Action plan to boost long distance and cross border passenger rail

2022/2022(INI) - 13/12/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 524 votes to 38, with 50 abstentions, a resolution on the action plan to boost long-distance and cross-border passenger rail.

Members supported the action plan to boost long-distance and cross-border passenger rail transport and the need to set ambitious targets to make rail transport more attractive and efficient. The plan fully contributes to the achievement of a wide range of objectives, including creating a safe and fully interoperable single European railway system, improving sustainability, promoting multimodal ticketing, creating jobs, enhancing connectivity, with particular attention to remote, island, mountainous and less populated zones.

The plan fully contributes to a wide range of objectives, including i) the creation of a safe and fully interoperable single European rail system, ii) enhanced connectivity, with particular attention to remote, island, mountain and less populated areas, iii) enhanced connectivity with enlargement and Eastern Partnership countries, iv) fair competition between rail operators and a level playing field between modes of transport, v) strengthening of passenger rights, vi) professional training, further training, retraining and certification for train drivers

Better implementation of the Union rail acquis and accelerated interoperability

Members welcomed the acceleration of the work to ensure the full implementation of the 4th Railway Package and the Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSI). They stressed that the full deployment of the ERTMS, through the achievement of the targets in the revised legislative proposal for the TEN-T Regulation, will help to create a digital single European railway area, ensuring the further development of increased network capacity, safe, secure, fast and efficient rail transport services for long-distance and cross-border connections.

Boosting long-distance rail transport must be accompanied by its integration into different inter-regional, regional, urban and peri-urban rail networks as well as with other modes and TEN-T, thus improving door-to-door mobility.

The resolution also stressed the importance of: (i) speeding up the construction of new rail lines and of further promoting the completion of infrastructure projects, including bridges connecting islands to the mainland, in order to close existing missing links and to improve the integration of islands with the motorways of the sea; (ii) ensuring the synchronised deployment of trackside systems and on-board units and of the need for improved ERTMS governance; (iii) ensuring quick, sufficient and efficient financing and funding to support investments.

Strengthened infrastructure for passenger rail

Members considered that the timely completion of the multimodal, seamless TEN-T core network corridors by 2030 will be a first step to further network integration. This must involve the elimination of bottlenecks and missing links and the completion of cross-border sections. They support the completion of planned high-speed rail connections in the extended core network by 2040.

In particular, Parliament called for:

- priority investments in the development of cross-border long-distance high-speed rail links and the construction of new infrastructure to meet the demand for high-speed trains

- actions and projects to support better connectivity of local sustainable and rail multimodal transport in peripheral and coastal areas with lower margins for development;

- improved the use of EU funds to ensure massive high-quality investment in sustainable and efficient transport infrastructure, including missing high-speed rail links;

- focus on the completion of first/last mile multimodal hubs in urban nodes;

- support the modernisation of small railway stations.

Sufficient rolling stock availability

The resolution called for the clarification and simplification of State aid rules on the public funding of interoperable rolling stock for cross-border transport and related service facilities, as well as for railway infrastructure services in the revised Railway Guidelines. It called on railway companies to plan sufficient orders of high-speed rolling stock, in line with the Commission's goals to double high-speed by 2040.

Members also stressed the need for clear requirements and specifications for interoperability and further investments in rolling stock.

Adapting training and certification of train drivers

The resolution stressed the lack of harmonisation of train driver certification may hamper their mobility between Member States and the development of long-distance passenger services, particularly in cross-border sections. It highlighted, furthermore, the need to promote a single EU-wide working language, namely English, for train drivers operating long-distance and cross-border passenger rail connections who do not speak the languages of the Member States crossed during the journey.

The resolution also stressed the importance of:

- ensuring **improved use of the network**, in particular along the TEN-T, take measures to smooth passenger flow, including the establishment of transit and terminal nodes along high-speed routes, and improve the attractiveness of night trains;

- fair and **appropriate track access pricing** for all operators, while ensuring a level playing field between incumbents and new entrants and ensuring that infrastructure networks are adequately funded;

- more accessible **smart ticketing** to facilitate multi-modal journey planning;

- **appropriate protection for passengers** in the event of delays or missed connections: regardless of whether they have booked a through ticket or separate tickets, passengers should at least be offered onward travel, which is a key factor in their choice of transport mode;

- ensuring **fair, easily accessible, affordable and advantageous ticket prices** for all categories of passengers, including the most vulnerable;

- explore all possibilities to ensure a **level playing field** with other modes of transport;

- the role of **public service contracts** in promoting the continuity of cross-border services for European citizens and improving connections to interesting destinations, such as tourist and historical destinations;

- maintain the momentum of the European Year of Rail 2021 in the context of the European Year of Youth 2022 by **encouraging young people to travel by train** and attracting them to professions in the railway sector.