



# Open letter to European Commissioner for Transport

## Call for massive investment in the extension of the European rail network

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True to the position, which Luxembourg has been defending continuously and consistently, most recently during the informal videoconferences of April and June, I would like to address to you directly a plea to boost investment in the European rail infrastructure.

Modern railways are the means of transport of the 21st century. But two major obstacles hinder the take-off of rail services in Europe and particularly for international connections. This is despite the advances made possible thanks to European initiatives, in particular the TEN-T and CEF programs.

Firstly, the network is facing a **lack of coherence and coordination**. This originates in particular in the lack of priority given to cross-border sections. The European Court of Auditors has highlighted this deplorable situation in a critical and in-depth analysis.

The joint ministers' declaration of beginning of June aims precisely at suggesting concrete solutions to remedy the first problem by initiating better coordination in order to improve international rail services in Europe.

Second, European railways suffer from a **chronic investment deficit in infrastructure**. The end of the current crisis could serve as a springboard for making greater leaps. The economic crisis triggered by the COVID19 pandemic has prompted the EU and its Member States to initiate a number of rescue plans. As a result, additional funding is available.

The way out of the crisis created by COVID19 offers to us an exceptional opportunity and we must see this as a chance to accelerate a deep transformation of mobility in Europe. We must **seize this opportunity**.

Apprehending the consequences of the recent health crisis and the current climate crisis have made it clear to Europeans that things cannot continue as before. They understand that relying on outdated approaches will not generate suitable solutions, neither in the short term nor in the long run.

We shall not be satisfied with spending the funds now available in order to simply revive the old transport sectors, but must rather help improve energetically European mobility for all. Public investments must have a **transformative effect**. The projects to be funded should meet clear criteria aimed at making mobility more sustainable while safeguarding our social standards.

The ultimate goal must be **smart multimodal mobility**, which enables us to drastically reduce the carbon footprint, improve travel safety and make transport environmentally and socially sustainable. Public transport has to be the backbone of the multimodal offer.

Therefore, we consider it essential to promote the key role of railways in international passenger transport within the Union. It is essential to provide for international rail passenger services in

order to offer a **real alternative to short-haul flights within the EU**. Technical advances and the use of alternative fuels in aviation will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but only marginally. To reach our climate goals, it is inevitable to aim for a reduction in domestic and intra-EU flights for which there is a rail alternative. The offer of rail services is for the moment still acceptable, after its dramatic structural decline following the liberalization of international rail traffic since January 1, 2010. Nevertheless, rail services will have to be revitalized swiftly by substantial investments in infrastructure and rolling stock without forgetting the key element of interoperability.

My message is therefore relatively simple: to make the train a real alternative to the plane and the car, **massive investment must be made in rail infrastructure**. Especially in the key strategic parts, specifically cross-border sections, which need to be implemented as a priority, in order to achieve a complete, digital and extensive European rail network. The current timetable for completing the trans-European transport network will also have to be revised to make it much more ambitious.

### **Intra-European mobility does not need a mere reanimation but a real rebirth!**

Finally, I cannot conclude this letter without a word about **active mobility and especially cycling**. The restrictions applicable during the periods of confinement in public transport have enabled many people to discover the benefits of traveling by bicycle, in particular independence and efficiency. In 2017 a project for a **European cycling strategy** was handed over to Commissioner Violeta Bulc. Despite the enthusiasm surrounding this initiative and certain ad hoc improvements with respect to the bicycle being seen as a mode of transport, the overall picture unfortunately remains rather disappointing. In order to achieve our climate objectives, in particular, but also for many other good reasons, such as the saving of urban space, the creation of local jobs or the proven benefits for health, Europe cannot pursue a policy of transport, which largely ignores a particular mode of transport. Cycling is in tune with the current times and is perfectly in line with Europe's main policy objectives. By failing to include active mobility in mobility concepts, we lose the real potential that it could contribute quickly and at low costs to climate, transport or public health policies. I plead therefore for a **complete and imminent transposition of the European bicycle strategy**.

The upcoming revision of the TEN-T regulation should take full account of these considerations in order to facilitate the faster implementation of sustainable and responsible multimodal mobility.

Together with my entire team, I stand ready to discuss the above bilaterally or in a broader context.



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