, monitoring and transparency of the performance of the rail freight sector and fair competition between different types of transport.

To make better use of EU funds, they also recommend that the Commission and the Member States match policy objectives more consistently to funding allocations and the selection, planning and management of projects and network maintenance.

#### **Notes to Editors**

The promotion of more efficient and sustainable methods of transport, and in particular of rail freight, has been a key part of EU policy for the last 25 years. As long ago as 1992, the European Commission set the shifting of the balance between different modes of transport as a main objective. In 2001, the Commission confirmed the importance of revitalising the rail sector, setting a target of maintaining the market share of rail freight in central and eastern European Member States at a level of 35 % by 2010. Finally, in 2011, the Commission set a target of shifting as much as 30 % of road freight being transported further than 300 km to other modes of transport such as rail or waterborne transport by 2030, and more than 50 % by 2050.

Transport accounts for around one third of energy consumption and of total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the EU. Promoting efficient and sustainable methods of transport, such as rail and inland waterways, over roads could help to lower Europe’s dependence on imported oil and reduce pollution. According to the European Environment Agency, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from rail transport are 3.5 times lower per tonne-kilometre than those from the road transport. More sustainable methods of transport could also help to reduce the costs associated with road congestion (currently projected to increase by about 50 % by 2050 to nearly €200 billion annually) and cut the number of transport fatalities.

Inland freight transport volumes in the EU (road, rail and inland waterways) are about 2,300 billion tonne-kilometres per year, with road accounting for approximately 75 % of the total.

Special Report No 8/2016 "Rail freight transport in the EU: still not on the right track" is available in 23 EU languages.