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Europaforum Northern Sweden's views on the European Commission's proposed amendments to the Rail Passengers' Rights Regulation

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 welcomes the European Commission's ambition to strengthen rail passengers' rights and make it easier and safer to undertake journeys involving multiple transport operators and countries. Clear passenger protection and well-functioning solutions for information, booking and rebooking can help to enhance the attractiveness of rail as a mode of transport.

For the reform to have the intended effect, the regulatory framework must be designed to function in transport systems with different geographical and infrastructural conditions. In this way, passengers' rights can be strengthened without simultaneously undermining the conditions for accessible and effective public transport in those parts of the Union where alternatives are limited.

EFNS's position in brief

- Stronger passenger protection must be combined with a robust and high-capacity rail infrastructure, so that passengers' rights can also be translated into journeys that work in practice.

- The regulatory framework needs to be designed to function effectively even in sparsely populated and peripheral regions, where long distances, infrequent services and limited alternative modes of transport make travel chains particularly vulnerable. It should be emphasised that tickets need to be valid for transfers between different modes of transport and that alternative modes of transport need to be available in such cases.

- Responsibilities, costs and new requirements must be proportionate, practically feasible and allocated based on each actor's actual ability to prevent, influence and manage disruptions.

Strengthened passenger protection requires a robust rail network

The ability to travel sustainably over long distances is a key part of Europe's territorial cohesion. In regions with vast geographical distances and long commutes, a functioning rail system is particularly important. Today, however, opportunities in northern Sweden are limited

by infrastructure deficiencies, capacity constraints and insufficient redundancy in the rail system. Strengthened passenger protection can provide passengers with clearer rights in the event of delays, cancelled services and missed connections, but it cannot replace the need for robust and reliable rail services. When there are few alternative departures and modes of transport, the link between passenger protection and the transport system's actual capacity is therefore particularly evident in northern Sweden.

EFNS therefore believes that strong passenger protection must go hand in hand with investment in railway capacity, resilience and reliability. The railway network in northern Sweden consists largely of single track, which means there is a greater risk of capacity shortages. It is also important that EU transport and cohesion policies work together to improve accessibility in sparsely populated and peripheral regions.

The regulatory framework must function effectively even in sparsely populated and peripheral regions

EFNS supports the aim of strengthening passengers' rights and simplifying journeys involving multiple transport operators. For the rules to have the intended effect, they must also function effectively in transport systems with very different geographical and infrastructural conditions.

Northern Sweden is characterised by vast geographical distances, long commutes and, on many routes, a limited range of alternative modes of transport. When there are only a few departures per day, a missed connection can mean a wait of several hours, the need to stay overnight, and the journey not being completed on the same day. Rules that are relatively straightforward to manage in dense transport systems with high service frequency and multiple alternative departures can therefore have entirely different practical and financial consequences in a sparsely served transport system.

EFNS believes that travellers should enjoy strong and predictable protection, regardless of where in the Union they live or travel. For this to work in practice, the regulatory framework must also take account of the actual circumstances in different parts of Europe. A territorial perspective should therefore be incorporated both into the drafting of the rules and into the assessment of the consequences of new requirements.

The regulatory framework needs to be technology-neutral

At the same time, the regulatory framework should be technology-neutral and promote open and interoperable solutions for information, booking and rebooking. Rapid technological development can create new opportunities to combine journeys across multiple transport operators and modes of transport without all operators having to use the same technical distribution solution. Regulation should therefore primarily ensure passengers' ability to search for, purchase, undertake and, where necessary, rebook a connected journey, as well as the availability of data, products and interfaces required to enable this. This is particularly important for sparsely populated and peripheral regions, where a seamless journey often depends on several smaller transport operators and modes of transport.

Liability and costs must be commensurate with actual ability to influence events

For passengers, the regulatory framework must be simple and clear. Anyone affected by a delay, a cancelled departure or a missed connection should not have to determine how liability is to be apportioned amongst the various actors involved in the journey.
At the same time, the division of responsibility between transport operators, ticket agents, infrastructure managers and other relevant stakeholders must be clear and legally certain. New obligations may entail costs relating to, for example, re-bookings, replacement journeys, accommodation, customer service, administration and technical solutions.
EFNS therefore considers that liability and financial consequences must be proportionate and allocated based on each party's actual ability to prevent, influence and manage the cause of a disruption. Regionally funded public transport should not bear a disproportionate financial burden for consequences that are primarily caused by circumstances beyond the control of the transport operator or the regional level. These may, for example, include infrastructure deficiencies, capacity constraints, traffic management or prioritisation within the rail system.

EFNS therefore considers that the financial and practical consequences for regionally funded public transport must be carefully considered when the regulatory framework is drawn up. When public transport is largely funded by public money, increased costs can affect the resources available for service provision, accessibility, resilience and development. Strengthened passenger protection should not have the unintended consequence of undermining the conditions for maintaining and developing public transport in regions where alternatives are already limited.

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Jonas Andersson (S), Chair EFNS Region Jämtland Härjedalen	**Åsa Ågren Wikström (M) Vice Chair EFNS, Region Västerbotten**	**Anders Öberg (S) Region Norrbotten**	**Jonny Lundin (C) Region Västernorrland**
Johan Loock (M) Region Jämtland Härjedalen	**Rickard Carstedt (S) Region Västerbotten**	**Carina Sammeli (S) Norrbotten Association of Municipalities**	**Erik Lövgren (S) Västernorrland Association of Municipalities**
Daniel Danielsson (C) Jämtland Härjedalen Association of Municipalities	**Ann Åström (S) Region Västerbotten**	**Isak Utsi (S) Norrbotten Association of Municipalities**	**Dan Rasmusson (SD) Region Västernorrland**
Lars-Gunnar Nordlander (S) Jämtland Härjedalen Association of Municipalities			