



OPEN LETTER

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Rastatt disaster: Let's learn the lessons!

The closure of a small stretch of railway line must never again lead to the chaos and wide-reaching economic damage of Rastatt. The disaster has directly exposed rail as the weak link within the integrated logistics chain. A strong transport supply system underpins vital trade relations between European countries and beyond, as well as local, national and European economies.

Customer confidence in rail transport has also been damaged, jeopardising modal shift in the coming months and beyond. This must be rapidly restored if rail is to continue playing a key role in Europe's sustainable transport system.

The scale of the disruption, both in terms of duration and its impact on international services; the absence of robust international crisis management tools; the lack of viable, alternative routes, particularly on neighbouring networks, with both national obstacles and language requirements for train drivers preventing the unrestricted use of such routes, are all elements that contributed to the extensive damage and that must now be urgently addressed.

We as rail freight customers seek your support and leadership to ensure that rail is left in a stronger position, not a weaker one, from this incident. Lessons must be drawn, recommendations must be made and actions must be taken in order to address the challenges facing the rail sector, laid bare by Rastatt.

Rastatt definitely shows the urgent need for effective international coordination of rail freight services by national ministries and infrastructure managers, with the strong support of the European Commission. We the rail freight customers are determined to ensure rail's strong contribution to Europe's competitiveness.

We believe that as a first step the following structural changes, relief measures and processes are needed:

1) Risk management and contingency plans

The Rastatt disruption shows that there is the need to have contingency plans based on robust risk management. For each main line, there must be pre-defined alternatives, to be elaborated and constantly updated together with railway undertakings and multimodal partners such as CT operators, rail/road terminals, private sidings, sea ports and inland shipping services. Capacity is to be considered: a line with 200 freight trains a day needs to offer stand-by routes of at least 75% of the normal volume.

- ➔ Alternative, diversionary routes to the corridor routes must be available, in case of traffic disturbances. These must be designated in advance.
- ➔ The diversionary routes should have characteristics, in particular in terms of loading gauge and axle weight, but also in terms of train length and electrification, which allow the diversion of trains without negatively impacting on the quality of rail services.

2) Crisis management

A structure should be put in place for much-needed day-to-day coordination between national infrastructure managers, railway undertakings, terminals, private sidings, operators and customers in case of an emergency.

- ➔ Crisis management plans must be put in place for future major disruptions.
- ➔ In the event of a disruption, the immediate designation of a cross-border emergency coordination team is required.
- ➔ Effective and real-time communication with all impacted users must be ensured.
- ➔ Set-up of an emergency fund.

3) Overcoming national obstacles

Incompatibilities between and particularities of national rail systems result in a situation, as exposed by the Rastatt incident, where available capacity on the rail networks of neighbouring countries cannot be used. The interoperability of the European rail network must be strengthened:

- ➔ National requirements for language competencies was one of the biggest barriers to using available spare capacity during Rastatt; the driver language issue must be addressed as a priority and a single operational language adopted for the European rail system.
- ➔ All interoperability issues (ETCS, operational rules, safety certificates etc) should be solved along the corridor routes in the short term.

4) International coordination of infrastructure works

Line closures or restrictions, whether planned or unplanned, must be managed in such a way that they ensure viable solutions for existing traffic and limit the negative impact on the quality of service offered to the end customer. This is still not the case today.

- ➔ An effective organisation and coordination of planned line closures/restrictions is already a good basis for better management when there are unplanned disturbances.
- ➔ Infrastructure managers on the rail freight corridors should cooperate to jointly and in advance of planned line closures prepare timetables, including the provision of diversionary routes.
- ➔ National transport Ministries should communicate to infrastructure managers at least 24 months in advance of the timetable change, funding for infrastructure works impacting international traffic in order to enable effective coordination for international services.

5) Operational cross-border management

The Rail Freight Corridors are an excellent basis for international cooperation on rail freight services, but today they lack essential operational competences to ensure competitive rail services.

The Rastatt disruption clearly shows the need for a strong operational corridor management:

- ➔ A strong operations centre, one per corridor, should be established to effectively manage long distance rail freight traffic on different networks.
- ➔ The corridor management must be equipped with essential operational tools to efficiently manage traffic and optimise capacity during traffic disturbances. This includes:
 - Coordination of traffic management along the freight corridor, also with neighbouring corridors, in order to optimise available capacity during disturbances.
 - Establishment and publication of priority rules between the different types of traffic in the event of traffic disruption on the corridor route and in the event of diversions, on the alternative routes of the corridor.
 - Freight traffic must be given the right priority in case of disruptions because - unlike passenger rail traffic, which can often be transferred onto buses - rail freight does not have viable alternatives.
- ➔ Responsibility and competency for ensuring seamless rail operations along the corridor, accelerating and implementing the harmonisation of operational concepts and rules.

6) Incentives to minimise the impact of disruptions on rail services

The infrastructure Manager must be incentivised financially to ensure better planning of infrastructure works and to find solutions that minimise impact on rail services and therefore limit the economic impact on their own organisation.

- ➔ Additional costs incurred by the diversion of trains should not be included in the access charges paid by railway undertakings. This also applies for diversionary routes that circumvent national networks.
- ➔ Compensation by the Infrastructure Manager for additional costs incurred by Railway Undertakings during disruption should be adopted to ensure greater-customer orientation.

7) A rail platform

The Rastatt disaster has exposed weaknesses in rail as part of the integrated logistics chain. Effective coordination of the follow-up is needed in order not to miss the opportunity to make changes.

- ➔ The establishment of a rail platform dedicated to the Learnings from Rastatt, chaired by the European Commission, in close cooperation with and full integration into the existing working groups.
- ➔ The platform facilitates long-term coordination with the rail transport sector and national transport Ministries.


8) Immediate relief for the sector

















The interruption for almost two months of normal rail freight services on Europe’s main North-South artery has had an enormous economic impact on rail freight logistics. Costs for the sector have simply increased, with no change in their fixed costs, whilst no compensation has so far been received, with the exception of Switzerland’s announcement to partly compensate. This situation increases the vulnerability of the sector, particularly for the smaller companies unable to absorb the costs.

- ➔ The affected railway undertakings and the combined transport sector players, including its users, should be offered immediate financial relief.
- ➔ To accelerate the process of paying compensation, the German Authorities should clarify as quickly as possible the liability issue surrounding the Rastatt disaster.

We end the letter by thanking the efforts made on many sides to overcome the Rastatt crisis, both at operational and political level. We are grateful to the European Commission for hosting an emergency meeting on 12th September with affected parties and to EU Commissioner Bulc for taking on board our concerns in a response to our initial letter.

We now look forward to your continued active engagement and collaboration with us to enable a positive, long-term outcome for what has been a disaster for rail and for the many sectors dependent on efficient transport logistics. We hope together to build a stronger future for rail transport in Europe.

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