Deployment of the European rail signalling system ERTMS/ETCS

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Michael CRAMER (Greens/EFA, DE) in response to the Commission communication on the deployment of the European rail signalling system ERTMS/ETCS. The report said that this was "a major cross-border European economic project" and that progress towards a standard train protection and signalling system could play a central role in the strategy of easing the strain on the roads and shifting transport flows to the railways.

The committee recognised that the ERTMS was superior to national systems in that it would be cheaper as far as new acquisitions and maintenance are concerned, safer at all speeds and very often would enable line capacity to be increased substantially. The technology involved would give the railway industry a "historic opportunity" to exploit digital technology to the full and gain in competitiveness over other modes of transport. MEPs added that it would be "unsatisfactory" for old systems and ERTMS to coexist side by side for decades, and called for the migration stage to be made as short as possible. The Commission was urged to hold consultations with the European Railways Agency (ERA), the Member States and the industry with a view to submitting a binding 'ERTMS master plan' without delay.

On the question of priorities, the report said that, if ERTMS is to succeed, the six corridors dealt with (Rotterdam-Genoa, Naples-Berlin-Stockholm, Antwerp-Basel-Lyon, Seville-Lyon-Turin-Trieste-Ljubljana, Dresden-Prague-Brno-Vienna-Budapest and Duisburg-Berlin-Warsaw) and the trains running on them must be equipped "quickly and completely" with ERTMS and resources should be concentrated on them. MEPs also stressed that no EU support should be granted unless the system was complete when a route was equipped with ERTMS, i.e. it should extend "from platform to platform or freight centre to freight centre as far as the national border or the port served".

On financing, the committee said that it was both "legitimate and necessary" to grant EU funding for the deployment of ERTMS, by using the TEN-transport budget, regional development funds, the Cohesion Fund and appropriations from the EU's research budget. It stressed that the costs should be apportioned fairly among Member States, the EU, railway companies and the rail industry, and urged the Member States to treat ERTMS as a priority in their transport and budget decisions over the next few years. Finally, the report said that the necessary provisions should be incorporated into the proposed regulation laying down the general rules for granting EU aid for the trans-European transport networks.