Railway safety and signalling: Assessing the state of play of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) deployment

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The Committee on Transport and Tourism adopted an own-initiative report by Izaskun BILBAO BARANDICA (Renew, ES) on railway safety and signalling: assessing the state of play of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) deployment.

The European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) is the EU standard for automatic train protection which creates an interoperable railway system in Europe.

Members recalled that the European Green Deal for Europe calls for a major modal shift to rail and that the **new Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy** sets the milestones of doubling high-speed rail traffic by 2030 and rail freight traffic by 2050, which require a share increase in rail transport capacity that cannot be obtained without a large-scale acceleration of the roll-out of the ERTMS throughout the EU.

The Court of Auditors reported that the **full deployment of ERTMS on the core network is currently well behind schedule** and will not be completed by the 2030 deadline, with a lack of coordination between Member States being one of the main reasons for this delay.

The report makes a number of recommendations to address the main problems identified with the deployment of ERTMS

Governance

Acknowledging the **leading role played by the European Railway Agency** as the single point of contact ensuring consistency in the development of interoperable ERTMS, Members deplored the recent reduction in the Agency's annual budget and suggested that it should be provided with the necessary financial and human resources as well as additional expertise to solve the remaining problems.

The report stressed that an **approach to ERTMS deployment coordinated between all Member States** and led by the ERTMS Coordinator is the only way to overcome the current patchwork situation, especially with regard to cross-border projects. The role of the ERTMS coordinator should be strengthened, both in terms of resources and implementing powers.

Members proposed establishing a regulatory framework for the **digital transformation of the railway system** that places ERTMS at the heart of the digital evolution of the railway system.

Interoperability and deployment

Members regretted that compared with the targets set in the European deployment plan, at the end of 2020 only 13% of the core network corridors were operating in accordance with ERTMS and ERTMS deployment in most corridors was in the range of 7% to 28%. The report therefore suggested that a corridor approach must be strengthened to overcome the obstacles to the deployment of ERTMS, in particular in the corridors with the lowest rates of deployment such as the Atlantic corridor, and especially within the Iberian Peninsula.

Members called on the Commission to:

- maintain and reinforce the **binding nature** of the targets in its revisions of the TEN-T guidelines, the European deployment plans for ERTMS and the on-board and track-side control-command and signalling subsystems (CCS TSI);

- strengthen the role of the **core network coordinators** in the forthcoming revision of the TEN-T Regulation, and integrate measures for a European management of the core network infrastructure

- develop an **overarching decommissioning strategy for Class B systems** with regulatory deadlines aligned with binding targets to be set at EU level;

- introduce a regulatory provision to ensure that national ERTMS implementation plans are legally aligned with the binding ERTMS deployment targets set in EU legislation, with a view to **completing the deployment of ERTMS on the core network by 2030 and within the comprehensive network by 2040**.

The report pointed out that the timeframes for authorisation processes for retrofit projects, especially for conformity-to-type authorisation processes for rolling stock for the national area of use only, still differ because of diverging assessments by national safety agencies on the need to re-authorise certain modifications, resulting in it taking up to one month to re-authorise each rolling stock.

The Commission is invited to:

- take legislative initiatives, including updates of the current implementing regulations, to ensure **streamlined and harmonised authorisation procedures** by means of fast-tracked control operations in order to reduce the time needed to grant conformity-to-type certificates;

- work with the Agency to establish a **common European model** for public procurement on and set out in a legislative proposal all technical aspects for ensuring successful procurement and compatibility with the latest ERTMS baseline available;

- legislative proposal for an **ERTMS industrial strategy** addressing the insufficient industrial capacity, the lack of sufficient workshop for retrofit and of stable and predictably budget and the shortage of qualified staff and to ensure the transition from the current project-based approach to the industrialisation of ERTMS deployment.

The need to ensure synergies between ERTMS and the European Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) as soon as possible is stressed.

Funding

Between 2014 and 2020, the EU budget supported ERTMS deployment with an estimated total budget of EUR 2.7 billion, out of which EUR 850 million came from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and EUR 1.9 billion came from European Structural and Investments Funds (the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund) in the eligible regions.

Members are convinced that the **existing financial instruments need to be improved** to incentivise large-scale investment in the ERTMS. They called on the Commission to draw up all-encompassing guidelines in support of a large-scale strategy for the funding of the ERTMS both trackside and on-board.

They also considered that Member States should make ERTMS a key priority in their recovery and resilience plans.