

01/07/2002

Dear Member of Parliament,

UNICE is pleased with the recent Commission proposals to liberalise the European railway market further. It is an important step in the context of the Lisbon process. Liberalisation of rail freight transport is crucial to improving the cost and quality of railway services. With anticipated growth in freight transport demand of 38% over the next ten years, Europe will absolutely need rail and all other modes of transport.

UNICE therefore fully supports the Commission's proposals to accelerate the opening-up of international rail freight market to competition, as well as the inclusion of domestic freight transport. Cabotage in rail freight transport is not only badly needed to stimulate competition in domestic markets, it is also vital to optimise international (especially return) trips, allowing better use of capacity and more competitive prices.

Nevertheless, UNICE points out that, if Europe is serious about revitalising its railways, there is no time to be lost, and therefore calls on the European Parliament not only to endorse the Commission plans, but to go a step further and set the timetable for complete liberalisation by 2004.

Secondly, UNICE calls on the European Parliament to revise the definition of the so-called "authorised applicant", allowing shippers and forwarders to apply for slot capacity as well. This will reinforce the position of railway customers, providing incentives for railway companies to improve their service quality.

Equally important are the Commission's ongoing work and proposals to improve interoperability, as the lack of interoperability between national networks is another important obstacle preventing rail from increasing its market share in international transport.

For detailed comments on the second railway package, we refer to the position paper of the European Rail Freight Customers Platform, which is fully endorsed by UNICE, one of its founding members (hyperlink: <http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/transport/rail/library/erfc1-en.pdf>).

In conclusion, UNICE supports the second railway package and calls on the European Parliament to approve the Commission proposals swiftly.

Yours sincerely,

(Original signed by)

Philippe de Buck
Secretary General