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**Preparation for the**

**Hearings of the Commissioner-designates after the EU elections in autumn**

Elaboration of questions from the sector of transport

Vienna, 01.07.2024

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# Decarbonising the transport system – financing

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| **Question** |
| The transport sector is a vital component of the European economy, accounting for approximately a quarter of the EU's total greenhouse gas emissions. The EU has set a target to reduce transport-related emissions by 90 % by 2050 in comparison to 1990 levels. **Please outline the financial incentives you intend to implement to decarbonise the transport sector (freight and passenger transport) in Europe.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please outline your plans to address the financing gap for the procurement and operation of decarbonised transport, with a particular focus on small and medium-sized transport service providers. * How do you intend to ensure that the funding allows sufficient time for implementation, especially when it comes to building new infrastructure? * Please outline how you intend to ensure that funding is also designed and used for cross-border projects. * Is new operating aid being considered? |

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| **Background** |

The transport sector is a critical infrastructure, an essential part of our way of life. With a contribution of over 9 %, it contributes significantly to the gross value added and to the EU as a business location. However, it is also one of the largest emitters in cities and is responsible for almost a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions in Europe, representing an increase of 21 % compared to 1990. In order to become climate-neutral by 2050, it is essential to create conditions for emission-free or low-emission mobility. The decarbonisation of the transport sector is a crucial step in achieving the EU's climate targets[[1]](#footnote-1). However, the rising energy consumption in road transport and the growing traffic volumes are presenting challenges to the implementation of these plans. Currently, over 90 % of the energy consumed in road transport is derived from fossil fuels. At present, electric propulsion represents a relatively minor alternative. From the perspective of the provision of services of general interest, the financing of environmentally friendly public infrastructures represents a key lever for achieving the desired modal split.

# Decarbonising the transport system - charging and refuelling infrastructure

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| **Question** |
| The EU has set a goal of reducing transport-related greenhouse gas emissions by 60 % below 1990 levels by 2050. However, the sector currently accounts for about 25 % of the EU's total emissions. Developing a sustainable charging and refuelling infrastructure is a crucial step in decarbonising transport (freight and passenger) in Europe. Financial incentives are essential to encourage investment in this infrastructure and accelerate the transition to low-emission transport modes. **Please provide a detailed overview of the financial incentives you intend to offer for the development of a functional and sustainable charging and refuelling infrastructure with the objective of decarbonising freight and passenger transport in Europe.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please indicate which EU programmes you intend to utilise to support regional providers in establishing sustainable charging and refuelling infrastructure, including for buses and municipal vehicles. * How will you ensure that a technology-neutral charging and refuelling infrastructure is implemented in the European transport system? * Please provide your views on the potential role of overhead line technology for (trolley) buses as an alternative to conventional charging and refuelling infrastructure. |

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| **Background** |

In July 2023, the European Parliament adopted the AFIR Regulation, which sets out the mandatory expansion of the charging infrastructure for electric vehicles in Europe[[2]](#footnote-2). This legislation requires the installation of public charging stations for electric cars at a rate of one per 60 km along all main roads in the EU by 2026. Furthermore, it requires the creation of charging solutions for electric lorries at a rate of one every 120 km by 2028. The objective of the legislation is to standardise the expansion, operation and density of the charging infrastructure across Europe, thereby enabling the achievement of medium and long-term climate and energy targets. The European Commission is already providing support for the development of charging stations, hydrogen refuelling stations and the electrification of airports with 424 million euros for 42 new infrastructure projects for alternative fuels from the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Fund[[3]](#footnote-3). However, from the perspective of services of general interest, this is not sufficient. The further expansion of alternative charging and refuelling infrastructure is an essential element of the green transport transition and requires public funds for investment and operation.

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# Decarbonising the transport system – technology neutrality

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| **Question** |
| Efficient and cost-effective transportation is a key factor in ensuring the continued success of our society and the continued growth of the European economy. However, the transport sector is dependent on fossil fuels, which have a significant impact on the environment. The EU has set a target of reducing transport-related greenhouse gas emissions by 90 % by 2050 compared to 1990 levels, but the sector currently accounts for about 25 % of the EU's emissions. Please outline the financial incentives you plan to provide for sustainable drive systems. Furthermore, what role does technological neutrality play in decarbonising freight and passenger transport in Europe? |
| **Further questions** |
| * How will we ensure that alternative drive systems can also function effectively in topographically challenging areas? Are there any considerations for making exceptions to the choice of drive systems depending on the area of use? * Please provide an update on the timeline for the ban on conventional combustion engines and the control measures being implemented to meet this timeline. |

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| **Background** |

The transport sector is responsible for approximately a quarter of total CO2 emissions in the EU. Technological neutrality is a fundamental requirement for the decarbonisation of the EU's transport system (freight and passenger transport). However, technology neutrality should not be viewed as an end in itself; rather, it should facilitate the optimal design of technology options. When selecting a technology, it is essential to make an objective decision based on the actual capacities and capabilities of a fleet system. It is essential to consider the total cost of ownership, including energy and energy infrastructure costs, when making decisions. Funding programmes should be linked to an objective analysis and a well-founded selection of technology, with the costs of these analyses being covered. It is not always necessary or efficient to use certain technologies in specific situations. One example of this is the Zillertalbahn railway, where a thorough analysis enabled the avoidance of path dependencies (hydrogen versus battery drive for the railway)[[4]](#footnote-4). Topographically challenging areas present particular challenges, as it is often the case in Austria. The vehicles must be able to cope with steep inclines and extreme weather conditions. The use of hybrid systems that combine electric and combustion engines could be an efficient solution in this case. From the perspective of services of general interest, it is important that EU policy and EU funding programmes in both freight and passenger transports are developed in a way that is consistent with the principle of technological neutrality.

# Digital infrastructure & Digital automatic coupling (DAC)

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| **Question** |
| The European Union is facing the challenge of strengthening its rail transport sector in order to promote efficient, sustainable and reliable transport solutions. Given the growing importance of rail transport in achieving environmental and climate policy goals, digital technologies play a crucial role. These technologies offer innovative solutions to optimise infrastructure, improve operations and increase customer satisfaction, which will further strengthen rail transport in Europe as the backbone of the trans-European transport network. **Please assess the importance of digital technologies in infrastructure, in particular digital automated couplings, for strengthening the rail transport in Europe.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please provide a list of EU programmes that have been specifically designed to promote digital infrastructure. To what extent do you consider the digital automatic coupling (DAK) to be a factor in your decision-making process? * Are new funding programmes or financing instruments planned to facilitate the rollout of the digital automatic coupling across the board? How do you intend to make the digital automatic clutch the European standard? How will labour dimensions and social effects on employees be taken into account and mitigated? |

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| **Background** |

The introduction of digital technologies into the infrastructure, such as Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC), has the potential to significantly enhance rail freight transport in Europe. DAC enables the automatic mechanical coupling and connection of air, power and data lines, which were previously done manually[[5]](#footnote-5). The technology is therefore a central component in the automation and digitalisation of rail operating processes. To ensure successful implementation, it is essential that the European Union demonstrates a strong commitment to this innovation and provides sufficient financial support for transnational implementation. One of the key challenges in this context is the implementation of DAC in the existing vehicle fleet, which is often outdated and not suitable for modernisation due to technical or economic constraints. As with the physical infrastructure, multi-layered and interlinked cooperation is also required for the data infrastructure. The digital infrastructures include the mobility data space[[6]](#footnote-6)and the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS). It is also essential to have funding programmes in place that enable local authorities, federal states, transport associations and transport companies to adapt their systems and generate high-quality data. Measures are needed to prepare workers for the change and to secure those employees who cannot cope with it.[[7]](#footnote-7)

# Strengthening single wagonload transport

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| **Question** |
| Single wagonload transport (SWT) represents an important alternative to Heavy Goods Vehicles as a customer-oriented, flexible, low-carbon and energy-efficient end-to-end logistics option. A sustainable single wagonload network forms the backbone of a strong freight transport system, providing a solid foundation for the development of other freight transport segments. Despite accounting for around 25-30 % of all rail freight transport in Europe, two-thirds of which are of a cross-border nature, the high fixed costs of rail freight transport make it economically very sensitive and it requires state aid to maintain it. Please outline the initiatives you plan to promote single wagonload transport (SWT) in the long term. |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please provide your opinion on the role of single wagonload transport in strengthening rail transport. * Please outline how the framework for operational and investment subsidies should be adapted to ensure the stability and profitability of the SWT system. * Do you foresee the need for funding programmes for research into remote control technology for the collection and delivery of individual wagons (groups)? |

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| **Background** |

In single wagonload transport (SWT), individual wagons or groups of wagons from different consignors are combined to form a train. The individual wagons are loaded at the loading station, transported to a collection point, bundled into a goods train, transported from the point of departure to the destination and distributed at the receiving station. The system comprises several interfaces, which results in more complex processes than those involved in block train transport. The SWT is distinguished by its flexible planning and individual booking according to quantity, time and relation. This enables the transportation of goods at short notice and the connection of economic centres throughout Europe and even as far away as Asia. SWT handles the collection and distribution of individual wagons or wagon groups, offering its customers customer-oriented and flexible end-to-end logistics as a CO2-friendly and energy-efficient alternative to lorries[[8]](#footnote-8). An efficient SWT network also provides the foundation for developing the potential of other freight transport segments. SWT represents the backbone of strong freight transport. However, due to its complex cost structure with high fixed costs that cannot be covered by revenue alone, it is economically very sensitive and cannot be maintained without state support. In EU member states such as Italy or Spain, where SWT is not subsidised, SWT has already been withdrawn completely or is in the process of being withdrawn. However, the maximum aid intensity stipulated by the European Commission in the EU guidelines on state aid to railway undertakings ("Railway Guidelines")[[9]](#footnote-9) is not sufficient to stabilise SWT in the long term. From the perspective of services of general interest, it would be beneficial that infrastructure utilisation costs should continue to be eligible and the external cost difference must be fully compensated with the objective of promoting the shift of freight transport from road to rail.

# Level playing field: Rail and air transport

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| **Question** |
| The EU has set itself the target of reducing transport-related greenhouse gas emissions by 90 % by 2050 compared to 1990 levels. However, the transport sector currently accounts for approximately a quarter of the EU's total greenhouse gas emissions. Air transport is one of the sectors with the highest increase in emissions and environmental pollution, and contributes to air and noise pollution. While rail transport is considered an environmentally friendly alternative, air transport only bears a fraction of its external costs. The resulting low air fares for consumers have the effect of distorting competition to the disadvantage of rail transport. **Please outline the measures you intend to implement to ensure a level playing field between air and rail transport.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Are you planning an EU-wide mandatory kerosene tax in line with the polluter pays principle? * Should flights from third countries using European airspace be included in the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism? * Are restrictions planned for short-haul flights and/or private jets (e.g. ban on domestic flights or flights under a certain number of kilometres)? |

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| **Background** |

There are considerable ecological and economic advantages to rail transport over air transport. Nevertheless, there are currently instances of unfair competition in favour of air transport. These distortions are due to inadequate consideration of external costs and various subsidies. Air transport has a significant environmental impact, particularly in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, noise pollution and air pollution. However, these external costs are not always reflected in ticket prices. Furthermore, air transport is subsidised and taxed in numerous countries. For instance, kerosene is exempt from energy tax in the EU, while international flight tickets often do not incur VAT. Airports and air traffic control systems frequently receive state subsidies, while rail transport must bear higher infrastructure costs, which are reflected in ticket prices. These subsidies and the incomplete internalisation of environmental costs enable airlines to offer lower prices, which makes air travel more attractive to consumers. This price distortion of competition disadvantages the more environmentally friendly rail transport and encourages the decision in favour of air travel, despite the long-term environmental and social costs being higher. From the perspective of services of general interest, it is of central importance in this context that political measures address this unequal treatment and level the playing field so that the actual costs of air transport are reflected in the price. This is the only way to create fair competitive conditions and promote sustainable mobility in Europe in the long term.

# Level playing field road and rail transport: Megatrucks

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| **Question** |
| There is currently no fair "level playing field" between rail freight transport and road freight transport. The lack of EU-wide harmonisation at operational, technical and regulatory level, coupled with the fact that the external costs of road freight transport are currently passed on to the taxpayer, makes rail freight transport more expensive than Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) transport. The authorisation of even longer and heavier truck configurations further erodes the competitiveness of rail freight transport. This could result in a significant shift back from rail to road. **Please provide your assessment of the current debate on the Weights and Dimensions Directive with regard to the external costs of megatrucks.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please outline the priority you give to megatrucks in your vision for the future of freight transport. * How do you intend to ensure that the decarbonisation measures in road transport do not lead to an intensification of the unfair competitive conditions between road and rail and prevent a shift back from rail to road? |

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| **Background** |

There is currently no fair "level playing field" between rail freight transport and road freight transport. The lack of EU-wide harmonisation at operational, technical and regulatory level, coupled with the fact that the external costs of road freight transport are currently passed on to the taxpayer, makes rail freight transport more expensive than Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs). Rail freight transport is 30 times more environmentally friendly than lorry freight transport and uses 6 times less energy[[10]](#footnote-10). The logistics sector is highly price-sensitive, which is why the willingness to accept higher costs for rail freight transport is very low. Due to the complex cost structure of rail freight transport, which includes high fixed, operating and maintenance costs, state subsidies are necessary to support the industry. In particular, single wagonload transport (SWT), which is the backbone of strong freight transport, and intermodal transport by rail, which is in direct competition with road transport, require support. The high operating and investment costs cannot be covered by revenue alone, which means that these modes of transport cannot be maintained without support. From the perspective of services of general interest, it is important to expand rail freight transport. Consequently, the adapted aid guidelines should be established to provide economically viable aid models. Furthermore, the authorisation of even longer and heavier truck configurations, such as megatrucks[[11]](#footnote-11), on the European road network is counterproductive and further weakens the competitiveness of rail freight transport. This is particularly relevant to unaccompanied combined transport (UCT) and the European transport (UCT) and the European rail freight network.

# Expansion of the TEN-T infrastructure: compensation payments for corridor closures

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| **Question** |
| The Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) are of crucial importance for the realisation and further development of the internal market and for improving the economic and social cohesion of the EU. The development and expansion of cross-border rail freight transport plays a pivotal role in ensuring the sustainability and resilience of the EU's transport infrastructure. The associated construction-related closures of corridors have a significant impact on the capacity, stability and costs of freight transport services. **Please outline how you intend to ensure that appropriate legal provisions are in place to compensate for the loss of freight transport in the event of corridor closures.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please advise whether the procedure for authorising accelerated payments is separated from the process for granting financial compensation payments. |

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| **Background** |

The inherent distortion of competition between rail freight transport and road freight transport is further compounded by the phased closure of system-relevant corridor routes due to network construction measures. While the general refurbishment of the rail network is principally to be welcomed, it considerably weakens the competitiveness of the operating railway companies. The impact on the capacity, stability and costs of freight transport services is significant. The corridor closures result in significant additional operating costs and are associated with time losses and measurable detours or diversions for freight transport. Specific effects include higher operating and logistics costs per train kilometre due to diversions and detours, uncovered fixed costs for train cancellations, energy, personnel and vehicle usage costs for shorter trains on longer diversion routes, and negative economic effects due to lower capacities on the diversion routes. One example of the relevance of this issue is the situation in Germany, where 40 sections of track with a total length of over 4,300 km are affected. The aforementioned closures have a direct negative impact on freight transport throughout Europe. The example of the Passau junction demonstrates the potential for avoiding external costs by shifting to road transport. With exports of approximately 12.3 million net tonnes and imports of 11.6 million net tonnes, the potential for savings in CO2 emissions and external costs is significant. These savings could amount to over 631,000 tonnes of CO2 and over 290 million euros, respectively. From the perspective of services of general interest, it is important to improve the framework conditions for the competitiveness of rail freight transport. This includes improved coordination of construction work, the provision of alternative routes and detours, as well as financial support measures (e.g. compensation payments) to offset the additional costs incurred by corridor closures.

# European Mobility Data Space

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| **Question** |
| Securing the European mobility data space is a crucial step towards achieving a sustainable modal split. As mobility data becomes increasingly important for innovation and the economy, it is vital to take measures to retain control over this data and manage its use in the interests of European citizens and companies. In light of the above, it is crucial to establish a framework that ensures the secure handling of mobility data, reinforces Europe's position as a business hub, encourages the creation of European value and drives innovation. **Please outline the measures you intend to take to further develop the Mobility Data Space and at the same time ensure cyber security.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * What measures will you implement to ensure that public data can be used transparently and comprehensibly by a diverse range of stakeholders, including the scientific community, public sector organisations, innovative companies, and others? * What role do European companies play in this area and what incentives do you intend to provide to encourage them to expand data collection and processing? |

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| **Background** |

The European Mobility Data Space plays a pivotal role in the European Commission's vision and strategy for a single European data space. The objective of the "single market for data" is to enhance competitiveness and data sovereignty in Europe. The Mobility Data Space brings together governance and infrastructure to enable the secure and shared use of data. The Mobility Data Space is one of nine common European data spaces, each covering a specific area. The Mobility Data Space provides access to mobility data from private and public stakeholders that was previously made available as open data without control of commercial use. The data room provides a platform for the clear and transparent definition of terms of use for this data. However, there are challenges. For example, while digitalisation could increase road safety, it could also jeopardise the security and integrity of consumer data. One of the key elements in the national implementation of the Mobility Data Space is the ITS Directive[[12]](#footnote-12), which ensures the availability and accessibility of multimodal traffic and travel data at national access points. This data is essential for modern driver assistance systems and will increase efficiency and safety in transport. It is therefore essential to devote sufficient attention to the issue of data ownership and the legal framework for access to and use of the data. From the perspective of services of general interest, the implementation of such a mobility data space is an essential basis for sustainable, safe and efficient mobility in Europe in the future. This necessitates transparent and comprehensible rules, as well as appropriate framework conditions and funding for public and municipal transport companies.

# Multimodal mobility - costs for public/municipal transport companies

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| **Question** |
| The integration of external service providers into the platforms of public transport operators (e.g. car-sharing providers) is associated with considerable additional costs for public and municipal companies. The financial responsibility for such interfaces lies with the public and municipal operator, who must also bear the financial consequences if external service providers withdraw. **What steps can be taken to prevent costs associated with integrating external players from being borne exclusively by public and municipal platform operators?** |
| **Further questions** |
| * How should the organisation that gains the actual or relative added value/benefit of integration into public platforms be made to bear the costs of this integration? For example, should the integration of private sharing providers into applications of municipal/public operators be subject to a co-financing model? * What is your view on the role of co-financing models between private and public operators in incentivising new forms of multimodal mobility? |

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| **Background** |

The promotion of multimodal mobility is a key objective of the EU, which is supported by the amended MMTIS Regulation[[13]](#footnote-13). The objective of this regulation is to ensure the availability of EU-wide multimodal travel information services and intelligent transport systems to travellers across borders. To provide accurate and easily accessible multimodal travel information, additional static, historical, observed and dynamic data is required. However, the collection, provision, storage and conversion of these data sets represents a significant financial challenge for public transport operators. The costs of collecting and transmitting dynamic travel data at maximum half-hourly frequencies, calculating timetables and converting data are particularly high. Furthermore, there are additional costs associated with the development, implementation and integration of digital infrastructure, as well as maintenance and support. It is also important to consider personnel costs, legal and regulatory costs in the area of data protection, as well as operational costs including marketing and communication. To ensure the seamless integration of external mobility providers (e.g. car-sharing services) into the platforms of public operators, it is essential to continuously verify the accuracy and reliability of the information provided. Should external providers fail to honour their commitments or provide inaccurate data, public operators may be held liable for any resulting issues or inconvenience. From the perspective of services of general interest, it is crucial that the implementation of multimodal mobility is practicable and that public and municipal transport companies do not incur extraordinary costs.

# Multimodal traffic management

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| **Question** |
| The effective management of multimodal transport is a crucial element in achieving a sustainable modal split and the objectives of the Green New Deal and the Fit for 55 package. Passengers expect the highest levels of spontaneity and reliability in the event of a spontaneous change in travel plans. For instance, customers travelling with a pushchair require information on the location of the nearest station with a lift. Multimodal transport management streamlines the travel planning process for passengers who wish to combine different modes of transport. **Please outline the initiatives you are planning to enable or support the national implementation of seamless multimodal transport management in Europe.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please outline your strategy for promoting multimodal transport management in freight transport, with the objective of creating a level playing field between road and rail. * How do you intend to promote multimodal transport management in passenger transport that enables a level playing field between public and private transport providers? |

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| **Background** |

Public transport is a vital infrastructure that not only contributes significantly to the EU's gross value added, but also plays a crucial role in ensuring security of supply, security architecture and the resilience of our society. It is a central pillar of social, economic and environmental sustainability and plays a key role in achieving the EU's climate and energy targets. In this context, multimodal mobility, and therefore the MMTIS Regulation, represents an important step towards making public transport more attractive for passengers. Specifically, multimodal mobility means enhancing transport services for passengers, thereby facilitating the planning of journeys that combine different modes of transport[[14]](#footnote-14). The regulation, which will come into force at the end of January 2024, must now be implemented at national level. It is a key element of the EU strategy to promote a smart and sustainable transport system. To provide accurate and easily accessible multimodal travel information services, additional types of data are required, including static, historical, observed and dynamic data. The implementation of the MMTIS Regulation must therefore overcome technical and financial hurdles in order to avoid disruption to the operations of transport service providers. From the perspective of services of general interest, it is crucial that implementation is practicable and that public and municipal transport companies do not incur any extraordinary costs.

# Expansion of terminal capacities

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| **Question** |
| It is essential to have sufficient terminal capacity in place for multimodal transport management and the further modal shift towards rail. However, there are currently insufficient terminals, and existing terminals often fail to meet the criteria for TEN-T Core Terminals. It is not reasonable to expect terminal operators to bear the investment burden and risk for the construction, expansion or upgrade of terminals in accordance with the TEN-T Regulation. **Please outline your strategy for ensuring that there are sufficient terminals in Europe that meet the revised TEN-T Regulation criteria.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please advise whether specific subsidies are planned to create additional terminal capacity. * Please provide details of the funding instruments that will be used to finance the additional capacities. |

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| **Background** |

The development of terminal capacity is of great importance for transport logistics and the development of the TEN-T network[[15]](#footnote-15). Terminals act as central hubs where different modes of transport such as ships, rail, lorries and aircraft meet, which is crucial for the efficient handling of loading units such as containers, swap bodies and semi-trailers. These locations are crucial for the efficient handling of loading units such as containers, swap bodies and semi-trailers. To facilitate the shift to rail and the further development of a continuous intermodal transport chain, it is essential to ensure the appropriate availability and capacity of access to the rail network, including terminals, as well as to implement funding models that cushion the associated investments. In particular, intermodal terminals act as a hub between the various modes of transport, facilitating combined transport. However, there has been a lack of investment in terminal expansion and modernisation in recent years. Existing capacities are often insufficient to meet the increasing demand for combined transport. To address this issue, the European terminal network must be strengthened through expansion, modernisation and extension. This includes improvements to infrastructure such as loading tracks and transhipment areas, as well as expansions to services such as customs clearance and cargo preparation. From the perspective of services of general interest, the availability of sufficient terminal capacity is an essential prerequisite for a further shift to rail transport in line with the EU's sustainability goals. Currently, there is a shortage of suitable terminals in many locations across Europe, which hinders the growth of combined transport. It is therefore essential that existing terminals are modernised in a targeted manner and new terminals developed in line with the TEN-T core requirements in order to increase efficiency and capacity. It is crucial to facilitate investment from both the public and private sectors, as well as to implement subsidy models to ease the financial burden on terminal operators.

# Night trains

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| **Question** |
| Night trains play a pivotal role in achieving a sustainable modal split in Europe. They offer an environmentally friendly alternative to air travel while providing a comfortable way to travel over long distances. By strengthening and expanding night train services, CO2 emissions from the transport sector can be reduced, while the environmental impact of travelling is reduced. However, as the provision of night trains is not currently profitable, targeted measures and public investments are needed to strengthen this sustainable mode of transport. **Please outline your strategy for financing and expanding night train services in Europe in a sustainable manner.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please provide an overview of the EU programmes planned to make night trains more competitive on the market. * Do you believe that measures such as a tax reduction or lower track access charges for night trains would be effective in enabling the railways to set prices more competitively? |

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| **Background** |

Night trains represent a significant contribution to European passenger transport, offering an environmentally friendly alternative to short and medium-haul flights and car journeys. The trains, which are typically equipped with sleeping and couchette carriages, enable travellers to cover long distances overnight with few stopovers, thereby significantly reducing CO2 emissions. Additionally, passengers have the opportunity to engage in other activities during the day. The expansion of night train connections has been a long-standing objective and is also supported by the European Commission. The objective is to make night trains competitive on high-speed lines in terms of price, quality and journey time. Despite these encouraging developments, night trains are facing challenges. The current economic framework conditions are challenging and require fundamental improvement. The high cost of operation, the inadequacy of infrastructure and the competition from cheaper flights represent obstacles to the viability of night trains. The differing national standards, such as those for track gauges, result in additional costs and make it challenging to operate trains across borders in an efficient manner. One of the key factors influencing the cost structure of night trains is the track access charge (TAC), also known as infrastructure utilisation charge[[16]](#footnote-16). A separate, more favourable TAC segment for night trains would significantly improve the profitability of these services without increasing ticket prices. The Belgian model, which provides for full reimbursement of the TAC, serves as a clear example of the necessity of this measure. It is also important to ensure that infrastructure managers are adequately compensated to offset any potential loss of revenue. From the perspective of services of general interest, it is important to fully utilise the potential of night trains in the medium and long term. This necessitates investment in modern trains and enhanced international collaboration.

# Direct award in public passenger transport

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| **Question** |
| The European public transport sector plays a pivotal role in ensuring the security of supply, secure architecture and resilience across the continent. Public transport providers facilitate the implementation of long-term, stable timetables, the sustainable expansion and maintenance of the rail network, and ensure stability in times of crisis. The direct award of contracts to approved public transport service providers is a crucial factor in this regard. **Please outline your position on the direct awarding of contracts in passenger transport.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please advise if you are planning a revision of the Public Service Obligations Ordinance (PSO-V). Do you believe that this should be accompanied by a restriction on direct awards to public transport operators? * Please describe the potential for a PSO-V in freight transport to be similar to the PSO-V in passenger transport, and indicate the conditions under which this could be achieved. * How do you intend to ensure that socio-ecological criteria are taken into account when awarding contracts? * How do you intend to ensure criteria on social and employment conditions, to prevent competition on employment conditions? |

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| **Background** |

The direct awarding of rail passenger transport services is of paramount importance for the stability and sustainability of the rail network, particularly in times of crisis such as a pandemic. While other modes of transport were severely restricted, the direct awarding of rail passenger transport services to public transport service providers ensured the continued operation of train services. This was of great importance to commuters, schoolchildren and travellers who still needed to get to work and to important appointments. Even during the Ukrainian refugee crisis in spring 2022, the affected people on the run were supported by special trains deployed at short notice. The direct award is therefore an important cornerstone for a socio-ecological mobility transition that ensures the sustainable expansion and maintenance of the rail network. However, the EU Commission's new PSO guidelines[[17]](#footnote-17) could jeopardise this tried-and-tested practice by replacing direct award with mandatory tenders. Such a change would have a significant impact on rail transport in Austria and other countries, with potential consequences for jobs, safety, fares and passenger service quality. Mandatory quality and social criteria in the regulation are still missing with the effect, that decent working conditions can be easily jeopardised. From the perspective of services of general interest, it is crucial that the flexibility of direct award be retained. This is the only way to maintain an attractive public transport service and respond to the growing importance of climate-friendly mobility solutions. It is essential that contracting authorities are able to react swiftly to changes in demand and crisis situations in order to guarantee the mobility of EU citizens.

# Strengthening the public transport sector

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| **Question** |
| The European public transport sector plays a pivotal role in the continent's security of supply, security architecture and resilience. Every day, public transport companies offer affordable and environmentally friendly mobility solutions for residents and visitors. They help to prevent gridlock, improve air quality and reduce CO2 emissions by providing commuters and travellers with a safe and efficient transport option. **Please outline your strategy for further expanding affordable, sustainable and safe connections to European cities and regions.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please provide your views on the role of public and municipal transport companies in the European transport system. * How do you intend to ensure that local and unprofitable routes (day and night) are also served in the interests of security of supply? * Are there any plans to introduce binding specifications for the intervals at which public transport must be offered, at what population density and for what distances? |

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| **Background** |

The provision of public transport represents a central aspect of our daily lives and is of crucial importance for the growth of the economy and the cohesion of society. There are several advantages to public transport. For instance, public transport is more environmentally friendly than private vehicles, with fewer emissions per passenger kilometre. This contributes to reducing air pollution and CO2 emissions. Furthermore, public transport is often more cost-effective than private vehicles, offering an affordable mobility solution for all social classes, particularly those without access to private vehicles. Furthermore, public transport alleviates pressure on the road network, reduces congestion and optimises the utilisation of transport infrastructure. Statistical analysis indicate that public transport is safer than private vehicles. Furthermore, it contributes to economic development and quality of life in urban areas by promoting urban development. However, public transport systems face a number of challenges. The lack of space in urban areas and the high CO2 emissions from road transport are challenges that need to be overcome in order to maintain the quality of life and attractiveness of cities. As part of the revisionof the TEN-T Regulation[[18]](#footnote-18), the EU has set a deadline of 2027 for each urban node to develop a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP). The plans are designed to promote efficient and environmentally friendly transport systems and to enhance the performance of the entire Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). From the perspective of services of general interest, it is clear that strong municipal, regional and public transport companies are essential for an environmentally friendly transport transition. It is therefore vital that their framework conditions are improved.

# EU road transport initiatives

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| **Question** |
| The society relies on the economic and efficient transportation of people and goods from one place to another in many ways. The transport sector is a critical infrastructure, an essential part of our way of life and plays a key role in Europe as a business location. The EU has set itself the target of reducing transport-related greenhouse gas emissions by 90 % by 2050 compared to 1990 levels. However, the transport sector currently accounts for approximately a quarter of the EU's total greenhouse gas emissions. Road transport accounts for almost three-quarters of this. **Are you planning to revise the guidelines for road transport in order to reduce CO2 emissions as quickly as possible?** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please indicate whether you intend to propose further amendments to the Polluter Pays Directive with regard to road transport. * Are you planning to further revise the Eurovignette Directive? * Are you considering implementing standardised speed limits in the EU with the dual objective of reducing traffic emissions and increasing road safety? |

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| **Background** |

The EU has set itself the target of reducing transport-related greenhouse gas emissions by 90 % by 2050 compared to 1990 levels. However, the transport sector currently accounts for approximately a quarter of the EU's total greenhouse gas emissions. Road transport accounts for almost three-quarters of this. In order to reduce emissions, it is crucial to apply the polluter pays principle. The polluter pays principle is a fundamental tenet of environmental economics. It states that the costs of damage caused by an action should be borne by the polluter. In the context of road transport, this means that those who cause pollution or other negative impacts must bear the resulting costs. These external costs are incurred by cars and lorries, which in some EU member states are charged for using the infrastructure through different toll systems. The Eurovignette Directive permits both time-based road user charges and distance-based tolls[[19]](#footnote-19). In the case of time-based road user charges, a specific road network can be used as often as desired for a specific period (e.g. one year) after a one-off payment. In the case of distance-based charges, the fee is calculated based on the number of kilometres driven on a specific road network. This means that charges are levied for each kilometre driven on a specific road network. From the perspective of services of general interest, it is crucial that those who cause pollution pay for the social and ecological costs incurred by the general public. Furthermore, the expansion of rail infrastructure and public transport should be facilitated by regulatory policy and promoted by EU programmes.

# Ticketing system for cross-border transport

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| **Question** |
| The availability of tickets for cross-border local and long-distance transport is a crucial factor in enhancing the appeal of public transport in the trans-European area. Tickets for the TEN-T network in Europe therefore play a pivotal role in achieving a sustainable modal split and the objectives of the Green New Deal and the Fit for 55 package. **Please outline your strategy for ensuring a fair ticketing system in cross-border transport.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please outline the initiatives you plan to implement to make public transport in the trans-European area more attractive. * How can the responsibilities for through tickets in the trans-European area be clearly defined and tickets offered by ticket brokers that are incorrect avoided from leading to liability on the part of the operating transport companies? * How do you intend to ensure that the pricing of through tickets remains in the hands of the transport companies? * How do you intend to ensure that these tickets are designed according to transparent, predictable and affordable criteria, while still enabling companies to cover their costs? |

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| **Background** |

The European rail sector is currently engaged in a concerted effort to enhance international ticketing, with the introduction of the CER Ticketing Roadmap 2021 representing a pivotal step in this direction. Developed by the Community of European Railways (CER), this initiative aims to foster collaboration between railways while maintaining a competitive environment[[20]](#footnote-20). In addition to the technical aspects, two major challenges in terms of content must be overcome: In order to prevent market manipulation, third-party providers must not be allowed to change the fare structure. Furthermore, they must not be allowed to impose additional costs on operating transport companies. Also, it is imperative that third-party providers refrain from selling tickets at terms that are deemed unreasonable, as this could potentially lead to claims for damages against the operating transport companies. It is also important that the pricing of through tickets enable seamless travel using different modes of transport, remains in the hands of the operating transport companies. From the perspective of public services, municipal, regional and public transport companies are key drivers for a climate-neutral Europe. For instance, railway companies require a legal framework that enables them to understand their customers' needs and to oversee data processing in order to guarantee data protection and service quality.

# Digital recording and monitoring of working time for on-bord personnel on trains

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| **Question** |
| The transport sector is a vital component of our infrastructure, a fundamental aspect of our way of life, and a crucial element of Europe's business landscape. To guarantee the quality, reliability, safety and resilience of the sector in the long term, it is essential to provide fair, stable and decent working conditions for employees. **Please outline your plans for a digital, tamper-proof recording of working time in order to prevent social dumping by enabling effective controls.** |
| **Further question** |
| * Please outline how you intend to ensure that working conditions are adhered to through appropriate controls. |

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| **Background** |

It is of the utmost importance to ensure fair, stable and good working conditions for employees in order to guarantee the quality, reliability and resilience of the transport sector in the long term.

There is already an obligation to record the working time of staff on trains, but this is vulnerable to manipulation and is often not fully traceable in the event of checks, especially in the case of staff working across borders. A tamper-proof digital recording and monitoring of working time is important for several reasons and a logical consequence of the efforts to digitalise the processes in the railway system and to create a single European railway area in which the employees of different railway undertakings can be deployed, especially in cross-border passenger and freight transport. In order to ensure the safety of railway operations and fair competitive conditions for all market participants in this common railway area, accompanying measures are required to create transparency and further cross-border integration of the railway sector. Firstly, it enables precise monitoring of drivers' driving and rest times, which reduces the risk of accidents caused by fatigue and thus increases safety. Secondly, it allows for the identification of any potential issues with driver fatigue, allowing for prompt action to be taken to address them. Furthermore, digital systems enable companies to ensure that they are complying with all applicable labour laws and regulations, thereby avoiding any legal consequences and fines. Forgery-proof digital monitoring of working time contributes to efficiency and productivity by reducing administrative overhead and enabling more efficient workforce planning. This results in more efficient resource utilisation and increased productivity. Furthermore, digital records provide transparency on working hours and enable effective controls also across borders, protecting workers' rights and reinforcing fair labour practices. In the event of an accident or incident, digital records can help identify the causes and clarify responsibilities, which is important for insurance claims and legal investigations. Digital systems also assist in reducing fuel consumption and emissions by optimising deployment planning and reducing idle time. However, there is currently no system in place to guarantee the veracity of employees' working time records across all transport companies. Without proper recording and monitoring, working hours are sometimes massively exceeded, putting the safety of employees and passengers at risk and impairing fair competition. From a public service perspective, the protection of skilled workers is an essential cornerstone for a prosperous transport sector.

# Attractiveness of jobs in the transport system

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| **Question** |
| The transport sector is a critical infrastructure, an essential part of our way of life and plays a key role for Europe as a business location. The attractiveness of the transport sector in the labour market is crucial for the smooth and efficient operation of the European transport system. In light of the growing shortage of skilled workers, governments and companies are confronted with the task of devising suitable strategies to attract and retain qualified personnel. Creating an attractive working environment and promoting training and development opportunities are important measures to address the skills shortage in the transport sector. **Please outline the initiatives you plan to take to increase the attractiveness of the transport sector in the labour market and to counter the skills shortage.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * What measures are you implementing to ensure the transport sector remains resilient in the future and that there are sufficient workers available? * Are there any specific plans to promote the sector, for example by encouraging women to enter the industry, in order to create incentives for new training programmes in the transport sector? * How will you ensure that there will be sufficient training opportunities for the new professional challenges of the future? |

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| **Background** |

The transport sector is a vital component of our infrastructure and a fundamental aspect of our way of life. It plays a pivotal role in Europe's economy. Mobility and transport are essential for our daily lives, facilitating access to work, family and friends, and tourism, as well as supporting the smooth functioning of global supply chains. The free movement of people and goods within the EU fosters cohesion and a sense of European identity. Transportation represents the second largest expenditure item for private households in the EU, contributing 5 % to European GDP. The sector employs 10 million people and transport volumes in Europe are increasing year by year. To meet the growing demand and achieve the climate protection targets by 2030, in particular in public transport, there is a need for more well-trained professionals in the transport sector. As a result of the growing skills shortage, governments and companies are facing the challenge of developing appropriate initiatives to attract and retain skilled workers. In a sector survey by the Association of German Transport Companies (VDV), one in two companies reported that they had had to temporarily reduce their driving operations in recent years due to personnel constraints[[21]](#footnote-21). These restrictions, which are being exacerbated by demographic change, are leading to reduced timetables and cancelled lines. From the perspective of the provision of essential services, it is important that the EU supports an attractive working environment and the promotion of training and further education opportunities in order to counteract the shortage of skilled workers in the transport sector and to ensure a smooth and efficient transport system in Europe.

# Health promotion and socially acceptable working conditions in the transport system

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| **Question** |
| The transport sector is a vital component of our infrastructure, a fundamental aspect of our way of life, and a significant contributor to the European business landscape. To guarantee the quality, reliability and resilience of the sector in the long term, it is essential to provide fair, stable and good working conditions for employees. **How can we ensure that workers in the transport sector can carry out their profession for as long as possible and in good health?** |
| **Further questions** |
| * How do you intend to ensure that the transition of professionals to new roles is seamless and that training in other areas is recognised? |

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| **Background** |

The transport sector is a vital component of our infrastructure and a fundamental aspect of our way of life. It plays a pivotal role in Europe's economy. Mobility and transport are essential for our daily lives, facilitating access to work, family and friends, and tourism, as well as supporting the smooth functioning of global supply chains. The free movement of people and goods within the EU fosters cohesion and a sense of European identity. Transportation represents the second largest expenditure item for private households in the EU, contributing 5 % to European GDP. The sector employs 10 million people and transport volumes in Europe are increasing year by year. To meet the growing demand and achieve the climate protection targets by 2030, in particular in public transport, there is a need for more well-trained professionals in the transport sector. In light of the growing shortage of skilled workers, governments and companies are facing the challenge of developing effective strategies to attract and retain qualified professionals. Considering the growing shortage of skilled workers, public authorities and companies are facing the challenge of developing effective strategies to attract and retain qualified professionals. A survey of the industry conducted by the Association of German Transport Companies (VDV) revealed that one in two companies had to temporarily restrict operations due to a lack of personnel. This led to thinly spread timetables and cancelled lines. The situation is further exacerbated by extraordinary waves of illness such as COVID-19, as well as demographic change, which further thins out the workforce. From the perspective of public services, it is important to ensure the quality, reliability and resilience of the transport sector in the long term by promoting health and providing socially acceptable working conditions. Furthermore, funding is needed for training and further education opportunities to successfully meet the challenges of the shortage of skilled workers and to ensure an efficient transport system in Europe.

# Green jobs in the transport sector

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| **Question** |
| The European Union (EU) defines green jobs as those in the production of products, technologies and services that avoid environmental damage and conserve natural resources. It should be noted that public transport is not currently included in this definition. However, public transport is a critical infrastructure and plays a key role in social, economic and ecological sustainability, as well as in Europe as a business location. **Please confirm whether a revised classification of green jobs that includes all occupations in the public transport sector is being considered.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please outline your strategy for ensuring the availability of sufficient EU programmes to make the public transport sector more attractive to employees. * Please outline your strategy for ensuring that the public transport sector receives the necessary financial support. |

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| **Background** |

The European Union (EU) defines green jobs as those in the production of products, technologies and services that avoid environmental damage and conserve natural resources. It should be noted that public transport is not currently included in this definition. However, it represents a critical infrastructure and plays a key role in social, economic and ecological sustainability, as well as for Europe as a business location. Green jobs in the transport sector include roles that seek to minimise the environmental impact of transport systems, promote sustainable transport solutions and develop clean energy solutions. These roles can be found across a range of sectors, including the development and manufacture of electric vehicles, public transport and electric transport. Nevertheless, the public transport sector is not currently fully recognised as a "green" employer. Its primary objective is not to protect the environment, but to provide efficient transport services. Public transport has the potential to reduce emissions per person-kilometre compared to private transport, thereby making an important contribution to climate protection by reducing air pollution and CO2 emissions. From the perspective of public services, it is important to consider public transport jobs as green jobs in their entirety. These jobs provide services that avoid environmental damage and conserve natural resources. This would reinforce the sector's contributions to sustainability and emphasise its role in promoting a greener economy.

# A level playing field for working conditions in cross-border freight transport

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| **Question** |
| In light of the challenges faced by lorry drivers, including fatigue, irregular working hours and unsafe working conditions, it is crucial to implement effective measures to improve their situation. Furthermore, the unequal working conditions in road and rail transport result in an absence of fair competitive conditions in the transport sector. To create a level playing field between road and rail, it is essential to regulate working hours, improve social security and promote health and safety standards. **Please outline the measures you intend to implement to enhance working conditions in cross-border road transport and harmonise working conditions in the TEN-T network.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * The erosion of working conditions in road transport must serve as a warning example for the railway sector. Please outline your strategy for preventing social dumping in these sectors. * Please outline your plans to revise the Posting of Workers Directive and your plans to amend the driving time regulations and the directive on the certification of train drivers. Please clarify whether you intend to adjust the rest periods in this context. |

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| **Background** |

The transport sector is facing challenges as a resulting from the lack of equal opportunities between rail freight transport and road freight transport. The lack of harmonisation across the EU at the operational, technical and regulatory levels, as well as the externalisation of the costs of road freight transport, make rail freight transport more expensive in comparison. A balanced framework is required to achieve the EU's sustainability goals. In road freight transport, there are initiatives to enforce the cabotage rules[[22]](#footnote-22) and clear regulations on posting and rest periods. However, these are encountering difficulties in enforcement. The Posting of Workers Directive[[23]](#footnote-23) is designed to enhance the working conditions of drivers engaged in cross-border freight transport. However, it is facing criticism due to potential cost increases and changes in competitive conditions. In rail transport, the differing national infrastructures and regulations present a significant challenge, resulting in time-consuming processes such as changing locomotives. In contrast to road transport, which is streamlined by an EU-wide driving licence, rail transport is strongly influenced by national regulations. From the perspective of the provision of services of general interest, the harmonisation of transport sector regulation is to be welcomed in order to create fair competitive conditions and to support sustainability and efficiency goals. High training standards and good working conditions are essential for the safety and sustainability of the railway sector.

# Secure and flexible funding for the transport system

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| **Question** |
| The adaptability and efficiency of the European transport system depend on the flexibility of funding for supported transport projects. In light of evolving needs and priorities, it is essential to implement flexible funding mechanisms to ensure optimal use of resources. It is of fundamental importance that funding is used effectively and in a targeted manner in order to achieve the goals of the EU-wide transport system. **Please outline your strategy for enabling more flexible use of funding in subsidised projects.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * How do you intend to ensure legal certainty in the flexible application of subsidies? |

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| **Background** |

The adaptability and efficiency of the European transport system depend on the flexibility of funding for supported transport projects. In light of evolving needs and priorities, flexible funding mechanisms are crucial for maintaining adaptability and efficiency. It is also of fundamental importance that funding is used effectively and in a targeted manner to achieve the objectives of the EU-wide transport system. For tendering authorities (in particular in the case of tenders on behalf of third parties), there is also the issue that only the ultimate beneficial owner of vehicles or infrastructure can receive the funding. This is because in these cases, the performance target and the financing are provided by an organisation other than the recipient of the funding. This is particularly problematic in the case of competitive funding, as the respective bidders cannot even take the expected funding into account as a "discount" in their offers, since the funding is not yet fixed at the time of the offer. This results in complex and legally questionable payment flows. The funding is either distributed to private operators as profit or retained by them. From the perspective of public services, both legal certainty and flexibility are essential elements for the expansion of the necessary transport infrastructure in Europe.

# Public funding and support in the transport system

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| **Question** |
| Securing public funding for the expansion and maintenance of transport infrastructure is of fundamental importance for the long-term sustainability and accessibility of the transport system. Given the significant investment required for infrastructure modernisation and maintenance, it is vital that this responsibility remains in the public domain. It is only through the implementation of clear political strategies and the use of appropriate financing instruments that transport infrastructure can be developed and maintained in the public interest. This will ensure that the needs of society are met, thus guaranteeing security of supply and the provision of public services. **Please outline your strategy for ensuring that the development and maintenance of transport infrastructure remains a public financing task.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * How do you intend to guarantee the quality of the transport infrastructure in the case of long-term tenders? * How can you prevent unscrupulous companies from exploiting the tendering process? * What incentives would you like to create to link part of the public funding system to infrastructure investments? |

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| **Background** |

The promotion of trans-European rail freight transport is contingent upon the provision of financial support in the form of investment and operating aid. These funds ensure a level playing field between road and rail freight transport and guarantee the resilience of the rail freight transport network. A significant proportion of these funds should be allocated to modernising the European railway fleet and purchasing and converting rolling stock. The rail sector is facing significant challenges due to decades of underinvestment in infrastructure and rolling stock. These include the dismantling of track systems, limited network capacity, outdated vehicle fleets and high costs for adapting to new safety standards such as ETCS BL 3, which require significant investment. In light of the investment and modernisation requirements outlined above, it is clear that an increase in the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) is necessary to complete the TEN-T network and to bring the European rail network up to the latest technical standards[[24]](#footnote-24). Furthermore, additional operating aid is required to cover the ongoing costs of rail freight transport. The challenging economic climate facing rail freight transport has made it clear that the sector cannot bear the burden of the necessary investments to implement the modal shift on its own. From the perspective of the provision of services of general interest, it is of the utmost importance that transport infrastructure remains a genuine public financing task. In this context, it is necessary to implement simplified rules for infrastructure investments (keyword: growth and stability pact) and improved state aid rules.

# Planning of financing and funding in the transport system

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| **Question** |
| It is of the utmost importance to ensure the implementation of multi-annual financing plans in order to facilitate long-term planning and the efficient use of financial resources in the transport sector. Given the complexity and long-term nature of transport infrastructure projects, it is essential to ensure the continuity of funding to guarantee their successful implementation. This necessitates the implementation of mechanisms that facilitate the targeted and efficient utilisation of funds, with the objective of strengthening and modernising the EU's transport infrastructure. **Please outline your strategy for ensuring the availability of multi-annual financing plans, allowing for the planned and targeted spending of funds.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please outline the initiatives you plan to support in the context of multi-year financing plans. |

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| **Background** |

It is of the utmost importance to have the capacity to plan financing and funding in the transport system. This is essential for the creation of a stable, efficient and sustainable transport infrastructure that is economically, socially and environmentally beneficial. The six-year framework plan in Austria provides multi-year funding, which enables infrastructure operators to better plan and communicate maintenance, as well as the construction and expansion of rail infrastructure. This results in more effective planning of construction sites, minimises the negative impact on available rail capacity and facilitates continuous improvement of the transport system. Reliable financial planning is the foundation for the effective implementation of projects that promote sustainable mobility, such as the expansion of public transport and rail infrastructure. Predictable financing allows for the efficient allocation of resources, reducing costs and ensuring the timely completion of projects. Clear financing plans also help to avoid unexpected cost overruns and delays, which increases the efficiency and reliability of the transport infrastructure. Long-term infrastructure projects, which are made possible by predictable financing, create and secure jobs in the construction and transport industries. Transport systems can also respond better to crises and make the necessary adjustments to maintain operations. Austria is a good example of this, with its framework plan and financing of the rail infrastructure considered a best practice example in the European Union. Unfortunately, railways in other EU member states often lack the same form of infrastructure financing, which makes it difficult to create seamless cross-border rail transport. To achieve an efficient and integrated European rail transport system, similar financing models are needed in other EU member states. From the perspective of the provision of services of general interest, it is important to expand plannable financing models so that a sustainable and efficient transport infrastructure can be built that meets the needs of the population while being environmentally friendly and future-proof.

# Expansion of the TEN-T network towards Eastern Europe

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| **Question** |
| The development and expansion of the TEN-T network towards eastern Europe represents a significant challenge. Given the historical differences in infrastructure and economic development, it is crucial to take appropriate measures to improve connections and integration between eastern and western Europe. It is also important to ensure that the candidate countries are optimally integrated into the existing TEN-T network in order to promote seamless transport connections and economic development. **Please outline the measures you intend to implement to reduce the east-west divide in the expansion and extension of the TEN-T network and to ensure that the Western Balkans are connected as planned via infrastructure links through third countries.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please confirm whether you have any further specific EU funding programmes in place for the expansion of the TEN-T network, in addition to the Connecting Europe Facility. * How do you intend to ensure that the new member states are optimally integrated into the existing TEN-T network? * Please outline your views on the role of capacity management in the TEN-T network. |

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| **Background** |

The expansion of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) towards Eastern Europe is a key objective for the EU in improving transport infrastructure and promoting the integration of member states. The EU is providing substantial funding under the Connecting Europe Facility[[25]](#footnote-25) to support the expansion and accelerate projects. This will facilitate greater mobility and economic cooperation. The objective is to modernise and expand the road, rail and waterway networks to create efficient, multimodal connections between Western and Eastern Europe. The objective is to promote trade, tourism and economic development. While progress has been made, there are still some challenges to overcome, including funding constraints, complex approval processes and technical adjustments. A particular focus is being placed on the development of infrastructure links that pass through third countries, with a view to connecting the Western Balkans. The revised TEN-T Regulation places a strong emphasis on the importance of better connecting the Western Balkans to Central Europe through new transport corridors, for both EU and non-EU countries. While EU Member States have access to EU co-financing, this support is not available to non-EU countries. It is therefore vital that TEN-T projects in non-EU countries are also financed and implemented in order to guarantee seamless connectivity. From the perspective of the provision of services of general interest, the further expansion of the TEN-T network is of great importance. This includes both the integration of new accession countries and the necessary means for capacity management.

# Automation of the transport system

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| **Question** |
| The implementation of automated systems in the mobility and transport network represents a significant development that will have a profound impact on the future of transport systems. In light of the growing integration of technologies such as autonomous driving and intelligent transport systems, it is vital to establish the optimal framework conditions to guarantee the secure, efficient and sustainable utilisation of these systems. As the European Commission, it is your responsibility to develop strategies that promote the introduction and integration of automated systems, while ensuring that the necessary requirements for safety, data protection and interoperability are met. **Please outline the framework conditions you plan to introduce for the introduction of automated systems in the mobility/transport network.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please outline your plans to prioritise the promotion of automated systems in the mobility/transport network, and indicate the specific areas where this should occur. * Please indicate which EU programmes or funding instruments you believe should be used to finance automated transport systems. * How do you intend to ensure that the legal issues surrounding the introduction of automated systems in the mobility/transport network are resolved and implemented in a binding legal framework? |

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| **Background** |

The automation of the transport system will result in significant changes to the design of the entire transport system over the coming years and decades. Automation in public transport encompasses a wide range of areas, including parking guidance systems, traffic information, traffic control, traffic assistance and traffic coordination. The introduction of networked and automated public transport could enhance its appeal through the provision of flexible and customised services. Furthermore, road freight transport could become more efficient and cost-effective. However, the expectations of automation are not entirely positive. The unregulated use of automation could result in an increase in the use of motorised private transport and freight vehicles, which would lead to an increase in energy consumption and emissions and a displacement of more environmentally friendly modes of transport such as trains and bicycles. To mitigate the so-called rebound effects, it is essential to establish clear framework conditions for the deployment of automated vehicles. In particular, these must set out the circumstances in and the manner in which automation should be used. It is of central importance to promote transport applications that are ecological and socially meaningful, as well as to utilise digitalisation of transport as an opportunity for sustainable mobility. The establishment of appropriate standards, including the necessary infrastructure, compatible interfaces and a seamless flow of information, is of paramount importance in this regard. One example of the opportunities offered by automation is the closing of gaps in public transport in rural and urban areas. Furthermore, automation can assist in addressing the shortage of personnel in the transport sector. From the perspective of the provision of essential services, it is crucial to define standards for the necessary infrastructure, interfaces and a smooth flow of information. Automation must be designed in a way that ensures it is future-proof and that the advantages of the new technology can be optimally utilised.

# Acceptance of automated transport systems

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| **Question** |
| When introducing automated transport, it is crucial to ensure that human jobs are preserved in the transport system. Automation elements have the potential to enhance efficiency and safety, but may also result in job losses. In light of these developments, it is crucial to devise strategies that facilitate the transition to automation while safeguarding jobs and creating new employment opportunities. **Please outline your strategy for ensuring that human jobs are preserved in the system when introducing automated transport systems.** |
| **Further questions** |
| * Please advise whether EU programmes or funding are planned to achieve this public acceptance through information campaigns. * Please outline how you intend to ensure that human contact persons will continue to be available to customers on site in the event of relevant questions or emergency situations. |

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| **Background** |

The progressive automation of the transport system will result in significant changes to the design of the entire transport system over the coming years and decades. One way to make public transport more attractive is to offer flexible and customised services. Furthermore, road freight transport could become more efficient and cost-effective. The introduction of an automated public transport system will create a new mobility offering for all. Automated vehicles should not only reduce human error in road traffic, energy consumption and emissions, but also increase the productivity of users, improve driving comfort and improve the mobility of people with mobility impairments. It is therefore essential that the public is willing and able to accept automation in transport if automated transport systems are to be successfully introduced and implemented. Ultimately, the success of an automated (public) transport system depends on its acceptance by users. From the perspective of public services, it is crucial to address the concerns and fears of the population and implement measures to increase acceptance. The success of the transformation of mobility through the integration of automated vehicles depends on the acceptance and use of an attractive automated (public) transport system. Only in this way can the economic, social and ecological potential in the mobility sector be implemented. It is therefore essential that EU funding and EU initiatives are made available to municipal, regional and public transport providers in order to enable them to carry out acceptance campaigns.

**Towards harmonisation of the European railway area**

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| **Question** |
| With the presentation of the 4th railway package, the European Commission aimed to harmonise the European railway area and increase the competitiveness of the railway system. 10 years later, it is time to evaluate the political objectives of that time. **Have the objectives been achieved or can be achieved in the medium term with the measures set out in the 4th railway package?** |
| **Further questions** |
| * What has been the effect of the liberalisation steps to date, particularly with regard to intermodal competition, b) the necessary support for achieving climate targets and c) the social impact on employees |

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| **Background** |

The measures taken to date to harmonize the European railway area and the work of the European Railway Agency should be thoroughly reviewed. This review should particularly focus on the lack of harmonization of the ERTMS technical train monitoring system, the exponential growth of company-specific regulations following the risk-based approach of the CSM Regulation due to the removal of national regulations, and how these issues impede European harmonization. Additionally, the announced revision of the Train Drivers Directive (2007/59) should be prioritized. There is also a notable lack of clear regulations to prevent negative social impacts, analogous to those in other transport sectors, such as digital recording of working hours, posting provisions, control mechanisms, and the social organization of working conditions. Addressing these points is crucial for achieving a more efficient and socially equitable harmonization of the European railway sector. From the point of view of services of general interest, the above-mentioned steps are necessary to ensure the safe, fast and, from a social point of view, good operation of European railway area.

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