



## Press Release

9 April 2024

# Landmark event on the future of European rail freight boosts commitment for DAC

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*In the frame of the Connecting Europe Days and under the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the European DAC Delivery Programme, enabled by the Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking, organised 'The Future of Rail Freight – see how it works in the 21st century!' event on 2 April in Brussels, Belgium. The event demonstrated a broad support for the future of digitised and automated European rail freight through Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC).*

The event encompassed keynote speeches from **Georges Gilkinet**, Deputy Prime Minister of Belgium and Minister of Transport, **Volker Wissing**, German Federal Minister for Digital and Transport, **Kaspars Briškens**, Latvian Minister of Transport, and **Magda Kopczyńska**, Director General for Mobility and Transport, European Commission.

High Level sector and government representatives, including **Peter Füglistaler**, Director of the Swiss Federal Office of Transport, **Sigrid Nikutta**, Chair of Rail Freight Forward and CEO of DB Cargo, **Paolo Pagliero**, Group Vice President Technology of Wabtec, **Mark Topal-Gökceli**, CTO of ÖBB Holding AG and Manager of the European DAC Delivery Programme and **David Zindo**, President of UIP and CEO of Stream Group, debated DAC experiences, funding and financing, large scale testing and deployment of the DAC transformation project and next steps to take. The panellists outlined DAC as a unique opportunity and offer to policy makers to push rail freight into the 21st century while ensuring the long-term re-industrialisation of the Member States and invited the Belgian Presidency to start the next steps towards DAC implementation.

Georges Gilkinet put the DAC technology in the context of the ongoing European legal initiatives on improving the position of rail freight and which role it can play for more resilience and capacity of rail. Kaspars Briškens called for more ambitious investments in Europe's strategic transport infrastructure, qualifying flagship cross-border project Rail Baltica as *"a strong opportunity for DAC-only operation"*. Volker Wissing pointed out the importance for the European Member States and the European Commission *"to make DAC a successful European project"*. Regarding the crucial way towards DAC implementation, Magda Kopczyńska expressed her belief to *"find a way to build a gradual take-up and financing schemes that will allow DAC to be tested in real life"*. She underlined that this event *"is one of the important building blocks to make that solution a reality"*.

The debate was followed by a live demonstration of a DAC-equipped train, showcasing with hands-on experience the unique opportunity offered by rail automation.

Europe's Rail Acting Executive Director, **Giorgio Travaini** concluded: *"This event was not just about showcasing the DAC technology but about envisioning its implementation across Europe. It represents a cornerstone in achieving the ambitious goals of the European Green Deal, aiming for a 90% reduction in transport emissions by 2050. I am glad to see that the Brussels Declaration as an outcome of the informal meeting of European Transport Ministers organised by the Belgian Federal Minister of Mobility places a major emphasis on boosting rail freight in Europe."*

Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC), developed in the Europe's Rail research programme as a standard European solution, stands at the forefront of efforts to modernise rail freight. It is not merely a technological leap, but a critical step towards redefining rail freight for the 21st century — enhancing

capacity, enabling flexibility, and bolstering Europe's re-industrialisation and competitiveness through a sustainable transport solution. DAC will foster a more reliable supply of goods across Europe for people and businesses. It will improve intermodal competitiveness of rail logistics to shift more volume to the most environmentally friendly and energy-efficient transport mode and play a role as a key enabler of other technologies, such as ETCS operations without trackside equipment, and lay the basis for intelligent freight trains by offering power-supply and connectivity for the future wagon fleet.

Detailed information and live stream are available at the following link: <https://rail-research.europa.eu/calendar/connecting-europe-days-2/>

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#### **About Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking**

The Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking (EU-RAIL) is the European partnership for rail research and innovation under the Horizon Europe programme (2020-2027) and the successor to the Shift2Rail Joint Undertaking. The partnership aims to accelerate research and development in innovative technologies and operational solutions. It supports EU policies and objectives for the rail sector, its competitiveness, and the European rail supply industry. EU-Rail accelerates the use of integrated, interoperable and standardised technological innovations necessary to support the Single European Railway Area.

#### **About the European DAC Delivery Programme (EDDP)**

The European DAC Delivery Programme (EDDP), enabled by EU-RAIL, is a unique platform dedicated to the successful implementation of Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC) as a means to revolutionise rail freight systems in Europe. Founded on an open cooperation concept, the project gathers a wide range of entities from railway undertakings, infrastructure managers and wagon keepers, as well as the rail supply industry, entities in charge of maintenance, concerned sector organisations, rail research centres and national and European political institutions. The aim is to deliver a European DAC solution through an integrated shared programme, building upon R&I results and pilots, and ensuring the necessary actions for a fast, technically and economically feasible European-wide roll-out.



Europe's Rail Communication (+32 2 541 83 74) - [communication@rail-research.europa.eu](mailto:communication@rail-research.europa.eu)  
[rail-research.europa.eu](http://rail-research.europa.eu)