



Rail Freight
The future is ours

10 reasons to choose for **Rail Freight**



Reason 1

Connecting Europe

A united rail vision for a greener, more resilient future

Rail is experiencing a true renaissance in Europe. This is driven by a shared ambition to make it more competitive, sustainable and interconnected. With strong support at the highest EU levels, rail freight is central to key initiatives shaping the future of European transport. The sector is moving fast to modernize by enhancing cross-border connections and accelerating digitalisation and automation.

To help both passengers and freight operators, upcoming proposals will boost high-speed networks, simplify multilingual driver certification and streamline digital ticketing. The deployment of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) and Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC) will improve safety, efficiency and interoperability across the continent.

Military mobility also underscores the strategic importance of rail, with over 500 infrastructure projects identified. As market liberalisation takes root, early results show more competition, lower costs and increased ridership. These are lessons that can be adapted to freight.

Yet challenges remain: from funding and infrastructure gaps to the need for standardised rolling stock and wider DAC deployment. The time to act is now. The Commission is calling on the rail sector to seize this momentum, drive innovation and make freight by rail the backbone of a greener, more resilient European economy.

Let's shape the future of rail freight, together.

Summary of Apostolos Tzitzikostas' speech at the European Railway Award ceremony. Apostolos Tzitzikostas is European Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism.



Reason 2

Innovation in safety

Unlock more rail capacity with AI

Dual Inventive and Rail Easy are bringing a powerful combination of safety technology and artificial intelligence to the rail sector, helping freight operators and shippers to maximise the use of existing infrastructure.

Dual Inventive's SIL 4–certified digital track access systems minimise the transition time between running trains and maintenance works. This allows essential works to be scheduled within shorter windows, freeing up more train paths and enabling faster responses to infrastructure issues, significantly reducing downtime.

Rail Easy's AI engine analyses real-time data from digital sensors on tracks and critical freight wagon components, combined with logistics planning, weather conditions, surrounding processes and contractor schedules. The system identifies 'white spots' — unused capacity — which can be

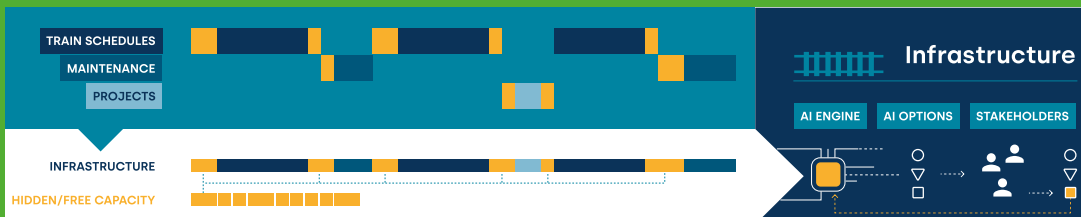
unlocked for additional freight trains or track works.

For rail customers, this means:

- More commercial train paths
- Greater planning reliability
- Fewer unexpected delays and re-routings
- Better utilisation of freight wagons
- A safer, more efficient and paperless logistics chain

By unlocking hidden potential, we convert available capacity into real commercial value. Together, we are making the rail network safer, more efficient and better utilized. This enables you to move more freight and respond flexibly to changing customer demands.

More capacity, more reliability, more trains without laying a single metre of new track!



Reason 3

Resilient

Stronger ports, stronger rail freight connections

European ports play a crucial role in Europe's economy, energy supply and strategic resilience. In the current geopolitical and economic context, ports must be better embraced and supported to maintain their vital position. This view is shared by Isabelle Ryckbost, Secretary General of the European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO), who underlines the need for a strong and balanced European Port Strategy.

Ports face growing challenges linked to climate policy, economic shifts and geopolitical tensions. At the same time, they are key to strengthening Europe's supply chains, industrial activity and energy transition. A future-proof strategy must ensure ports remain competitive, secure and well-connected to the hinterland.

For rail freight, this development offers clear opportunities. Strengthened ports require reliable inland connections, and shifting more cargo to sustainable transport modes like rail will be essential. As part of this, a well-integrated rail network supports resilience, reduces dependency on road transport and contributes to Europe's broader strategic goals.

The upcoming European Port Strategy should clarify stakeholder responsibilities, safeguard investment and avoid regulations that weaken Europe's competitive position. Well-connected ports are vital for securing Europe's future economic and strategic position.





Reason 4

Supporting the energy transition

How ports and rail power the green economy

The energy transition is considered a major game-changer for our economy and society. Changes in energy systems, industrial processes and cargo flows are expected to transform how ports are used and the infrastructure they require. For this reason, the European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) and the European Federation of Inland Ports (EFIP) commissioned Haskoning to identify the impact on port infrastructure and the implications for the role of port authorities.

The final report contains 17 fact sheets on various developments related to the energy transition. These include decarbonisation, renewable energy and supply chain considerations, examining their impact on both sea and inland ports. Although every port is different, the energy transition will influence the role of rail transport across the borders.

As demand for fossil fuels decreases, ports will handle lower volumes of coal, oil, and gas shipments. In contrast, cargo volumes related to renewable energy will increase. Ports are expected to become hubs for green energy and alternative fuels, involving new types of cargo flows. The mix of transport flows will shift, bringing both challenges (such as reduced coal volumes) and opportunities, including the transport of new raw materials for the energy transition (e.g. ammonia) and the development of ports as energy hubs.

**Download
the study here:**





Reason 5

A lifeline for the industry

The only way is intermodal

For Pim Bastiaanse, Rail Manager at DOW and Rail Shipper of the Year 2024 in the Netherlands, rail freight plays a vital role in the chemical company's supply chain. "Some of our production sites in Europe are exclusively connected by rail. And many of our products are simply not suitable for road transport."

For DOW, rail is not just one of many options – it is the logistical lifeline. And it needs to stay that way. That's precisely why Bastiaanse advocates for greater European coordination. "We need a harmonized, standardized approach. That will make rail more stable and more attractive for businesses across Europe."

(ESC) echoes his call. The ESC sees rail freight as a sustainable transport solution for the future. To encourage more international shippers to opt for intermodal or rail-based logistics, several factors are essential:

- Harmonized regulations across member states, including standards for tonnage, unified requirements for train drivers and consistent safety systems.
- Reliable and sufficient connections, along with the availability of train paths.
- Proper prioritization of freight trains, as well as effective tracking and real-time updates on train and individual wagon status.

The European Shippers' Council

Godfried Smit, secretary-general ESC



Reason 6

Easy to find your intermodal way

Smarter logistics choices with intermodal route visibility

"With the help of Routescanner, we easily identify rail transport solutions. Rail freight offers a smart way to reduce CO₂ emissions while ensuring the efficient transport of high volumes across Europe." – Niels Verdel, Director Verdel Logistics

Routescanner enables you to compare container routes and intermodal operators worldwide. By gathering all schedules and information from deep sea, short sea, rail and inland waterway operators in one place, they help cargo owners and freight forwarders in selecting their best transport solution. The platform shows door-to-door container routes with filtering options as emissions, transit times, preferred modalities, and carrier selection, ensuring efficiency, sustainability, and

cost-effectiveness throughout the entire supply chain.

Rail connections in Routescanner

With over 90 rail operators visible, transport solutions by train are well-represented in Routescanner. The comprehensive overview allows for easy exploration of Europe's inland connections. The detailed information available on Routescanner allows cargo owners and forwarders to make their container logistics smarter and more sustainable.

Scan the QR-code
and find your best
container route.



Reason 7

From black box to full visibility

Digital collaboration for real-time supply chain control

Rail freight is entering a new phase: one where data and connectivity play a central role. Across major European hubs like Rotterdam and Antwerp, digitalisation is no longer a side project, but a key enabler of smarter logistics.

In the Port of Rotterdam, the *Rail Connected* programme brings together more than 25 operators, terminals and carriers to create a shared digital environment. Features like weekly train pre-notifications, real-time insight into train composition and accurate ETA updates are streamlining the chain. Less guesswork and more control for all parties involved.

Infrabel, the Belgian infrastructure manager, works with Port of Antwerp-Bruges and Railport to drive similar change. Tools like Rail Trans Port (RTP) Manager track trains and wagons throughout the network, while FreightChat replaces fragmented communication with a single, transparent channel between infrastructure, terminals, operators and clients.

The result? Fewer delays, faster turnaround times and better alignment across the supply chain. And crucially, more visibility for end customers like shippers and forwarders.



Reason 8

Avoid road congestion

Efficient combined transport as a future-proof freight solution

Combined transport — where non-road modes like rail cover over 50% of the distance — offers an efficient and scalable solution for goods transport. According to the International Union for Road-Rail Combined Transport (UIRR), it delivers clear benefits: lower infrastructure costs, higher energy efficiency, improved safety and a smaller environmental footprint compared to road-only transport.

European initiatives like the Green Deal and Clean Industrial Deal support this shift. UIRR expects intermodal rail freight to become the primary mode for land freight over 300 km by 2050. Targeted investments in infrastructure, digitalisation and increased capacity are already driving this transition.

While technologies like hydrogen-powered trucks are developing, rail remains far more energy-efficient: hydrogen trucks reach 34% efficiency, while electric trains powered by the grid achieve 85%. For companies, choosing rail freight offers cost stability, lowers supply chain risks and ensures compliance with future sustainability regulations.

Rail freight is more than just a transport mode. Rail freight is a strategic choice and a cornerstone of a future-proof European logistics system.

Benefits of shifting from road to combined transport

Source: UIRR Report on Combined Transport in Europe



84% fewer GHG emissions

95% fewer accidents

70% better energy efficiency

50% reduced road congestion



More information
download the report

Reason 9

Labour productivity

Empowering the next generation skilled train drivers

In rail freight, productivity isn't just about tonnage or timetables. It's also about people. Each freight train replaces up to 50 trucks. That means fewer emissions, less congestion and more efficient logistics. But none of it happens without skilled and motivated train drivers.

Take Hugo Boelhouwer. At just 20 years old, he's already playing a key role in international rail freight. From container terminals to cross-border corridors, every day brings new challenges and new impact.

"As a freight train driver, you really make a difference. You move massive volumes across borders, with far less

emissions than road transport. It's technical, physical and international. That combination makes the job incredibly rewarding."

Freight train drivers like Hugo do more than just operate a train. They inspect, plan, shunt and solve – often across hundreds of kilometers and multiple countries. Their role is vital in keeping Europe's supply chains moving. Rail freight needs people who are hands-on, sharp and driven by purpose. Hugo proves just how much difference one person can make.





Reason 10

Constructions on track

Investing in infrastructure to meet future freight demand

Efficient rail freight transport is essential for economic growth and, together with our ports and industry, contributes to the competitiveness of Europe as a location for industry and business. Additionally, rail freight transport is sustainable, safe and efficient. It emits up to six times less CO₂ than road transport and three times less than inland shipping, helps reduce traffic congestion, and is 43 times safer than road transport, especially for hazardous materials. It also plays a strategic role in NATO and European security, for example, in the movement of defense equipment.

Rail infrastructure forms the backbone of both national and international freight flows. Investing in its renewal and upgrade is essential to ensure the reliability, capacity and flexibility of the rail system across Europe. Measures such as extending holding and staging tracks to 740 meters, initially driven by military logistics, also play a vital role

in enabling longer and more efficient freight trains. These 'dual use' upgrades bolster defense capabilities and strengthen the competitiveness of rail compared to road transport.

However, robust infrastructure requires more than just physical upgrades. Smart capacity management is key to balancing maintenance, disruptions, and growing demand. This means better planning, closer collaboration and increased digitalization. At the same time, international coordination is indispensable. Freight trains cross borders daily, so aligning timetables and works across countries is essential to prevent delays and improve reliability. As demand for rail grows, so must our commitment to a future-proof network. We are fully committed to creating a rail system that international shippers and forwarders can rely on, now and in the years ahead.

John Voppen, CEO ProRail