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Copy to:

Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal

By electronic mail

26 March 2021

OPEN LETTER FROM ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

Subject : Official start of the European Year of Rail - triggering a rail renaissance for Europe

Dear Minister, Dear Commissioner,

The European Year of Rail could not have come at a more pivotal time. Passenger numbers are growing and public enthusiasm is surging, but rail services are still only patchy at best. With the right political and financial support, the European Year of Rail 2021 could trigger a climate-friendly train travel renaissance, with a truly connected European rail network that leaves no one behind.

Tackling the European Union's contribution to climate breakdown will be impossible without a shift from air and road transport to rail. Nonetheless, while the [share of rail passengers](#) in EU transport has only slightly increased since 2007, air transport has grown dramatically and cars continue to make up over 70% of passenger transport. Despite its environmental benefits, rail is particularly underused in international travel: cross-border traffic accounts for [less than 8%](#) of

rail passenger traffic. Boosting rail numbers will be instrumental for a green and just pandemic recovery.

We urge you to ensure the EU takes forward these five major steps, starting in 2021, rapidly moving towards a true European railway system that is a model for the world:

- Governments should identify at least 30 underexploited international routes with high potential, and begin plans **to start new day-time and night trains running from end 2021**. These plans should include seed funding, or cross-border Public Service Obligations, to guarantee services which are currently not financially viable, and the support of the European Commission. Most EU capitals are not connected via direct rail services. This is as true for cities in neighbouring countries, as it is for cities further apart or in peripheral regions.
- Governments and the EU should set up a **funding programme to build a European pool of compatible rolling stock** of international day-time trains and night trains. The cost of compatible rolling stock and the lack of supply because of chronic underinvestment are slowing down the renaissance of night trains in Europe, and the creation of sustainable and high quality jobs.
- Governments and the EU should significantly increase **investments in the upgrade and modernisation** of existing railways, thus removing bottlenecks and improving cross-border regional rail. Neither existing national plans, nor the EU's new transport budget will be sufficient to meet these goals.
- The EU should create a legal framework to **make travelling by train cheaper than flying** (on comparable journeys). The EU should introduce a kerosene tax and cut unfair airport subsidies, and governments should reduce rail track access charges. The EU and Governments should also phase out domestic and cross-border short-haul flights where there is a convenient night train or a day-time connection.
- The EU and governments should ensure rail operators guarantee all **passenger needs and rights**, from specific assistance to low income families and people with reduced mobility, to a **common Europe-wide booking system** for rail tickets, and uninterrupted passenger rights on international trips.

Funding and other measures to support a shift from air and road to rail, and to increase cross-border rail, should be at the heart of national **recovery and resilience plans**. And the European Commission should monitor these plans to ensure they are.

We believe the people of Europe deserve a Europe-wide railway system that meets their needs, while boosting a shift from air and road to rail. The EU should seize this opportunity to start building the foundations of a **European body with a responsibility to oversee and coordinate international rail**, starting with the creation of a European timetable and the allocation of tracks to operators.

To help trigger a rail renaissance in Europe, we call on you to support the measures listed above in the Council of the EU and in the preparation of the European Commission's forthcoming action plan on cross border and long distance rail.

Without concerted and resolute political action, the European Year of Rail will do little to revive the fortunes of trains in Europe, just at the time when we need them most. After years of neglect, it is time to invest in an industry with a bright future.

We remain available to discuss these matters further, at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Magda Stoczkiewicz
Programme Director, Greenpeace European Unit

Also on behalf of:

2CELSIUS
Back on Track, the European network to promote cross border night trains
Germanwatch
eco union
Instytut Spraw Obywatelskich
Natuur & Milieu
Réseau Action Climat