



Ministry for the Ecological Transition, France

For the attention of

Mr Jean-Baptiste Djebbari

State Secretary for Transport

Sent exclusively by e-mail

Brussels, 28 September 2020

Subject: The urgent need to upgrade the loading gauge on the North Sea Mediterranean Rail Freight Corridor

Dear State Secretary Djebbari,

The European Rail Freight Association (ERFA) and the International Union for Road-Rail Combined Transport (UIRR) have joined forces to approach the French government in order to highlight the importance of upgrading the loading gauge along the North Sea Mediterranean Rail Freight Corridor to P400 (GC-C80).

Rail freight is a vital component of longer distance land freight transport, indispensable in our joint struggle to decarbonise the European economy. Rail Freight Corridors incorporate the most important railway lines used by freight trains. The North Sea Mediterranean Rail Freight Corridor is the most prominent corridor of France that provides an essential north-south connection within the EU's most economically advanced '*blue banana*' region. It also holds strategic advantages in that it is approximately a 100km shorter journey from Belgium to Basel than along the Rhine-Alpine Rail Freight Corridor.

Intermodal transport is a rapidly expanding production system of rail freight since intermodal cargo corresponds best to the truckload-based needs of many economic players, manufacturers and commercial actors. A 750-metre-long intermodal train can carry 50 truckloads, consignments of 50 different shippers. It's like having an electrically powered 50-truck platoon with one single driver. Moving more consignments onto rail is crucial in order for Europe to achieve its decarbonisation objectives. Rail freight is 6 times more energy efficient than road and 9 times lower CO₂ emissions than freight on road.

Intermodal trains, especially if carrying refrigerated trailers, require a P400 (GC-C80) loading gauge. It is well understood that many historic railway lines in France need infrastructure upgrades to be able to offer this loading gauge.

We believe the key bottlenecks of North Sea Mediterranean Rail Freight Corridor, like the ones in the Thionville – Metz – Strasbourg region, would be completed with an affordable investment of €150 million. The phasing of the work by prioritizing the clearance of the gauge on the two or three most constrained tunnels would also make it possible to quickly use this route for the transport of semi-trailers on special lowered wagons without waiting for the extension work to the P400 gauge of all the tunnels are completed. The dynamic demand growth for north-south freight transport in Europe would guarantee a good utilisation of the upgraded lines, and through them for the entire North Sea Med RFC, resulting in not only a rapid return of investment, but also a meaningful transport-related CO₂ reduction potential for France. We would also like to stress that upgrading infrastructure to P400 compatibility is a key enabling factor the rolling road concept.

The underwriting associations and their members would like to bring to your attention this investment opportunity also in the context of the ongoing drafting of France's post-pandemic economic recovery plan. Including this project would create a win-win situation: both in terms of economic competitiveness and when accounting for the carbon footprint of the French and neighbouring economies.

Therefore, we ask that you strongly consider the inclusion of all sections of the NorthSea Med RFC within French territory within France's infrastructure investment programme under its imminent post-COVID 19 economic recovery plan.

Sincerely yours,



Conor Feighan
Secretary General, ERFA



Ralf-Charley Schultze
President, UIRR

ERFA – ERFA is the European Association representing European private and independent railway companies. ERFA members share a commitment to work towards a non-discriminatory, competitive and innovative Single European Railway area.

UIRR – Founded in 1970, the International Union for Road-Rail Combined Transport represents the interests of European road-rail Combined Transport Operators and Transhipment Terminal Managers. Road-Rail Combined Transport (CT) is a system of freight forwarding which is based on efficiently and economically inserting electric rail into long-distance (road) transport chains through the use of intermodal loading units (ILU).