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European Commission

Europaforum Northern Sweden's views on the European Commission's proposal for a regulation on the use of railway infrastructure capacity in the Single European Railway Area

Europaforum Northern Sweden (EFNS) is a network for politicians at the local and regional levels from Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland Härjedalen and Västernorrland. EFNS is a meeting place and a knowledge arena for discussion and analysis of the impacts of EU policy on northern Sweden. EFNS monitors European issues to influence EU legislation, the EU's strategies and action programmes and the EU's budget. The objective of EFNS is to safeguard the interests of northern Sweden both in the European arena and in relation to the national level in matters with a clear European perspective.

Europaforum Northern Sweden (EFNS) welcomes the European Commission's ongoing work to develop a proposal for a regulation on the use of rail infrastructure capacity in the Single European Railway Area, which is part of the EU's joint work to increase green freight transport and solve the multifaceted challenges facing the rail transport sector.

The proposal broadly reflects the development that has been carried out jointly by infrastructure managers in Europe for several years. In general, it can be concluded that an increase in efficient, cross-border rail transport of both people and goods has good potential to contribute to the desired reduction of the climate impact of transport and at the same time strengthen Europe's economy. This also applies to intermodal transport involving rail. A well-functioning model for allocating rail capacity is essential to ensure that transport meets real market demand and can be carried out in a reliable manner, which is crucial for the attractiveness of rail.

The measures in the proposal are also in line with the Commission's work on upgrading the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) with higher infrastructure standards and the integration of the different modes of transport into the transport systems. In its strategy for sustainable and smart mobility, the Commission has set targets to increase rail freight traffic by 50 percent by 2030 and then double between 2030 and 2050, as well as an ambition to double high-speed rail traffic (which in Sweden is defined at speeds from 250 km/h) by 2030 and triple it by 2050.

In this feedback, EFNS has primarily chosen to focus on the parts of the regulation that concern capacity allocation and cross-border traffic, as traffic in our regions is extensive and is expected to increase and is to a large extent a mix of freight traffic, regional commuting and long-distance train travel. This opinion also raises questions about who is covered by the burden of responsibility that the proposal places on infrastructure managers and the scope that exists for the regions to work with the responsibility they have to steer towards a transport-efficient society.



Overall input and feedback

- EFNS welcomes the fact that the European Commission is proposing clear targets for an increased shift of transport to rail. If the EU is to achieve its climate goals, a transition to climate-neutral transport is a crucial factor.
- EFNS is positive to the wording in the proposal that would enable and strengthen the dialogue between infrastructure managers and infrastructure users in order to solve capacity problems and challenges.
- EFNS sees the usefulness of the proposal for a unified transport system that will facilitate cross-border transport.
- EFNS believes that it is essential that intermodal nodes and ports are included in transport planning, and that future coordination of legislation should also include the importance of nodes for efficient capacity utilisation in the transport system.
- Member States' emergency and defence organisations should be included in the dialogue and planning of cross-border traffic to ensure that issues of military defence, preparedness and mobility are included in the implementation of the proposal.

Limited infrastructure and insufficient investment

The lack of capacity in the rail transport sector is a well-known problem that requires immediate action. Unfortunately, capacity challenges have led to congestion, delays and reduced service quality. The requirements that the proposal places on available capacity in the railway network would mean greater strains on large parts of Swedish railways, which have historically received insufficient resources for measures such as maintenance and investment. This includes the high prevalence of single-track lines, narrow tunnels or bridges that cannot cope with modern trains, too few passing tracks, and stations with limited capacity that do not meet the standards set by the TEN-T. When establishing a new regulation, time is therefore needed for a gradual implementation that gives the states the opportunity to work off the large maintenance debt before exposing the railway network to more load that makes it difficult to carry out the necessary measures, to ensure a qualitative and efficient capacity utilisation.

In addition, EFNS welcomes the openings proposed in the proposal to link the process of capacity allocation with long-term investments and maintenance of the rail network. According to the proposal, this will be done by requiring the infrastructure manager to carry out capacity analyses and draw up action plans for congested lines together with applicants. Given the high degree of heterogeneity in the European rail market, processes that promote dialogue and consultation between infrastructure managers and those who will use the rail system should facilitate their application.



In several respects, the regulation provides scope and opportunity for the infrastructure manager and member states to develop priorities for what rail traffic should achieve. At national level, the impact of the Regulation on the entire transport network should be taken into account in order to ensure effective capacity utilisation. Above all, when it comes to freight traffic, which in Sweden often arises on regional lines outside the TEN-T network and which then has to continue with cross-border transport via the core network's railways or ports. Coordination needs to be in place for the entire transport network for efficient use of existing capacity. Possible outcomes of this could be to include optimised timetables, coordination of maintenance work and improved allocation of capacity between different actors. Increasing capacity requires extensive investments, such as the expansion of existing lines but also the reinforcement of important infrastructure outside the rail network such as functional transport nodes, ports and terminals. The expansion of modern digital traffic systems at all levels of traffic management is of paramount importance.

The regulation does not require national processes, such as the development of national plans, to take into account the processes described within the regulation. The proposal describes very little how the rail network is connected to the overall transport system. In order to reduce significant discrepancies, Member States should combine the work on strategic long-term infrastructure planning with investment and maintenance work, capacity allocation work and contingency planning as described in the proposal. In this way, it is possible to get an overview of the overall transport objectives that exist and prevent incompatibilities in the multimodal work and plan.

Furthermore, the proposal consistently mentions the role of the infrastructure manager and its responsibility for constructing, managing and maintaining railway infrastructure. We are critical of the fact that the proposal does not make any distinctions as to which infrastructure managers should be covered. In Sweden, the Swedish Transport Administration is the national infrastructure manager, but there are also a large number of other infrastructure managers, such as companies or municipalities that own their own railway facilities, intermodal terminals or ports.

Cross-border traffic and international coordination

Cross-border rail traffic is complex due to regional differences, implementation of rules, organisational structures, geographical challenges and the need to coordinate between countries with different conditions. In order to facilitate cross-border traffic, it is important to have an open dialogue between different stakeholders, including transport buyers, suppliers and infrastructure owners, both within and between member states. Harmonisation of rules and cooperation with third countries is an important factor in promoting smooth cross-border traffic. In the continued work on the development of the regulation, the work on the harmonisation of rules and standards between the EU and third countries is an important issue. In the implementation of the Regulation, special attention should also be paid to the challenges posed by border crossings to Finland, which are adversely affected by its geographical and technical isolation from the European rail network.

Strengthening international accessibility is also important for the EU's more peripheral geographies for continued development and to be able to attract foreign investment, sustain the tourism industry, attract foreign labour and ensure business access to international export and cooperation markets.



The EU is facing a new security policy situation in which military requirements and needs in the rail transport sector are one of several critical components. Member States' preparedness and defence organisations should therefore be included in the dialogue and planning of cross-border traffic to ensure that issues of military defence, preparedness and mobility are included in the implementation of the proposal. The Regulation should also take into account the objectives developed in the framework of the European Commission's Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0, as a guiding framework to address military aspects of rail transport beyond what is described in Article 47 on the management of capacity allocation in crisis situations.

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