



A FUTURE POLICY BASED PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP FOR RAIL

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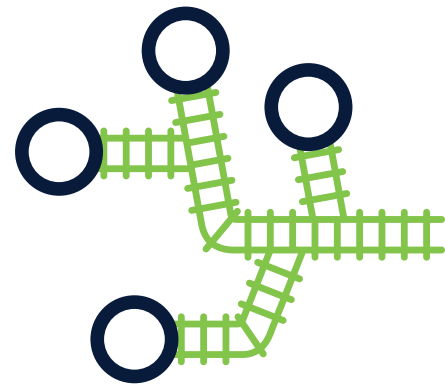
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Contents

Mission and focus	4
Specific context, challenges and objectives	5
Context	5
Challenges	6
Objectives.....	7
Rationale why an EU approach is needed	8
Why a rail PPP for rail innovation structure is necessary	9
Planned Implementation and outputs/impacts (resources needed & R&I)	10
Inclusiveness and transparency	14
Partners composition and target groups + cooperative approach	14
Meeting EU priorities/added value	16
Members of Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking	19
High Level Paper Annex - Flagship Initiatives	20

Mission and focus



The European rail sector requires decisive action to simplify¹ its systems and operations while enhancing its fundamental capabilities, with European innovation to make rail systems more agile, resilient and competitive.

The core emphasis is to:

- deliver the policy objectives of a Single European Rail Area (SERA) and strengthen the Single Market;

- manage a harmonised and coordinated innovation transition;
- deliver competitive services across three vital domains for Europe's socio-economy:
 - passenger and tourist mobility;
 - green freight operations; and
 - EU industrial and military strategic capabilities.

This mission focuses on targeted research and pre-deployment activities, leveraging railway fundamental capabilities.



¹ With the term simplification the rail system will be considered agile, resilient, competitive with no higher complexity than necessary, in particular in the day-to-day operations.

Specific context, challenges and objectives

Context

Rail is vital for Europe.

A well-functioning rail system is strategically important for the economy and security of the EU and its Member States. Rail is also central to achieving sustainability in transport, being the greenest mass transport mode.

The EU railway value chain is a global leader in the design, manufacturing and maintenance of railway systems and products, providing clean transport solutions and employment to 2.3 million Europeans and making a significant contribution of €143 billion to the EU total GDP, of which 659,000 jobs and €102 billion correspond to the rail supply industry ².

In the EU, manufacturers have maintained a positive trade balance in the past decade in the context of a strongly consolidated global market.

This global industrial leadership and competitiveness has been achieved through the development of products and solutions within the internal European market, with both public and private investments. But this position is not guaranteed and cannot be taken for granted. New competitors, particularly from China, are looking to establish themselves both in Europe and globally.

It is therefore imperative to support at European level the increased competitiveness of rail as a core part of the transport and mobility infrastructure for its citizens and in view of its security, and to support a healthy European rail industry, developing solutions for European benefit, and exporting these solutions to consolidate the position of the sector at global level.

Research and Innovation is needed in the rail sector to preserve and reinforce the competitiveness of the rail industry while decreasing the costs of the rail assets and operations in terms of Opex and Capex in an existing complex system. A specific attention should be paid to reduce the foreign dependencies of raw materials and electrical components ³. Implementation of innovation and the associated evolution should be more coherent, faster and affordable in a context of scarcity of public funding, taking in account the significant investments needed for regenerating, modernising and digitalising a diverse and partly aged railway assets.

In the Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029 President von der Leyen announced a Clean Industrial Deal that will enable more investments in clean and strategic technologies, so that the future of the clean and cutting-edge tech industry is made in Europe. A successful rail sector is an integral part of the Clean Industrial Deal.

The EU and private and public partners are already supporting research and innovation efforts through the Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking (EU-Rail) and before it the Shift2Rail Joint Undertaking (S2R). Those partnerships have fundamentally changed the landscape of European rail research and innovation for the better, enabling European approaches and solutions, as demonstrated for example by the development of Automatic Train Operations, improved traction systems improving overall energy management and Digital Automatic Coupler (DAC) as a key enabler for a competitive rail freight.

² Source: The transition pathway for the EU Mobility Industrial Ecosystem, European Commission, 2024: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fcbf7748-c0af-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

³ As highlighted as well in the recent EC study on "Addressing European research and innovation challenges for system transitions in energy and mobility": <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/46e16a85-9d7f-11ef-85f0-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>



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Within S2R, 695 prototype testing activities were carried out across the programme up to 2023⁴, with an average technological readiness level (TRL) reached of 5/6, i.e. technology validated or demonstrated in relevant environment. This progression through the TRL scale represents a coordinated approach spanning from concept formulation (TRL 1-2) through laboratory validation (TRL 3-4) to system demonstration in relevant environments (TRL 5-6), with activities distributed across many EU Countries. Many technologies reached higher TRLs and these are described in the EU-Rail catalogue of solutions for market uptake. Moreover, it is reported that -with further private development- 72 new EU harmonised products, processes and methods have been launched into the market⁵.

The Partnership Evaluation study⁶ indicated that a lesson drawn from S2R is that the implementation of new approaches and solutions within the rail system is not only about technology, but also about the introduction in diverse operational environments and rail systems to realise a Single European Rail Area, which is something EU-Rail started to address with the new EU-Rail System Pillar and Deployment Group.

Challenges

The rail sector faces multifaceted challenges that demand coordinated Union action. The primary challenge lies in the heterogeneity of the European rail system and operations, fragmentation among national systems, with historically independent development of standards and technologies creating expensive bespoke solutions that makes the necessary migration towards digital and more harmonised technical solutions a real challenge, given the

insufficiency of funds for investments. The sector still struggles with structural fragmentation between operators and infrastructure providers (on top of its large European supply base of several system integrators, train builders, signalling systems providers, infrastructure constructors, safety system suppliers, etc.), compounding geographical divisions. The complexity of introducing agile approaches in brownfield situations and fragmented business models, coupled with reduced public funds availability, presents significant hurdles. Additionally, the sector faces the challenge of maintaining competitiveness against other transport modes while managing the digital transition.

The need to simplify the system supporting the Single European Rail Area while ensuring cybersecurity and environmental resilience adds another layer of complexity.

Additionally, rail faces a range of threats to rail resilience, including natural hazards, terrorist attacks, insider threats, or sabotage, as well as public health emergencies, which have increased in the last years, also in terms of risk associated levels.

Moreover, the society in the EU and in the (Western) world is facing profound change, driven for example, by demographic evolution, climate change, migrations, urban development, labour market and social conflicts. The offer of both freight and passenger rail services should evolve accordingly. Therefore, consideration of broader socio-economic matters is important to inspire and guide strategic choices in this field.

4 See EU-Rail Annual Activity report 2023, scoreboard of Horizon 2020 KPIs: https://rail-research.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Annex_GB-Decision_10_24_CAAR_2023-signed.pdf

5 See EU-Rail Annual Activity report 2023, scoreboard of Horizon 2020 KPIs.

6 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6cc1f91-6421-11ef-a8ba-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>



Objectives

European support for rail is vital to achieving sustainability goals and maintaining European technological sovereignty. The known challenges underscore that a lack of a European approach towards a system simplification would significantly undermine the EU's industrial leadership and competitiveness, and the European ability to respond to passengers' and businesses' needs.

The challenge and opportunity for the future resides in capitalising on past achievements and focussing on the mission of simplifying the rail system to make it more attractive, and creating the conditions for a faster and more effective and affordable deployment of innovations.

The primary objectives are therefore on making the rail system more agile, resilient, and competitive. This requires both increased and new collaborative R&I focused efforts, as well as new pre-deployment European actions.

Agility objectives include developing systems capable of reacting dynamically to disruptions and implementing shorter innovation cycles, notably through enhanced modularity and simplified certification processes.

Resilience objectives encompass ensuring cybersecurity, maintaining sovereignty over rail system operations, and building environmental change resistance. Such work will support the protection of railway transport and its critical infrastructure and contribute to the resilience of critical entities operating that infrastructure in the railway sector and to enhance preparedness and response against current threats, both by reinforcing certain elements of the Critical Entities Resilience Directive ⁷ and by making use of resources in a coordinated manner open to aspects of international cooperation.

Competitiveness objectives target significant cost reductions in both upfront and lifecycle expenses, improved asset utilisation and system performance, and strengthened EU industrial leadership. These objectives align with the need to extend the scope beyond SERA to include complete rail market coverage, including urban rail systems and multimodal transport integration, since urban nodes are included in the revised TEN-T guidelines ⁸ aligned with the EC Communication on EU Urban Mobility Framework.

⁷ Directive (EU) 2022/2557 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 on the resilience of critical entities and repealing Council Directive 2008/114/EC (Text with EEA relevance) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2557/oj>

⁸ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/13/trans-european-transport-network-ten-t-council-gives-final-green-light-to-new-regulation-ensuring-better-and-sustainable-connectivity-in-europe/>

Rationale why an EU approach is needed

A coordinated EU-level approach is essential due to the cross-border nature of rail operations and the need for standardised solutions. The “Much More than a Market” report by Enrico Letta underpins that a European rail network is vital for European cohesion, making European coordination imperative.

Historical evidence shows that uncoordinated research activities have led to poor market uptake of innovative rail solutions and limited direct leverage of EU funding. The complexity of the rail system, with its interconnected nature, demands harmonised implementation of innovations and technologies across national boundaries, and well beyond any market initiative from a single or group of limited players. A sustained EU approach is essential to ensure interoperability of the future rail solutions and operational system harmonisation, which cannot be achieved through isolated national/regional or purely private initiatives. By enabling the supply industry to

deliver standardised products aimed at reduction of complexity across the network, economies of scale can be increased, significantly reducing both production and implementation costs through shared knowledge and best practices. This approach not only benefits large rail systems, such as rolling stock, but also enhances the development and affordability of smaller rail specific components, fostering greater efficiency and competitiveness – including of SMEs – across the European rail sector. A fully coordinated approach also prevents parallel developments by individual stakeholders, with the EU acting both as a federator and as a catalyst for efficient research delivery and future affordable deployments into a system and network approach. European coordination becomes essential where system integration and cross-border compatibility is critical for success. In turn, cross-border compatibility is also contributing to more capacity, higher quality (and availability) as well as to more speed of the rail services, further reinforcing the needs for European networks cooperation.





Why a rail PPP for rail innovation structure is necessary

This coordinated European approach is not easy and requires political and sectorial will with European structures to achieve success. Achieving the SERA will require an adequate level of investment and a stability on the long-term planning for rail – something that can only be achieved if the European rail system (network and rolling stock, assets and operations) is looked at its entirety, with a dedicated EU approach towards addressing the challenges.

The current setup of Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking supports these essential changes; with the research and innovation focussed through the Innovation Pillar, the activities to support harmonised operations and harmonised specification and standard development for a system architecture convergence through the System Pillar, and the broader deployment activities handled through the Deployment Group. This serves as a benchmark for any future initiative at European level.

The public-private partnership of EU-Rail, and S2R before it, provides a vital and unique structure in which challenges can be addressed jointly by the EU rail sector and the Union and its bodies, and European solutions delivered. A joint undertaking, in particular, is a unique opportunity to capitalise on a structured and dedicated environment that fosters the exchange of expertise, cross-fertilisation between stakeholders, and ultimately, the deployment of advanced technologies. This collaboration is essential as the railway sector requires deep and complex domain knowledge that must align with the emerging technological landscape. For instance, AI cannot be effectively trained without this specialised domain knowledge and data is

scattered among different European stakeholders. The implementation of AI solutions in rail requires not just technical expertise but also a deep understanding of rail operations, safety requirements, and regulatory frameworks - knowledge that is distributed across various stakeholders and can only be effectively brought together through a structured partnership approach. The outputs of the EU-Rail innovation pillar, system pillar and deployment group will play a pivotal role in this context, ensuring that the railway sector stays at the forefront of technological advancements and remains competitive on a global scale.

Such an approach is fundamental to address market failures that are still present in both the delivery and implementation of rail research and innovation. On one side the rail sector's nature with complex interactions between subsystems and actors limit the potential development of breakthrough solutions, without a deep coordination and alignment that only PPP structure offers. On the other side, the PPP structure enables shared risk management and a visibility on future possible investments stemming from research outputs, including the setup of normative and legislative instruments needed in rail (for example to counterbalance the fact that who need to bear the costs of implementation of an innovation it is not the same actor that gather the benefit, leading to a market failure⁹).

⁹ The EC final Report on ERTMS Retrofitting strategy Funding and Financing, shows that it is more difficult for RUs to prove a positive business case, creating a bottleneck to the overall deployment.



The Joint Undertaking structure also provides a stable platform for engagement, supported by a dedicated administrative structure that stimulates research ideas and allows industry to undertake together research activities and increased private leverage contribution (financial and in-kind resources). It allows engagement with academia, leveraging cutting-edge research to drive future advancements with industrial commitments. It allows a unique interface between the public and private sector, as well as a single-entry point to enable synergies with other sectors and initiatives that have now the possibility to create a positive impact in the rail sector.

Further the Joint Undertaking structure is an ideal launchpad for consideration of pre-deployment and deployment activities, as demonstrated by the European DAC Delivery Programme, and the recent activities on the future radio system. A network-wide innovation in the European railway system can only work if accompanied by appropriate pre-deployment measures within (or strictly aligned with) that Joint Undertaking/PPP model, to encourage potential future investors, reassured by a long-term EU strategy, including by a common approach on standards and regulations. This would encompass the assessment of cost/benefits (benefits not only captured by Private companies but also Public/Society), the appropriate changes to operational procedures; and a well-conceived migration strategies and plan with coordinated investments & fundings.

Without a future public-private partnership structure, the possibility to achieve a SERA will be significantly reduced, reducing the competitiveness of rail in the future transport mix, and undermining the ability of the supply industry to use Europe as the test bed on which to compete globally.

Planned Implementation and outputs/impacts (resources needed & R&I)

The work of a new partnership, building on the achievements of S2R and EU-Rail, contributes to making rail a more attractive transport option for both passengers and freight operators, supporting the EU's broader climate and mobility objectives while ensuring the sector's long-term competitiveness. For this it would focus on delivering the following targets:

- **Service Quality Enhancement:** Focussed on reliability and punctuality improvements, building on the development and implementation of improved Control Command and Signalling and Traffic and Capacity Management Systems. The COVID-19 experience demonstrated that rail freight can achieve 80-90% punctuality rates when provided with adequate capacity, compared to the previous 60% average. This demonstrates that a more efficient management of the capacity in the network is needed to cope with high-density traffic. In addition to reliability and punctuality improvements, passenger experience is another target.



A set of solutions for European-wide application would allow economies of scale and significantly reducing the cost of assets development and maintenance.

- **Cost Effective Solutions:** Contributes with market-ready solutions to making rail a more attractive transport option for both passengers and customers, supporting the EU's broader climate and mobility objectives while ensuring the sector's long-term competitiveness. Asset development, given their substantial costs and long lifespans, will undergo specific strategic and financial analysis to ensure the best impact on society and an optimal return on investment.
- **System Optimisation:** The holistic development of the network infrastructure and future proof rolling stock, with integrated digital connectivity, will create the foundation for enhanced services for passengers and businesses. This contributes to making rail a more attractive transport option for both passengers and freight operators, supporting the EU's broader climate and mobility objectives while ensuring the sector's long-term competitiveness.
- **Resilience and Improved Security:** The necessary accompanying steps to improving the performance of the rail system through digitalisation also necessitates the appropriate resilience and cybersecurity developments. Rail vehicle and infrastructure resilience to climate change and military challenges requires a development of solutions to ensure better resilience against more frequent extreme weather events (for example flooding), and better adaptability to functional use change, for example in the case of a need to move large numbers of troops and equipment on the European rail network.

Implementation focuses on systematic development and deployment of standardised and modular EU innovations for the new simplified rail system. This implementation requires carefully planned (European) migration paths spanning over several years, with clear staging of technological transitions to minimise disruption while maximising benefits.

Such an approach is necessary to support more efficient and reliable operations, improving services for passengers and freight customers while decreasing costs across the entire EU network. This approach also applies to infrastructure and rolling stock, where the 'designed-to-build' and 'designed-to-maintain' mantra should be adopted. A set of solutions for European-wide application would allow economies of scale and significantly reducing the cost of assets development and maintenance. Additionally, further robotisation for both construction and maintenance and in general automation applied at network and system level address the growing issue of workforce shortages, ensuring efficiency and sustainability cross the European rail sector.

It is a use-case (based) and demand driven implementation, where the emphasis on technology is related to the offering of better and more attractive services, through for example digital systems integration, automated operations, assets modernisation, and cybersecurity enhancement.





The activities cover basic research, focusing on development, and demonstration as well as pre-deployment, with appropriate resource allocation across different Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs).

Considering the current geopolitical context, it is essential to secure and focus the funds on rail research that will bring significant impacts on rail's attractiveness for decision makers and customers. This means that the next programme has to be based on sound and solid impact assessments. Additionally, approaching the rail system with harmonised European solutions will enhance security and coordination in both a cybersecurity and military mobility context. Additionally, the economic viability for each selected project must cover not only the technological risks but also the financial risks resulting from the complexity of the railway system.

A simplified rail transport system would also allow an easier integration of the various modes to achieve the optimal end-to-end transport solution, exploiting common European approaches and solutions for passenger experiences (physically, on data, on ticketing and schedules, on organisation – stakeholders' cooperation, on administrative matters and regulations). Artificial intelligence and advanced digital technologies will play a transformative role in this simplified system, enabling everything fully automatic train operations to dynamic capacity management and personalised passenger experiences.

A new European Competitiveness Fund will provide investment capacity to invest in strategic initiatives to ensure that strategic technologies are developed and manufactured in Europe. It is essential that there is space within the European Competitiveness Fund to support a rail partnership supporting European objectives.

This encompasses the successful transition from research to market implementation and this requires strategic

support for pre-deployment activities. The pioneer Digital Automatic Coupler (DAC) trains case demonstrates how large-scale testing across Europe serves as a crucial stepping stone (risk-reduction) between research and full deployment. This phase proves essential for validating functionality and system interoperability, reliability, and performance in real-life operations across different environments and conditions, as well as preparing their alignment of harmonised operations for the implementation of a single European solution.

Additionally, pre-deployment support represents a strategic better investment in Europe's rail future. Pre-deployment bridges the "valley of death", the gap between research and full rollout, reducing risks and validating solutions in real conditions. Its value lies in preventing costly failures and ensuring mature, interoperable implementation across diverse European conditions. The ERTMS variants implementation experience shows that significant funding is necessary for successful system-wide deployment in a very complex and bespoke rail national environment, with an estimated €29 billion needed for the TEN-T Network alone ¹⁰. This initial investment in a new PPP focused on the rail system simplification has the capability to deliver long-term economic benefits through decrease complexity/costs and allow for a coordinated European implementation.

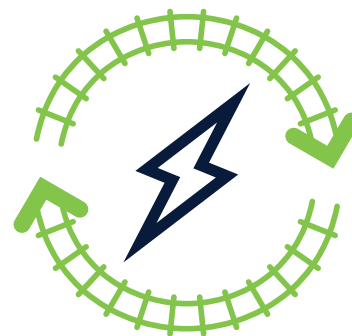
The new rail partnership would implement a "policy-based budget", with a performance-based approach relying on the ability to track progress towards achieving the above-mentioned targets for the EU policy objectives. The investment effort required to simplify the rail system and deliver improved services for the entire EU network is:

- approximately **€3 billion for R&I activities**, with half (€1.5 billion) coming from EU funding and half from industry contributions to make the rail system more agile, resilient, and competitive. This expanded R&I

¹⁰ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-modes/rail/ertms/eu-funding-ertms_en



The scale of investment needed is substantially larger as it requires the diverse participation of stakeholders across different countries to upgrade their systems and make investments in their network.



scope, compared to previous initiatives, addresses the need for costly yet essential one-time developments of innovative solutions aiming to transition the diverse existing legacy systems into a new, simplified European rail system, building upon past Joint Undertaking achievements and incorporating new R&I advancements;

- approximately **€15 billion for pre-deployment activities**. The scale of investment needed is substantially larger as it requires the diverse participation of stakeholders across different countries to upgrade their systems and make investments in their network. It would require significant European procurement activities to enable a first implementation at system level, that can then be replicated based on the pre-deployment results at scale. The estimation considers similar efforts being made by the European Union for the modernisation of the European Air traffic Management where 1.3 billion euros of EU grants have been provided against 1.4 billion euros of industry investments. The simplification and modernisation of the rail future does not only rely on an equivalent European future Traffic Management implementation, but of several other European standardised solutions to be deployed

as a system in the network. Considering the past ERTMS support efforts from the Union through the Connecting Europe Facility, the estimate of the investment needed for DAC, FRMCS, Satellite applications, other technology game changers and possibly future Traffic Management solutions harmonised at European level. Additionally, pre-deployment instruments could be used to facilitate the integration and promotion of a new generation of High-Speed solutions, directly supporting the creation of a European High-Speed network linking capitals and major cities, requiring further private investments and also possible dual use solutions of rail assets. The estimated amount for all those pre-deployment activities across the network seems the appropriate order of magnitude for a strategic investment in Europe's future, supporting both technological sovereignty and economic sustainability.

An annex (as a living document) includes the membership initial reflection on the strategic areas of R&I and pre-deployment to simplify the rail system and its operations, while enhancing its fundamental capabilities. Those are grouped in four flagship initiatives which together, they form a cohesive living roadmap for the future of European rail.

The investment effort required to simplify the rail system, reduce complexity and associated costs, and deliver improved, more efficient services across the entire EU.



€3 billion
for R&I activities



€15 billion
for pre-deployment activities

Inclusiveness and transparency

Success depends on maintaining an inclusive and transparent approach throughout all stages of research, development and implementation. The existing partnership structure (EU-Rail JU) has already created a solid base of committed rail economic operators to R&I and system change, with a wide EU geographical coverage.



Not capitalising on this achievement would mean a reduction of both inclusiveness and transparency at European union level on future possible rail investments. EU-Rail is a unique Joint Undertaking setup where not only the manufacturing and technological driven industry is an invested member, but also operating companies, infrastructure managers and research centres/universities. It is a setup that

should be maintained as the only one capable to translate effectively and timely R&I output into real impacts with a system implementation across EU Countries.

EU-Rail promotes transparency by sharing research outcomes. For research results, EU-Rail stimulates partners to communicate findings through scientific (peer-reviewed) publications, including sharing data/models/methods, aligning standards through collaboration with European bodies, and publishing results from pre-deployment projects and fostering patents applications. This ensures wide adoption, regulatory alignment, and supports rail sector transformation through open innovation.

A new strengthened EU rail partnership should capitalise on rail stakeholders' networks, linking more universities/research centres, more small medium enterprises and attracting start-ups with industry actors across that are ready to invest in a PPP, leveraging EU funds. Synergies with European, national and regional programmes are prioritised together with the European Commission and Member States to avoid duplication and amplify funding impact, while maintaining strategic alignment with the overarching SERA objectives.

Partners composition and target groups + cooperative approach

The partnership shall be composed by all those players ready to:

- perform Research & Innovation activities, exploring new concepts, allowing further step change in technological application to different rail subsystems while committing to demonstration activities, validating the new technological solutions;
- implement solutions into systems in operation, paving the way for deployment of the solutions onto the market.



The partnership is expected to involve infrastructure managers, railway operators, technology providers, research institutions, public authorities, in a cooperative framework, allowing exchange of expertise and views, towards shared strategic and technical objectives.

The partnership is expected to involve infrastructure managers, railway operators, technology providers, research institutions, public authorities, in a cooperative framework, allowing exchange of expertise and views, towards shared strategic and technical objectives. A particular focus is to be brought on a strong participation of Research Institutions (including universities) and SMEs and start-ups to ensure the integration of their specific capacities into the programme. This diverse composition enables cooperation across EU Member States, resulting in dynamic exchange and collaboration. Additionally, in supporting of the global competitiveness of the European rail supply industry, R&I cooperation should, in that perspective, be seek and open to third countries that do not hinder the accessibility of their domestic procurement markets to European companies.

The target groups span passengers, freight operators, tourists, military logistics, industrial users, and local communities in order to ensure that the results of R&I positively impact as much economic operators as possible in Europe.

In addition, partnering with other sectors and Union bodies is also essential to ensure a cross fertilisation and that the rail sector is taking-up relevant innovative solutions (e.g. batteries, chipsets, etc...) and apply them in the rail system in a harmonised way, creating economies of scale with the successive implementation. Successful cooperation in the past has taken place with Clean Hydrogen JU for exploring the use of hydrogen as a power source for rolling stock. Ongoing collaboration with SESAR JU (air/train traffic management) or SNS JU (development of FRMCS and use of 5G/6G in railway applications) is also demonstrating the ability of a PPP, representing rail R&I, in creating those synergies which otherwise single actors would not have created or not having the possibility of achieving any system and significant impact for the EU.



Meeting EU priorities/added value

Through coordinated efforts in policy oriented research, innovation, and pre-deployment activities, the initiative is capable to respond to the European Union priorities¹¹ for a Prosperous and Competitive Europe through cutting-edge rail solutions developed by its industries for retaining their global leadership role, for a Strong and Secure Europe strengthening the rail resilience of its system and ensure harmonised and secure operations in critical infrastructures, and providing an accessible, affordable and attractive transport mode across borders to all its citizens, for a Free and Democratic Europe.

This aligns with the Competitiveness Compass's¹² establishment of competitiveness as one of the EU's overarching principles for action. Rail innovation directly addresses all three transformational imperatives identified in the Draghi report and highlighted by the Competitiveness Compass: closing the innovation gap through pioneering rail technologies, creating a joint roadmap for decarbonisation and competitiveness through efficient transport systems, and reducing excessive dependencies while increasing security through robust European rail infrastructure.

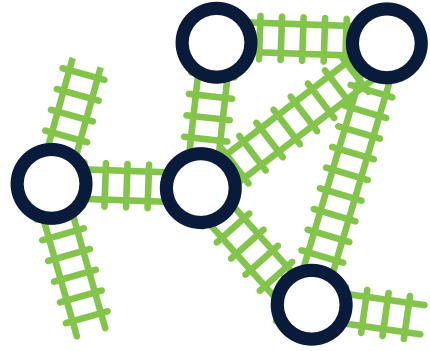
The mission directly supports EU strategic objectives with a simplified and modernised rail system easier to implement for a greener, more connected and resilient European transportation network. This approach directly contributes to the EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy's¹³ milestone of tripling high-speed rail traffic by 2050, while aligning with the TEN-T network completion targets for seamless cross-border



11 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/yxrc05pz/sn02167en24_web.pdf

12 https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/10017eb1-4722-4333-add2-e0ed18105a34_en?filename=Communication_1.pdf

13 https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/be22d311-4a07-4c29-8b72-d6d255846069_en?filename=2021-mobility-strategy-andaction-plan.pdf



connectivity. Similarly, rail freight traffic should double by 2050, strengthening green logistics chains across the continent. This requires a fundamental system simplification and harmonisation but also look into sustainable deployment strategies, which can only be achieved through intense R&I collaboration between public and private stakeholders at European level. It also mirrors the Clean Industrial Deal's ¹⁴ core aim of bringing together climate action and competitiveness under one overarching growth strategy, positioning rail as a cornerstone of Europe's transformational business plan that simultaneously accelerates decarbonisation, reindustrialisation, and innovation across the entire continent.

The initiative supports environmental sustainability through rail's inherent advantages in emissions reduction and energy efficiency, as well as in its low footprint in space utilisation for mass transport, contributing to the European Green Deal ¹⁵ target for Europe to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050. The Clean Industrial Deal identifies circularity as a priority to maximise the EU's limited resources, reduce dependencies and enhance resilience. Rail when approached at system level exemplify this principle through their long lifecycles, reusable and recyclable components, and capacity to replace more resource-intensive transport modes.

EU coordinated rail innovation drives economic growth through improved connectivity and freight transport efficiency, including for European freight net-zero logistics. Additionally, the initiative specifically targets reduction in lifecycle costs of rail systems and significant improvements in operational efficiency, addressing the economic barriers that have historically limited rail's competitive position against other

transport modes. This aligns with the Competitiveness Compass's focus on innovation-led productivity as the heart of European renewal.

It brings people, regions and countries closer together with an efficient higher speed rail system and shorten the travel time distances in a harmonised manner across Europe. Beyond the essential civilian connectivity at the hearth of Europe, the rail system serves as a vital component of what the White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030 ¹⁶ identifies as essential “Military Mobility” infrastructure, including dual-use.



¹⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0085>

¹⁵ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

¹⁶ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6d5db69-e0ab-4bec-9dc0-3867b4373019_en?filename=White%20paper%20for%20European%20defence%20%E2%80%93%20Readiness%202030.pdf



The development of a simplified rail system will position the EU as a global leader in rail affordable solutions and operations, supporting strategic autonomy in military mobility and clean industrial technologies. A key aspect of this simplified approach is the convergence on architecture and compatibility between subsystems from different EU manufacturers, reducing fragmentation and enabling interoperable solutions across national networks. This architectural harmonisation is a key added value promoted through the partnership, as the Joint Undertaking creates a resilient network of EU industries supporting rail mobility and economic growth while reducing implementation and maintenance costs. It fosters an industrial ecosystem that develop European manufacturing, technology, and expertise. By strengthening European suppliers, the EU can enhance strategic autonomy, secure its supply chains, and maintain control over critical rail infrastructure innovations.

Such rail initiative aligns with the EU focus on skills and quality jobs. Rail modernisation creates demand for specialised technical capabilities while supporting workforce transitions common EU programmes and approaches, ensuring the sector remains an attractive workplace with high standards for health and safety.

The partnership enables efficient pursuit of synergies and cooperation with other relevant European, national, and regional programmes, in particular thanks to its wide Membership spread. It supports social cohesion by enhancing connectivity between regions and, given its wide geographical reach, creating opportunities for technological advancement across the entire EU.

This proposed comprehensive PPP approach, from R&I to pre-deployment, ensures successful translation of innovations from concept to implementation, leveraging from the Single Market and creating lasting value for the European rail sector and for the EU. It is to be seen as an investment for the future, including for creating a more economically sustainable rail system.

This strategic PPP investment approach to rail system development represents a significant opportunity to address current challenges while preparing for future needs. By having a system view and focusing on impactful innovations and by fostering deployments in Europe, the rail sector will achieve greater agility in responding to market demands and enhanced competitiveness in the broader transport and mobility landscape.

Members of Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking



High Level Paper Annex - Flagship Initiatives*

Introduction	22
The importance of an integrated approach: From research and innovation to pre-deployment	24
Mission oriented objectives.....	28
Flagship Initiatives	32
Flagship Initiative 1: European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS)	32
<i>Pre-deployment coordinated activities across EU and associated R&I</i>	34
<i>Impacts</i>	46
Flagship Initiative 2: The Next-Generation Rail Freight Operations with European Digital Solutions	50
<i>Pre-deployment coordinated activities across EU and associated R&I</i>	52
<i>Impacts</i>	58
Flagship Initiative 3: Resilient and Recoverable Railway System	60
<i>Pre-deployment coordinated activities across EU and associated R&I</i>	62
<i>Impacts</i>	70
Flagship Initiative 4: Innovative EU High-Speed Rail Corridors	72
<i>Pre-deployment coordinated activities across EU and associated R&I</i>	74
<i>Impacts</i>	82
Horizontal R&I framework	84

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N°02-2026 AND N°09-2026



Introduction

This Annex details strategic areas of Research and innovation (R&I) and pre-deployment to simplify the rail system and its operations, while enhancing its fundamental capabilities in alignment with the core objectives of making European railways more agile, resilient, and competitive. Those areas are grouped in four flagship initiatives, which needs to be complemented by other policy actions beyond the field of R&I and pre-deployment to reach the intended objectives.

- The first flagship initiative - **the European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS)** – is an initiative for increased Europe's railway competitiveness and lowering European rail system costs through automation, cutting-edge technology and harmonised operations. This based on simplification/standardisation and improvement of Command-Control and Signalling Systems, Capacity and Traffic Management Systems, digital infrastructure information systems, systems for digital operational communications and unified data management solutions and related processes, aiming at optimum system cost effectiveness and efficiency. This initiative directly addresses upgradability and scalability through secure modular systems and simplified certification and to harmonised approaches or adaptors solutions towards legacy systems, resilience by design and through harmonised cybersecurity frameworks, and competitiveness through cost reduction and industrial leadership.
- The second flagship initiative - **the Next-Generation Rail Freight Operations with European Digital Solutions** – is an initiative for transforming Europe's rail freight operations and making rail freight transportation more competitive. For this purpose, a comprehensive plan is needed to favour a competitive European rail freight through

automated processes, digital coupling with advanced communication systems technologies, and intelligent capacity management. Transition pathways are developed jointly, to identify the actions needed to achieve the green and digital transitions for logistics with rail, while ensuring the cost effectiveness and efficiency of the proposed solutions. This initiative enhances competitiveness of rail freight accelerating modal shift, supports quick adaptability to demand through dynamic freight planning, and strengthens resilience through multimodal integration and strategic logistics capabilities.

- The third flagship initiative - **Resilient Railway (Re²Rail)** – is an initiative addressing the fundamental challenge of maintaining reliable, secure rail operations under increasingly complex and unpredictable disruption scenarios. Climate change (floods, heavy storms or landslides), cybersecurity threats, geopolitical tensions, and system interdependencies create vulnerability patterns that demand integrated resilience strategies built into the core architecture of European railway systems while enabling seamless civilian-military interoperability and logistics (dual-use) when required. This initiative addresses the entire system with a focus in the area of automation, digitalisation and control command (on-board and trackside), but as well design and maintenance of infrastructures and rolling stock in order to create a system which is resilient and recoverable. This flagship directly delivers resilience through climate adaptation and cybersecurity, supports agility through adaptive systems, and enhances competitiveness through dual-use infrastructure optimisation.
- The fourth flagship initiative - **Innovative EU High-Speed Rail Corridors** – is an initiative unifying the innovation, deployment, and operation of next-generation high-speed systems within a harmonised European architecture. It ensures unmatched interoperability across borders.

The initiative will pioneer harmonised pre-deployment corridors serving as early implementation pilots for pan-European high-speed expansion. These corridors will validate new rolling stock and infrastructure technologies, including ETCS L2-only operations, predictive maintenance, and EU traffic management under real conditions, ensuring safe, reliable, and cost effective scaling. This flagship directly delivers competitiveness through cost reduction, energy efficiency, and industrial technological sovereignty; enhances service quality through reliability improvements and multimodal integration; and strengthens resilience through climate-adaptive infrastructure, cybersecurity, territorial inclusion, and strategic autonomy in critical high-speed technologies.

These first four flagship initiatives are focussed on areas involving an EU system thinking that necessitate activities of European pre-deployment and associated research to ensure a long-lasting positive impact. There are further activities that should also be considered under the work of a future partnership:

- **Horizontal Research and Innovation at lower TRLs:** There are a number of important areas of work where further research and innovation is required to improve future railway systems, but which may not lead to full pre-deployment activities within the identified time frame, still providing a valuable input to the works of the Flagship Initiatives. The focus would be on a set of areas related to the four flagships initiatives and on fostering new ideas. These are captured in a dedicated chapter.
- **System and deployment integration:** The production and validation of harmonised specifications and standards with the sector, and the coordination of the outputs of the Flagship Initiatives towards the European regulatory harmonisation and standardisation framework is an essential consideration within the overall programme. Additionally, the broader deployment considerations, including the coordination of European and national deployment



programmes resulting from the pre-deployment activities is also necessary within the programme.

These flagship initiatives and additional horizontal activities described in chapter 4 share the same mission and focus together, they form a cohesive living roadmap for the future of European rail that extends the scope beyond SERA to include complete rail market coverage, including urban rail systems and multimodal transport integration, as urban nodes are included in the revised TEN-T guidelines aligned with the EC Communication on EU Urban Mobility Framework. They represent a holistic effort to ensure that through coordinated investments onto legacy systems, the European Single Rail Area will be delivered capitalising on the strength of the European Single Market. They will bring innovation, sustainability, and security - delivering long-term environmental, economic, and social benefits for Europe and beyond.

The importance of an integrated approach:

From research and innovation to pre-deployment

The challenges to achieve successful European deployments are large and can only be done at European level with a strong coordination instrument, in a PPP setup with an EU-wide geographical and stakeholders representation supported by a joint governance.

This is particularly the case where a framework for harmonisation and joint development on design and implementation concepts such as modularity and adoption of open standards are needed.

The development of such systems will build on the work of Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking – both in terms of solutions, but also the approach to not only focus on research and development, but also consider the necessary specifications and standards to be developed, and the overall considerations for a successful deployment.

A complete and coordinated process from research and innovation to pre-deployment across the EU, taking into account for economic reasons existing proven productive systems as basis, is critical for the successful implementation of new system related approaches on the European rail network. This represents a fundamental change in how the rail sector collaborates and helps shift to demand driven innovation.

Such an approach is necessary to:

- **Harmonise operational practices, specifications/ rules, and processes across borders.**
 - New harmonised rules need to be tested and validated in real-world (commercial) operations.
 - New harmonised professional requirements for staff who will operate and maintain the new systems.



 *The involvement of infrastructure managers and railway undertakings in specification and pre-deployment activities will accelerate the take up for future market implementation of innovative solutions.*

- **Develop improved design principles.**

- Standardised interfaces between rolling stock and infrastructure components ensure interoperability while allowing for platforms and solutions standardisation, creating economies of scale for European manufacturers. These simplified designs, that may also make use of (the latest) generic components/solutions from other sectors, reduce complexity in vehicle-infrastructure interactions, allowing for more efficient certification processes, including by use of simulation-based and virtual testing, and faster market entry for innovative solutions. It will also facilitate interchangeability and avoid “technical borders”.

- **Validate innovative EU system solutions based on harmonised specifications and standards for integrated technologies in real conditions via cross-border pilot corridors.**

- Technical solutions put forward must be adequately tested and validated to finalise the overall specifications. Pre-deployment activities are crucial to this.
- Validate system robustness, safety and interoperability across a range of operational and national contexts, including differing and extreme weather conditions.
- Demonstrate the economical commercial viability of EU-wide system solutions across diverse business cases for individual stakeholders and for the European economy.

- **Involve and prepare key rail stakeholders (including infrastructure managers and railway undertakings) for system rollouts from the beginning. Pace of delivery and rollout is an enormous challenge for rail and with the stakeholders involvement there is an opportunity to make the rail system more agile and effective.**



- Technical development is crucial, but the preparation and training involved in implementing new systems and processes is also key, and pre-deployment activities support this essential element, including a just/proper workforce preparation and adaptation into the new systems.
- Moreover, it helps to measure the gap between existing situation and expected one leading to reliable business cases.
- The involvement of infrastructure managers and railway undertakings in specification and pre-deployment activities, will accelerate the take up for future market implementation of innovative solutions developed by the rail supply industry.
- **Improve and accelerate authorisation and certification processes.**
 - The commercial operations of pioneer trains and infrastructures, complemented whenever possible by tests on virtual environment, can



support the preparatory work for a streamlined certification in view of smoother European authorisation, including for massive retrofitting, particularly important when safety critical components are software based, and new versions will be downloaded frequently. Those tests should be based on fully harmonised testing specifications, tools and procedures.

- Certification processes need to become faster in order to accelerate also above-mentioned innovative technology and allowing for the urgently needed testing under commercial operations.
- **Support the synchronisation across the introduction of different programmes.**
 - Pre-deployment activities can support a more integrated approach to transition than country by country programme specific implementation, addressing in a comprehensive manner the funding challenges, coordination complexity across actors from different geographical (weather and rail



network conditions, and operations) realities, and the industrial capacity and logistic/expertise flow within Europe.

- Railways face many ongoing and upcoming transition programmes – ETCS, FRMCS, DAC, vehicle digitalisation; approaching and prioritising them in a non-individual and nonlocal manner for pre-deployment activities would result in both economies of scale and optimum time-to-market possible implementation.
- **Address potential market, technical, regulatory and policy barriers, while securing buy-in from all relevant actors.**
 - Engage infrastructure managers, vehicle keepers, terminal operators, maintenance companies, rail operators, and suppliers.
 - Build confidence and ownership across the sector to support smooth transition into future system European wide deployment.
 - Use pre-deployment activities to identify and resolve potential technical and operational risks early, reducing delays and cost overruns.
 - Trial in pre-deployment activities new business cases and addressing potential new policies approaches.
 - Improve visibility of market needs for significant technical improvements to the rail system, reducing fragmentation and increasing competitiveness in the rail supply market.
- **Maximise short-term to long-term investment benefits.**
 - Limited commercial tests may result in new findings and can, therefore, help improve the business case for the rollout of new technologies.
 - Coordinated planning ensures future-proofing, cost efficiency, and an assessment of the trade-off between flexibility and cost.
- **Reduce time-to-market.**



- Bringing the required maturity to the technical solutions, including faster (pre-) deployment.
- Showing the real benefits in a real environment demonstrating the business case to decision-makers.

To ensure an efficient transition from Research and Innovation (R&I) to pre-deployment and in reasonable time to a recovery of pre-investments, Flagship Initiatives must be implemented. These initiatives will create a structured link between R&I activities that have reached higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) and pre-deployment actions that bring innovation closer to the market. Pre-deployment will be further supported by complementary R&I and harmonisation activities to ensure robustness, interoperability, and stakeholder alignment. Additional horizontal R&I activities will focus on R&I topics complementing at lower TRL the four flagship initiatives or fostering new ideas, laying the groundwork for future innovation, facilitating international cooperation and enabling the launch of subsequent pre-deployment activities.

The R&I activities will include:

- **Deep Tech:** Harnessing safe and trusted AI for dynamic capacity and traffic optimisation, predictive vehicle diagnostics, and real time train composition detection. Leveraging edge computing and IoT for real time diagnostics and predictive maintenance. Developing decentralised IT infrastructures, including data space technologies and data ecosystems, to ensure European digital sovereignty. Advancing automation in yards and logistics hubs, transforming overall operational efficiency.
- **Clean Tech:** Deploying energy efficient traffic management and traffic control systems and advanced energy management solutions to facilitate modal shift and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This includes appropriate infrastructure description, energy-optimised driving strategies, smart energy metering across freight trains, and innovative operational practices that improve efficiency and sustainability.
- **Secure Tech:** Delivering resilient, modular cyber-secure solutions to protect operations and ensure safety across a fully connected rail ecosystem. Ensuring long-term sustainability of critical Infrastructures and the secure and harmonised use of AI, attracting and developing talent and skills for secure tech innovative solutions.

Mission oriented objectives

To deliver the simplification mission for the future European railway system, several key objectives described in the table below must be met.

The impacts of the four Flagship Initiatives described in chapter 4 will support these key objectives ¹. The R&I activities coupled with pre-deployment work of the Flagship initiatives will enable the Flagship Initiatives to demonstrate their achievement through coordinated implementation that creates synergistic effects exceeding individual target achievements.

Expected impacts of the Flagship Initiatives

Flagship Initiative 1 (ESIRS)

The impacts of Flagship Initiative 1 represent a step and major change toward a simpler, cheaper, and more predictable European railway, combining service quality, cost effectiveness, system optimisation, and resilience. By moving from bespoke national practices to harmonised operational rules—paired with a simplified ETCS Level 2-only trackside, a harmonised ATO/TMS interface, and an EU-wide data/semantics backbone—services

Key objectives

Key objectives	2035 Pre-deployment Target	2038 Mission Achievement	Measurement Methodology
System Cost Optimization	20% cost reduction validated on pilot networks	30-40% total system cost savings demonstrated	Total cost of ownership analysis across lifecycle
Operational Complexity Reduction	25% reduction across 5 TEN-T corridors	30% reduction in operational procedures and interfaces	Interface mapping, procedure analysis, operator feedback
Cross-border Interoperability	Seamless operation on 5 corridors	90% of cross-border services fully interoperable	Service continuity metrics, border crossing analysis
Technology Readiness	All cost efficient flagship technologies at TRL 7-8	Complete cost efficient technology portfolio at TRL 8-9 with industrial deployment capacity	Independent technology assessment, market readiness evaluation
Industrial Capacity	European supply chain ready for scaled deployment	Leadership of European suppliers in the global rail technology market, with new export opportunities	Market share analysis, export performance tracking
Migration Capability	Validated and economically sustainable adapter solutions covering 60% of legacy interfaces	Proven economically sustainable migration pathways for all critical systems	Migration success rates, timeline adherence, cost performance

¹ Baseline 2025 state of the art.

 *It will facilitate a harmonised European deployment of digital capacity and traffic management systems at European and multi-network corridor-level.*

become more consistent, and costs can be reduced.

Pre-deployment of a full ETCS L2 trackside, including all signalling trackside assets, with harmonised rules and automated configuration/diagnostics targets measurable savings of ~20% through process automation, fewer physical assets, and streamlined delivery. Migration is de-risked via economically sustainable adapter solutions to new modular equipment covering ~60% of legacy interfaces to keep networks running during transition, while authorisation is accelerated by heavy reuse and automation of proofs. Using cyber resilient general-purpose hardware further reduces lifecycle and change costs, replacing one-off engineering with repeatable, scalable builds across Member States. These scalable builds are also designed to ensure combined use with suburban and urban rail environments through harmonised digital interfaces and common specifications where applicable.

System optimisation shifts from national silos to European and multi-network corridor-level, data-driven operations. Improved digital infrastructure information and capacity and traffic management algorithms are demonstrated across multiple networks; traffic management systems and digital infrastructure information systems are linked with automatic train operations (ATO) for tighter traffic management, improved punctuality, and in-operation energy monitoring; and dynamic and automated capacity allocation becomes feasible through shared digital platforms, unified digital infrastructure information and harmonised traffic rules supported by digital operational communications. A common rail ontology (facilitated at EU level) plus a federated rail data space provides consistent semantics and secure, real time exchange, enabling automatic compliance of harmonised rules and reliable multimodal integration. Validated simulation tools and integration with other transport modes round out a repeatable optimisation toolchain.

Digitalisation, automation, and intelligent public transport solutions enhance and complement high-capacity urban rail systems by providing greater flexibility, agility,



sustainability, and efficiency. They also support urban regeneration through adaptable and easily deployable cost-efficient solutions, ultimately benefiting all citizens.

Finally, resilience and security are strengthened by simplifying architectures and reducing the attack surface inherent in bespoke systems, embedding cybersecurity and long-life software maintenance into the baseline the post-quantum cryptography cybersecurity being mandatory for critical systems. Future radio pre-deployment ensures robust, sabotage-resistant communications (including coexistence with future systems like IRIS² and the preparation to the use of next generation mobile communication systems), while federated data-space pilots include governance, sovereignty levels, and cross-border stress-tests. Harmonised degraded-mode rules and standardised automation processes support safe recovery, including in high-density urban operational contexts, and an interoperable European market—grounded in open specifications rather than technology lock-ins—bolsters strategic autonomy and supply-chain robustness over the long-term.

It will facilitate a harmonised European deployment of digital capacity and traffic management systems, digital infrastructure information systems, and



systems for digital operational communications, by providing pre-deployment activities at European and multi-network corridor-level. This deployment also encompasses metropolitan node-level integration to ensure coherence between long-distance and urban rail operations

The European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS) aims to create a unified, inclusive, and multimodal European rail network that genuinely serves all citizens. It focuses on user-centric platforms, seamlessly connecting rail with other transport modes for easier, integrated journeys. ESIRS is committed to harmonised accessibility requirements, guaranteeing consistent and inclusive travel experiences across borders for all passengers. Its simplified approach will make secondary lines economically viable, connecting remote communities and ensuring comprehensive European coverage with interfaces for all abilities. Advanced algorithms will enable dynamic rescheduling, seamless transfers, and first/last mile integration, while sophisticated data processing will optimise schedules and passenger flows in real time. This transforms journey planning into personalised mobility guidance, supporting intelligent traffic management and evolving rail into a complete, citizen-focused mobility ecosystem by 2038.

Flagship Initiative 2 (Next-Generation Rail Freight)

The impacts of the Flagship Initiative 2 represent a transformative shift for European rail freight, combining service quality, cost effectiveness, system optimisation, and resilience. A coherent EU-level deployment roadmap for freight will prevent fragmentation, secure stakeholder confidence, and enable automation

in yards and digital freight trains. Pre-deployment activities in the Flagship Initiative 2 target to accelerate transshipment by up to 50%, improve cargo visibility, and increase line capacity by 5%. Cost effective measures include large-scale retrofitting that provides an industrial boost, and improved terminal and asset utilisation that lowers logistics and lifecycle costs, while also opening export opportunities and strengthening European technological leadership.

System optimisation will stimulate European industrial capacity in strategic rail technologies, reduce physical strain in coupling operations to address workforce challenges, ensure interoperable digital systems across borders, and make yard operations more energy efficient.

Resilience and security will be enhanced by reinforcing rail's role in achieving Green Deal and TEN-T targets, enabling modal shift from road to rail, reducing CO₂ emissions, road congestion and energy consumption, improving safety with fewer accidents and less manual strain, and strengthening Europe's strategic autonomy by reducing reliance on non-EU suppliers while consolidating leadership in sustainable rail technology.

Flagship Initiative 3 (Resilient Railway)

Investing in resilience, digitalisation, and cybersecurity (associated to post quantum cryptography for critical systems) across the European rail network enhances service quality, reduces costs, and ensures continuity under disruption. This investment applies across both mainline and high-capacity urban rail systems, recognising their critical role in daily mobility and metropolitan economic stability. Automated inspections and improved surveillance reduce



delays and human error by up to 50%, boosting passenger and freight reliability. Early integration of secure, automated systems cuts long-term costs by 20–30% and avoids expensive retrofits. Digital traffic management and real time asset monitoring which includes highly reliable predictions enable 15–20% increased terminal throughput and faster recovery from disruptions—limiting the need for major infrastructure upgrades. Upgrades and new design for rolling stock and infrastructure as well as harmonisation measures would allow creating a resilient system, ensuring 99% system availability during cyber incidents, 85% network capacity during extreme weather events, and dual-use capability on strategic corridors supporting 96-hour EU-wide military deployment.

Theresilient systems create the foundation for enhanced services by ensuring reliable operations under all conditions, supporting both passenger experience and business continuity through comprehensive climate adaptation and security measures that enable the holistic network development required by the strategic framework. By integrating corridor, regional, and urban rail domains within a harmonised digital and cybersecurity architecture, the Resilient Railway initiative ensures coherent protection and adaptive capacity across the entire European rail ecosystem.

Flagship Initiative 4 (Innovative EU High-Speed Rail Corridors)

The impacts of Flagship Initiative 4 represent a transformational advancement for European high-speed mobility, combining service quality, cost effectiveness, system optimisation, resilience, and territorial cohesion. This initiative will be further specified based on the recently published Commission communication: Connecting Europe through High-Speed Rail ², which provides a comprehensive policy direction and deployment priorities for European high-speed rail development.

Pre-deployment of harmonised high-speed corridors targets cost reductions through lifecycle optimisation via predictive maintenance, simplified ETCS Level 2-only infrastructure, and standardised European designs. System optimisation delivers increased capacity through AI-driven traffic management, reduced travel times between major EU major cities, and improved integration with conventional networks and multimodal services. Resilience and improved security are strengthened through rolling stock and infrastructure innovations and with territorial accessibility across all EU regions, and European technological sovereignty addressing the EU supply ecosystem while supporting dual-use strategic mobility objectives.

Horizontal R&I activities

Horizontal R&I activities provide the essential research foundation that enables the advanced capabilities and future evolution of the first four flagship initiatives that require longer development timelines. These horizontal activities focus on breakthrough technologies at lower Technology Readiness Levels (TRL 1-4) that will become critical enablers for the next generation of railway systems beyond 2038.

It also provides a framework for more disruptive or fast-paced R&I into marketable solution for pre-deployments, leveraging on the knowledge of the partnership and in particular of its Members who can provide the nurturing framework of data and processes for trialling and scale-up.

≡ *Pre-deployment of harmonised high-speed corridors targets cost reductions through lifecycle optimisation via predictive maintenance, simplified ETCS Level 2-only infrastructure, and standardised European designs.*

² https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/774e79c9-1ece-4514-8f16-a2b98049c82e_en?filename=COM_2025_903_HSR.pdf

Flagship Initiative 1

European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS)

The cost and complexity of improving European railway systems has entered a critical phase. Costs for deployment and maintenance are high and deployment remains slow and complex. The current path is economically unsustainable and is not a temporary market fluctuation.

To be cheaper and simpler, implementations must move from complex hybrid systems based on legacy systems, to systems based on harmonised operational rules, favouring smooth migration, technological evolutions without gaps, and based on standardised interfaces eased by smooth authorisation processes.

In the past, long-lived non digital systems—often lasting 50 to 80 years—could be developed nationally with an acceptable level of risk, even on an individual installation basis. These relatively simple systems could be optimised case by case, configured specifically, and then operated at reasonable cost over extended periods. Precisely because of their longevity, this initial situational optimisation process made sense and became part of the engineering culture. With their low degree of automation, such installations were relatively isolated, had few dependencies, and therefore rarely required changes, which were also simpler and less knowledge dependent.

Modern digitalised systems, by contrast, are fundamentally different. Highly digitalised systems can be cost effective - if designed in a whole system approach and used in the right way, necessarily considering the migration and the technological evolutions.

Once designed and used in the right way, such digitalisation will lead to more efficient railway operations, addressing also the challenges posed by a shortage of skilled labour, which is necessary for the future of European rail. This triggers a condition for designing digitalisation: future operational use shall

always be part of the design phase – for improved and more efficient operations.

Digital systems are shorter lived, and subject to more frequent change. Managing the obsolescence and the software maintenance of such technologies has become correspondingly more complex (for example linked to associated cybersecurity considerations), particularly due to the exceptionally long-life cycles expected in the rail sector (over 30 years). Experience shows that current introduction of highly digitalised national systems can be extremely expensive. Some railways experience that there seems to be high costs for software development and changes, in large part due to insufficient harmonisation.

There is also the potential to consider solutions, cost reduction opportunities, and lessons learned between mainline and urban rail domains.

And this leads directly to the core issue: this high level of technological maintenance and support cannot be sustained for every country's individualised digital solutions, and every company's bespoke solution to such individualised solutions, especially considering the speed of the digital technologies' evolution. Those who seek to digitalise and automate are, by necessity, compelled to harmonise technical system architecture and their operational use. Technological applications should comply with harmonised operational processes and technical specifications. This prevents the lock-in effects of proprietary solutions and ensures that systems can communicate seamlessly across the EU.

The European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS) initiative aims to simplify, optimise and harmonise rail operations across Europe. In addition, it also ensures a smooth transition to these new technologies and seeks to support the decommissioning of legacy systems.

The goal is to create a unified, inclusive European rail system that genuinely serves all citizens. It prioritises user-centric platforms and applications, seamlessly

integrating rail with other transport modes for easier, more connected journeys and rail-freight based supply chains. Harmonised accessibility guarantees consistent, inclusive travel experiences and transport reliability across borders for everyone.

ESIRS's simplified approach makes secondary lines economically viable, connecting remote communities and ensuring comprehensive European coverage for all users, regardless of ability or technical literacy.

Advanced systems will provide dynamic rescheduling, seamless transfers, and personalised mobility guidance, integrating real time journey and transport planning with essential accessibility information.

By 2038, the ESIRS initiative aims to deliver solutions to support a fully integrated, simplified, secure and digitally native European rail system, smoothly managing the migration from legacy systems and the technological evolutions that operates under a common set of rules and technologies across the continent. If the migrations are based on modular and upgradable equipment, and are economically sustainable, this will not only increase the efficiency of rail transport but also enable a competitive and efficient European market for rail solutions and products, also acting as a springboard for a competitive global European rail supply industry.

All elements for a successful deployment and decommissioning must be considered to enable success:

- R&I to deliver solutions in cooperation with universities and research centres, as well as closer cooperation with other sectors, especially the IT sector;
- an optimized and simplified operational and technical harmonized system architecture that is developed through a joint sector effort according to common business objectives, and the pre-deployment of systems and solutions that adhere to this system architecture (e.g. an evolution of the System Pillar);
- development of tested, validated, and open standards and specifications to guide product development, and which do not require the use of a specific technology;
- ensuring alignment with and development of relevant standards and specifications;

- adapt and adopt, whenever possible, technologies and solutions from other sectors, being relevant to mainline railway but specially to urban segment due to its coexistence with other modes of transport;
- including a major contribution of railway operators in order to aim at a correct introduction of digitalisation while maintaining the triple relation of products/operational rules/human beings;
- Guaranteeing where possible semantic interoperability through ERA ontology;
- a focus on decentralised systems (federated data spaces defined according to the needs and particularities of the ecosystem) supported by extended ERA ontology (under an EU governance) to implement trust and sovereignty for the rail data and service ecosystems;
- support to the development of migration solutions, as in reality we must prepare for adaptations over a long period, and are accompanied not only by technology change, but also updated national processes. The migration strategy must take account of those permanent (or at least long-term) differences, the need for transitions, interfaces, and national political priorities, including differences between mainline corridor and metropolitan rail deployment timelines.

Building upon the foundation established by Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking and other initiatives, ESIRS takes a decisive step toward creating a truly unified, intelligent, and efficient rail system spanning the continent.

The expected transformative impact extends far beyond technological advancement. By consequently applying the simplified and harmonised EU-RAIL system architecture, and deployment/update process, ESIRS promises to reduce both capital and operational expenditures across the European rail system enabling the system competitiveness of densely operated as well as low density lines.

In addition, technological improvements to urban rail systems should improve the overall passenger experience of the entire rail ecosystem.

Flagship Initiative 1

European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS)

Pre-deployment coordinated activities across EU and associated R&I

Pre-deployment is essential because the transformation that ESIRS envisions cannot be implemented through isolated national initiatives, and require testing and validation, including validation in real time operations, in particular at European and multi-network corridor level. The Europe's Rail High Level Deployment Group demonstrated the need of such coordinated approach at the sector and European level.

Areas of pre-deployment and associated research and innovation coordinated activities for ESIRS

1. Full trackside CCS system solutions for ETCS only operations based on harmonised operational rules

a. Context

ETCS-Only offers strong potential here due to its simple architecture and modern, automation-friendly technologies. Yet, current ETCS systems are often complex hybrids weighed down by legacy elements and national requirements, making cost savings harder and slower to achieve because each ETCS solution today is based on national engineering rules that impose nationally diverse implementations. ETCS implementation up to now is reduced to standardised air-gap and does not provide any further standardisation benefits.

Infrastructure managers spend hundreds of millions annually on CCS trackside systems, yet cost optimisation remains slow due to bespoke orders overstressing development capacity. A well-designed demonstration through pre-deployment can break this cycle, integrating existing solutions to accelerate harmonisation and deliver robust, cost-optimal processes.

In order to address the challenges of increasing costs and complexity it is essential for pre-deployment activities on a full trackside CCS to fully test, validate and demonstrate the operational and costs benefits of such a harmonised approach.

Above all, trust among railway operators and suppliers in the feasibility of a cost-efficient solution must be established—only then can meaningful change occur.

b. Objective

By 2034, following pre-deployment activities:

- there will be a fully demonstrated at [TRL 8] in [4] cross-border situations real-world, end-to-end CCS trackside (including SERA target trackside architecture with ETCS Level 2 without lineside signalling) implementation using simplified and harmonised specifications and processes, integrating cost optimisation, and demonstrating measurable savings [20%] from process automation, reduction in physical assets, interchangeability between components from different suppliers and streamlined project delivery;
- to facilitate migration, adapter solutions covering [60%] of legacy system interfaces will have been developed, enabling seamless migration without service disruption on operational networks. These interfaces will allow at least the connection of systems between two sections from different suppliers to seamlessly interconnect.

c. Pre-deployment activities

Pre-deployment activity 1: CCS trackside system ETCS L2 without lineside signalling based installation

- In service trackside systems in operation in cross-border areas, interconnecting systems from different suppliers.
- Test and validate (including performance evaluation) under real operation:
 - harmonised operational rules and ETCS-Only engineering rules together, including degraded mode
 - the simplified and harmonized system architecture with its key interface specifications and principles, for example, the interfaces between CCS trackside and TMS, and the European Trackside Protection system building on simplification through the harmonized design safety case
 - harmonised operational processes for exchanging, updating and maintaining a system and its infrastructure elements, with a high degree of automation for infrastructure configuration management and diagnostics
 - elaboration and testing of a use-oriented interface to the rules for ETCS only-operations usable for teaching and all day use based on innovative technics of representation and AI-technology
 - the engineering rules shall be developed in a standardised machine-readable manner/SHACL rules of an extended ERA ontology
 - standardisation of braking curve definitions and dynamic train behaviour parameters including adhesion management to ensure consistent stopping distance calculation, harmonised ATO speed profiles, predictable degraded mode behaviour, and unified capacity and energy optimisation assumptions across Member States.
 - harmonized train dynamics parameters, including deceleration profiles and stopping distance modelling, shall be incorporated into the European operational rules.
- Safety case preparation for a cost-efficient installation
- ATO system in operation in cross border areas
- Introduction of harmonized operational processes and associated training/upskilling for staff, with focus on cultural aspects, in at least 10 Member States, ensuring geographical balance
- Demonstration including performance evaluation of the use of general-purpose hardware systems to deploy CCS applications to allow a simpler maintainability and an improved scalability to address the needs from digitalized object controllers for Trackside assets
- Defined pre-deployment across at least 4 Member States, including cross border operations by 2035.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail:

- Within the EU-RAIL System Pillar, the steps towards a European CCS system based on harmonised operational rules for operations and employment is underway. This process goes significantly beyond harmonisation based on current ETCS specifications (for example including signalling rules and degraded modes)
- The development of the System Concept and associated specifications for the Traffic Control System in the System Pillar, as well as the associated work in Trackside Asset Control Systems, and Concept of Employment domains aligned with extension of ERA ontology.
- Demonstration activities in the Flagship Area 2 (for example on the European trackside protection system, moving block and hybrid train detection, computing environment)

Flagship Initiative 1

European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS)

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

R&I and associated harmonisation activities efforts will play a crucial role in enabling pre-deployment activities and preparing for industrial ramp-up. Key focus areas include:

Migration/Adapters

- consideration of overall migration and integration solutions for the target architecture. This can include the development of technical solutions, for example, adapters, and the consideration of implementation of new operational rules operating alongside existing operational rules. Backward compatibility with legacy systems should be provided exclusively during the transition period, and actions should be taken to shorten this period as much as possible.
- Onboard and infrastructure energy and power electronics considerations shall be included as part of the migration strategy and system wide interoperability framework

Authorisation and certification

- Whilst it is recognised the competence of ERA and NSAs in the field of authorisation, new approaches for lighter, faster, and economically sustainable authorisation and certification processes should be developed and implemented. Consideration of radical processes to streamline and automate authorisation including efficient (re)verification techniques for safe functions and integration of software-centred components, enabling heavy reuse and automation of proofs
- One approach for European authorisation and certification, including for massive retrofitting of vehicles could be: Grouping similar vehicle types into clusters or transferring more responsibility to the EVU; both can potentially develop significant time and cost synergies. In general, European coordination would be needed to achieve massive retrofitting or upgrading of vehicles across borders as ETCS deployment will only be possible with equipment of trains with ETCS.

2. Automated operations (GoA 3/4) and modular onboard (including full Advanced Safe Train Positioning)

a. Context

The development of the higher levels of automation is an important component to future operational efficiency, resilience and flexibility, and reduction in the overall cost base of the European railway.

GoA3 (Driverless Train Automation) and GoA4 (Unattended Train Operation) require very high assurance: of safety, reliability, cyber-security, and system integration.

Automation on both the heavy rail network, and in urban light rail are major opportunities for the rail sector. For tramways operating in open, mixed-traffic environments, the relevant framing is often Levels of Automation/Autonomy (L1-L5) rather than GoA, as these systems require perception, interaction with other road users, and safe decision-making beyond classic railway ATO concepts. Commuter and suburban rail branches and feeder networks, including those not part of the mainline network and/or outside the SERA perimeter, represent a major additional opportunity for automation and digital onboard protection, given their high-frequency operations, strong passenger impact, and need for cost-efficient modernisation.

Accompanying higher grades of automation is the necessity to further develop the onboard unit, including to accommodate more precise localisation approaches, with a modular approach allowing interoperability and large scale cost reduction benefit.

b. Objective

By 2036, following pre-deployment activities:

- Validated and harmonized operational rules, architecture and interface specification for ATO GoA3/4, including Advance Safe Train Positioning and perception systems
- There will be ATO GoA3/4 in operation in [4] cross border areas using harmonised specifications and processes, as well as relying on equipment from different suppliers
- There will be a fully tested and validated modular on-board system including full Advance Safe Train Positioning and perception systems
- There will be automated light rail in operation in [6] urban areas based on the partnership specifications and solutions.
- The engineering rules shall be developed in a standardised machine-readable manner/SHACL rules of an extended ERA ontology

c. Pre-deployment activities

Pre-deployment activity 1: ATO GoA 3/4

- ATO GoA 3/4 systems in operation in cross-border areas including depots and shunting yards.
- Test and validation (including performance evaluation) under real operation:
 - harmonised operational rules;
 - mature ATO specifications;
- Develop any necessary product adaptations, and safety case preparation for a cost-efficient installation.
- Revision of processes and associated training/upskilling for staff, with focus on cultural aspects, in at least 5 Member States, ensuring geographical balance.
- Defined pre-deployment across at least 4 Member States, including cross-border operations by 2035.

Pre-deployment activity 2: Full Advanced Safe Train Positioning

- Modular on-board system including full Advance Safe Train Positioning, piloted on high-speed and conventional network.
- Test and validate (including performance evaluation) under real operation:
 - mature specifications.
- Develop any necessary product adaptations, and safety case preparation for a cost-efficient installation.
- Defined pre-deployment across at least 8 Member States, ensuring geographical balance by 2035.

Pre-deployment activity 3: Urban light rail automation

- Automated light rail in operation – fully automated line and operations, and automated depots - in urban areas.
- Test and validate (including performance under real operation):
 - fully connected (V2X) and automated operations in service;
 - perception systems;
 - human factors, including passenger acceptance, and recovery from incidents;

Flagship Initiative 1

European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS)

- integration with urban traffic management systems and public transport control centres;
- cyber-resilience in open urban environments with mixed traffic interactions;
- digital onboard train protection system (cooperative awareness), with no infrastructure components, also applicable to regional low-density lines.
- Defined pre-deployment across at least 6 urban areas, ensuring geographical balance by 2035.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail.

- The demonstration activities on ATO GoA3/4 in Flagship Area 2.
- The development of the on-board architecture within the System Pillar, and demonstration activities for full ASTP in Flagship Area 2.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

R&I and associated harmonisation activities efforts will play a crucial role in enabling pre-deployment activities and preparing for industrial ramp-up. Key focus areas include:

Operational rules for ATO GoA 3/4

- The finalisation of complete harmonised operational rules, but also shunting, stabling, and fall-back situations for ATO GoA 3/4 operations.
- Comprehensive protection and monitor of lines (including level crossing) based on distributed sensor networks.

Specifications for ATO GoA 3/4

- The finalisation of mature specifications for the technical solution for ATO GoA 3/4.

Specifications for Full ASTP

- The finalisation of mature specifications to enable testing and validation of the future on board architecture including full ASTP and perception systems.

Urban light rail automation

These activities build upon the findings and results of EU-Rail's Flagship Area 2 (FA2) on urban light rail.

- Further development of sensors and certification activities.
- V2X between trains and road users in complex multimodal scenarios.
- New automated depot operations (washing, inspection...) and tailored depot design benefiting from automated vehicles.
- Safe streamlined train protection system based on onboard technologies (cooperative awareness), also applicable to other segments and scenarios (e.g. low-density lines, degraded modes).
- Energy-optimised automated driving profiles for high-frequency urban and suburban services.

Train-to-train and train-to-satellite communication

- Study data-centric signalling approaches that rely on train-to-train and train-to-satellite communication, reducing dependency on trackside infrastructure, through a proof of concept.
- Establish the protocols, needs, procedures and architecture for data exchange (e.g. dataspace deployment) according to the different approaches analysed.

- Validation and testing of the system on regional (low-density) lines enabling its approval and further network expansion and assess applicability to segregated urban corridors and suburban/commuter branches where reduced trackside dependency can unlock economical modernisation.

3. Future rail radio communications

a. Context

By 2030 the process for the deployment of the FRMCS 1st Edition specification set should be in place. There will though be important elements of work outstanding to develop, test and validate new features, or to enhance the functionality of new use cases to e.g. improve reliability or support further applications (e.g. ATO GoA 3/4).

In addition, future rail radio communications will need to operate reliably in dense metropolitan environments, including major interchange stations and shared corridors where mainline, suburban/commuter rail branches, and in some cases metro systems coexist.

The development of any further elements on communication needs to go hand in hand with other deployment activities in order to minimise costly interventions on the system.

The deployment chain from requirement engineering, development, testing, deployment, operation and monitoring should be a central aspect, especially with respect to vehicle authorisation.

b. Objective

By 2033, following pre-deployment activities:

- there will be a tested and validated product available for the future radio system in Europe based on an extended use case set compared to the Edition 1.
- the extended use case set should consider operational requirements for suburban/commuter rail branches and metropolitan nodes, ensuring reliable communication performance in high-density and tunnel environments.
- such developments should promote the use of commercial off the shelf technology

c. Pre-deployment activities

Pre-deployment activity 1: FRMCS Edition 2

- Broad pre-deployment campaign for the FRMCS Edition 2.
- Test and validate (including performance evaluation) under real operation::
 - mature specifications for FRMCS Edition 2.
- Defined pre-deployment across at least 8 Member States, including cross-border operations and ensuring geographical balance by 2035.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail including the FP2 MORANE 2 project, which is testing and validating the FRMCS 1st Edition specifications, and FA2 wave 2 and wave 3.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

R&I and associated harmonisation activities efforts will play a crucial role in enabling pre-deployment activities and preparing for industrial ramp-up. Key focus areas include:

Flagship Initiative 1

European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS)

Satellite Navigation for Safety-Critical Applications

- Validate GNSS-based positioning (EGNOS/Galileo) for ETCS former L3 and ATO.
 - Validate Safe train positioning safety level needs enabling multi sensor fusion, (GNSS fusion with other perception systems), to reach SIL 4 safety levels.
- Ensure anti-spoofing/jamming resilience and integrity.
- Launch cross-border pilots for satellite-based localisation.

Low-Orbit Satellite Communication (LoSat)

- Consider LoSat as primary system for ERTMS, with radio as backup.
- Reduce reliance on ground infrastructure and cut deployment costs.
- Enable resilient, secure, interoperable communication.
- Pilot satellite-first corridors.

Compatibility

- Ensure compatibility and coexistence with future communication systems (e.g., IRIS², local systems based on Wi-Fi evolution) for secure, resilient, and sabotage resistant data exchange. This includes ensuring electromagnetic and spectrum coexistence in dense urban areas where rail radio systems may operate alongside metro communication systems, public mobile networks, and urban ITS infrastructure.

Mainstreaming

- Reduce the railway specific aspects of FRMCS, to facilitate the future migration to next mobile telecommunication solutions (6G, 7G, etc.).
- Consideration of sensing technologies and spatial awareness.

4. Future rail traffic and capacity management

a. Context

In the early 2030s, the implementation of the capacity regulation will be proceeding. To meet the growing demands for sustainable and efficient transport, cross-border train paths and capacity allocation necessitate shared digital platforms and agreed-upon traffic rules. A European-wide capacity management approach of federated state of the art national systems must evolve from disparate national frameworks to integrated, network-based models, ensuring that path requests, allocation, and scheduling processes are standardised and interoperable. This evolution is not just about operational efficiency; it's about delivering significant value for society and people by fostering greener mobility, reducing road congestion, supporting economic growth, and enhancing the overall quality of life across Europe.

Crucially, dynamic and flexible capacity allocation will empower rail to respond in near real time to demand fluctuations, disruptions, and rerouting needs. This enhanced responsiveness will not only optimise freight logistics but also significantly improve accessibility for passengers, making rail travel more resilient, convenient, and attractive for a wider range of users, including those with specific mobility needs. The continuous development of higher levels of capability and the seamless integration of still required national systems with selected central supporting tools to a European Traffic and Capacity management approach will be paramount to extracting maximum efficiency from networks, ultimately creating a more resilient, user-centric, and environmentally friendly railway system.

b. Objective

By 2035, following pre-deployment activities will establish a highly efficient, responsive, and integrated European rail network by leveraging advanced digital solutions and harmonised operational frameworks, thereby optimising capacity utilisation, enhancing operational performance, and fostering seamless multimodal logistics and as well connections into the urban and aviation system where appropriate.

- Implement and demonstrate advanced planning and regulation algorithms to significantly enhance network management efficiency and adaptability. This will lead to more predictable and resilient rail services, ensuring smoother journeys for passengers, more reliable delivery of goods, and reduced societal disruptions across Europe.
- Integrate Traffic Management Systems (TMS) with Automatic Train Operations (ATO) to optimise energy consumption, improve punctuality, and maximise network capacity. This crucial system enhancement will result in a more reliable, environmentally friendly, and comfortable travel experience for all passengers, contributing to cleaner air and more efficient operations.
- Deploy and validate interoperable digital platforms and data exchange standards reusing and building on existing EU regulation to foster seamless information flow and integrate multimodal transport. This will empower individuals and businesses with real time routing, tracking, and booking information, making rail travel and freight logistics more transparent, accessible, and convenient for everyone, thereby enhancing the overall efficiency and trustworthiness of the European transport system.

c. Pre-deployment activities

Pre-deployment activity 1: Digital systems supporting existing EU framework framework and ESIRS target architecture

- Pre-deployment and validation of digital systems compliant with existing and planned regulatory requirements supporting the development of other activities.
- Pre-deployment of TMS systems that demonstrate the operational use of the optimized trackside CCS system architecture in a mixed configuration (harmonized and non-harmonized operational rules, cross-border)

Pre-deployment activity 2: Implementation of improved planning and regulation algorithms

- In service demonstration of improved planning and traffic regulation algorithms across countries, including for cross-border and freight operations (Real time conflict detection and resolution, Dynamic rerouting, Optimised train sequencing, Predictive delay management.), designed to enhance network management efficiency and adaptability.
- Pre-deployment activities for implementing improved planning and traffic regulation algorithms in railway capacity management involve rigorous testing in demonstrators. Different methods are evaluated and combined to address national, international, and corridor-specific requirements. These activities ensure compatibility and effectiveness across diverse operational contexts. By simulating real-world scenarios, stakeholders can identify optimal algorithm combinations. This approach supports robust, scalable solutions for enhanced railway capacity planning.
- To validate the effect in non-commercial demonstrations, operational evidence is gathered within a controlled, limited scope. This approach ensures compliance with European procurement regulations while still enabling meaningful assessment. Although the pre-deployment activities are restricted in scale, targeted tests can demonstrate measurable improvements. By focusing on representative scenarios, stakeholders can reliably evaluate the algorithms' impact without breaching regulatory constraints.

Flagship Initiative 1

European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS)

- Possible areas for a pre-deployment could include national railway networks or specific corridors in countries where advanced traffic management and planning systems are already operational. This could include parts of the European Transport Corridors, as these areas offer established infrastructure and operational complexity, making them suitable for testing and validating improved planning and regulation algorithms in a pre-deployment context.
- Defined pre-deployment across at least 4 Member States including cross-border operations by 2035.

Pre-deployment activity 3: Linking TMS to ATO for optimised operations

- Application in commercial environment of harmonised ontology for TMS and ATO.
- In service demonstration of TMS linking to ATO to improve energy consumption monitoring, punctuality and impact on capacity.
- Comprehensive Validation, Safety Assurance, and Performance Optimisation: Conduct thorough safety analyses, develop a robust safety case, and utilise advanced simulation (including Hardware-in-the-Loop testing) to rigorously validate integrated functionalities and fine-tune performance optimisation algorithms for energy efficiency, capacity, and dynamic conflict resolution under all operational scenarios e.g. Driving Rules for loco hauled trains (e.g. freight).
- Ensure Operational Readiness and Human-System Collaboration: Develop specialised training programs for operators and validate ergonomic and efficient Human-Machine Interface (HMI) designs to ensure effective monitoring, supervision, and intervention within the integrated TMS-ATO environment, preparing personnel for efficient and safe system management.

Pre-deployment activity 4: Digital platforms and data interoperability

- Deploy and test digital platforms that enable the aggregation of complex multimodal services for rail-based supply chains, real time routing, tracking, and ETA predictions, based on data standards developed under an EU governance (ESOs or ERA), and respecting EU legislation in place (MMTIS, TEL TSI) or based on ERA ontology. Implement and validate interoperable data exchange standards and interfaces between railway undertakings, infrastructure managers, terminal operators, and first/last mile transport providers.
- Adapt and deploy integrated, intelligent digital platforms from the works of EU-Rail that provide seamless, personalised, and accessible end-to-end journey solutions for all passengers and freight customers, from first mile to last, across borders and modes, ensuring proactive communication and simplified travel experiences. Using information available from other modes that can contribute to seamless journey planners and integrated multimodal tickets considering the type of passenger.
- Pilot deployment on [5] selected TEN-T corridors with high cross-border traffic and strong intermodal interfaces (e.g. Rhine–Alpine, North Sea–Baltic, Scandinavian–Mediterranean) ensuring geographical balance. Strategic nodes: major intermodal terminals and to validate cross-border and multimodal data exchange.

Pre-deployment activity 5: Digital operational communications

- Adapt and integrate automated and operational telematics data exchange opened protocols between infrastructure managers and railway undertakings (TCMS/TMS) based on ERA ontology and based on modular products for driver advisory systems (DAS) that work with harmonised ETCS and are scalable to ATO GoA2 operation over ETCS.
- Integration of multilingual requirements, including for automated language tools, fit for operation in normal and degraded mode.
- Pre-deployment for testing and validation in operation along [5] pilot cross-border corridors.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail in FA1 and the harmonised interface between ATO and TMS from the System Pillar.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

R&I and associated harmonisation activities efforts will play a crucial role in enabling pre-deployment activities and preparing for industrial ramp-up. Key focus areas include:

Linking TMS to ATO for optimised operations

- Application of unified digital infrastructure information with a granularity and reliability fit for ATO and traffic control.
- Establish Secure and Standardised Interoperability: Develop and agree upon harmonised data model derived from ERA ontology and interface for the enhanced seamless, real time information exchange between TMS and ATO systems, while rigorously conducting cybersecurity threat modelling and resilience testing to ensure the integrity and security of the interconnected architecture.

Integration with other modes

- Intelligent traffic and capacity management system that allows integration with other transport modes, in particular combined transport for freight (road, maritime and inland waterways) and multimodal hubs including airports for passengers, to anticipate congestion, manage incidents, enhance passenger information and improve the daily mobility of residents. Integration with urban system where relevant, including urban rail systems and other modes such as buses, trams, shared bikes among others.
- Develop where relevant, interoperable data exchange standards and interfaces based on ERA ontology between railway undertakings, infrastructure managers, terminal operators, and first/last mile transport providers.

Simulation tools

- European validated simulation tools in terms of predictability and accuracy of the simulations compared with a real operation scenario, enabling the models to reflect continuously enhanced models of influencing factors (weather, state of equipment from digital twins, human flows on the stations, etc.).
- Development of capabilities to set out working timetable fit for intermodal (rail/road) transport services integrating buffer times and milestones in intermodal freight terminals for the departure/arrival and decision making on the availability of such services.
- Artificial Intelligence & Quantum Computing: Enabling dynamic planning, predictive capacity management, and adaptive routing across the multimodal network.

Automation

- Improved Traffic and Capacity management through improved feedback from operations and real time decision support system for train dispatchers, preparing for Autonomous traffic managements systems.
- Validation and testing of sensor setups for ATO/RTO: during development (e.g. sensor model in detailed simulation of rail environments) and for ATO/RTO system approval (e.g. scenario-based HiL-testing).

5. The ERA Ontology and Federated Rail Data Space

a. Context

The move to much more data-centric processes is central to ESIRS.

Flagship Initiative 1

European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS)

The development of the ERA ontology, monitored and managed at European level by the European Union Agency for Railways as established by the TEL TSI implementing regulation, is a foundational infrastructure for a digital railway. It supports seamless cross-border operations, regulatory alignment, better data quality, and greater agility for innovation. Therefore, it is crucial that there is focussed well-resourced work at European level to develop semantic interoperability across European rail systems and to define standardized, machine- & human-readable vocabulary of rail-related concepts and relationships.

To ensure full multimodal interoperability within the common European mobility data space, the ERA ontology is aligned with Transmodel - an implementation of CEN 12896 through NeTEx (the XML implementation). European public transport reference models in use covering use cases not regulated should build their bridges towards ERA ontology.

In addition to the development of the ontology, there is also the need to create federated, decentralized data ecosystems to enforce innovation while following EU values – a federated rail data space.

b. Objective

By 2036, following pre-deployment activities:

- in order to facilitate the uptake of TSI, the ERA ontology and its extensions will cover all of the subsystems across the TSI (TEL, CCS, OPE, INF, ENE, LOC+PAS, SRT, PRM, NOI), supporting fully interoperable European rail operations.
- ERA ontology is aligned with Transmodel - an implementation of CEN 12896 through NeTEx (the XML implementation). European public transport reference models in use covering use cases not regulated should build their bridges towards ERA ontology.
- the European register of infrastructure (RINF) will be the single European source of digital infrastructure information populated by infrastructure managers and a reliable source of data for operational systems
- where relevant, interoperability mechanisms will allow structured exchange between RINF-based infrastructure information and metropolitan infrastructure data models to support passenger-facing services and operational coordination at interchange nodes.
- the European federated rail data space will be part of the common European mobility data space and in commercial operation, providing a real-time and user-friendly digital platform.
- the federated rail data space will enable controlled participation of urban and metropolitan rail operators, enabling coherent passenger information, disruption management, accessibility data, and multimodal journey integration across mainline and urban rail ecosystems.

c. Pre-deployment activities

Pre-deployment activity 1: Extension of the ERA ontology

- ERA ontology extended to all subsystems across TSI.
- Test and validate the shared set of definitions, and the data use by IMs and RUs, relevant to all systems to be defined at European level.
- Abstraction of Transmodel to extend the ERA ontology, including pilot use cases involving metropolitan interchange nodes.
- Pilot products using the ERA extended ontology:
 - trackside CCS products involving data preparation, configuration, and coherence and completeness checks.

Pre-deployment activity 2: Pilot operations of the European federated rail data space

- Testing of the interlinking layer with common European mobility data space (EMDS) – subject to the interlinking layer being ready.

[5] cross-border pilot corridors, with a minimum of five connectors, with the ERA ontology managed and exposed through a shared semantic or vocabulary hub to demonstrate that federated rail data space can support secure, governed and interoperable cross-border data exchange, including discovery, access and reuse of selected data products under common trust and policy rules

Pre-deployment activity 3: Enhancing digital infrastructure information to support operational use

- Enhancement of the granularity of RINF model to support ATO.
- Evaluation of requirements between enhanced RINF data and urban infrastructure models used in metro and light rail systems where operational interfaces exist.
- Integration of a digital route book in the driver cabin.
- [5] cross-border pilot corridors and assessment of data interoperability of those corridors.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail:

- the development of extension for the ERA ontology, for example through the System Pillar CCS/TMS Data Model;
- the development of the Rail Data Space integrating the interlinking layer of common European mobility data space (EMDS), which will move into a first operative mode by 2028.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

R&I efforts will play a crucial role in enabling pre-deployment activities and preparing for industrial ramp-up. Key focus areas include:

ERA rail ontology: Automatic compliance

Common rail ontology by ERA ontology: Machine-verifiable rules and compliance checking

- Formalise harmonised operational rules in human- and machine-readable form, using open semantic standards such as SHACL, so that selected conformity and compliance checks can be executed automatically.
- Assess semantic compatibility between rail rule representations and relevant public transport data models, where relevant, in order to support coherent multimodal validation and information exchange

Federated rail data space: Architectures

- Further research into federated SW architectures (with enabling services) for railway application and advanced railway service.
- Interlinking layer of common European mobility data space (EMDS).
- Decentralised IT infrastructures for digital EU sovereignty by data space technology and data ecosystem enabling.
- QC integration and applicability study in the context of federated rail SW architectures.
- Research into extensions of federated data space architecture as digital railway enabler for secure and trusted data and service exchanges with new approaches such as code-to-data and potential QC

Flagship Initiative 1

European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS)

algorithms.

- Leverage the Data Space APP Store component to provide a set of common services and applications to support the above points (ex. Compliance).
- Extension of federated architectures with sovereignty levels, federated IT infrastructure for data sovereignty.
- Ensure architectural compatibility with urban public transport data ecosystems as part of the European Mobility dataspace.
- ERA ontology as semantic hub

Federated rail data space: Governance

- Development of Data Governance Frameworks (define access levels, roles, and responsibilities for data sharing across stakeholders, ensuring compliance with EU regulations).
- Extension of federated architectures with sovereignty levels, federated IT infrastructure for data sovereignty.
- Full integration in the overall common European mobility data space (EMDS).
- ERA CCM ontology board

Federated rail data space: Complex data processing

- Evaluation of potential of quantum computing to accelerate complex data processing and encryption tasks for rail in federated architectures.

Impacts

Service quality enhancement

- Cross-border services become more predictable and reliable by replacing bespoke national practices with harmonised operational rules and simplified ETCS L2-only trackside—tested end-to-end in real operations—so operators and dispatchers work from the same rulebook and engineering rules, including degraded modes.
- At major metropolitan nodes, improved coordination between mainline, suburban/commuter and metro services enhances transfer reliability, reduces missed connections, and limits disruption propagation across interconnected networks.
- Higher grades of automation (ATO GoA3/4) plus a modular onboard with Advanced Safe Train Positioning raise punctuality and regularity, while standardised processes and safety cases make automated operations service-ready on both mainline and urban networks.
- In high-frequency metro environments, stable headways and automated regulation reduce dwell-time variability and platform congestion, directly improving passenger comfort and perceived reliability.
- CCS Trackside with highly-efficient safety core based on harmonised principles enables flexible railway operations, especially in nodes and degraded situations
- Linking TMS with ATO enables tighter regulation in real time (better adherence to plan, smoother recovery), with improved energy monitoring and more stable ETAs for customers.
- In metropolitan contexts, this supports passenger-flow-aware regulation and more accurate real-time passenger information across mainline and urban rail systems

- Federated, EU-wide data exchange (rail data space) and a common ERA-led rail ontology give stakeholders consistent, machine-readable semantics and near real time visibility across borders, supporting accurate journey information and dependable handovers between actors.
- Common datastores, such as RINF, offer structured and governed data frameworks that enhance data accessibility and support the development of the sector.
- Alignment with established public transport reference models (e.g., Transmodel) enables coherent passenger-facing information between rail and urban public transport, supporting seamless multimodal journeys.
- FRMCS (Edition 2) validation across multiple countries improves communications robustness for operational messaging and ATO use cases, reducing service disruption from comms bottlenecks.
- Improved communications robustness in dense metropolitan environments strengthens operational continuity in tunnels and interchange hubs.
- Flexible and adaptable urban rail services, enhancing network performance and streamlining the flow management.
- Digital platforms provide passengers and shippers/forwarders with seamless, personalised, and accessible end-to-end journey or transport solutions, including real time routing, booking, and highly accurate ETA predictions across borders and modes. These increases the attractiveness of rail-based journeys/supply chains and proactive communication and transparency significantly improve the travel experience and the trust in using rail.
- For daily urban mobility, consistent multimodal semantics and disruption messaging across operators reinforce passenger trust and accessibility compliance.



Cost effective solutions

- Using commercial off the shelf products as an overall aim.
- Moving from hybrid, legacy-laden designs to harmonised operational rules with simplified ETCS. Only architectures cuts bespoke engineering, lowers software change effort, and enables reuse - addressing today's spiralling, unsustainable cost base.
- Pre-deployment of a full trackside CCS (ETCS Only) with standardised interfaces and automated configuration/diagnostics targets measurable savings (around 20%) from process automation, fewer physical assets, and streamlined delivery.
- Migration is supported through tested technical solutions such as adaptors.
- Modular, upgradable equipment and cost-effective adapter solutions de-risk migration by keeping legacy interfaces running during transition, avoiding costly cutovers and service downtime.
- General-purpose hardware and digitalised object controllers reduce lifetime costs and supplier lock-in, while a re-engineered authorisation approach (heavy reuse, automated proofs) shortens deployment cycles and curbs expenditure.
- A unified market for solutions—fostered by common specifications, open standards and shared rules—strengthens Europe's supply industry and scales volumes, lowering unit costs for both dense and low-density lines.
- An onboard urban light rail protection system, independent of infrastructure, which together with autonomous operations, enables the efficient and cost effective deployment of new lines or the upgrade of existing ones.

System optimisation

- Corridor-based capacity and traffic management (shared digital platforms, harmonised traffic rules) on top of a harmonised and performant CCS Trackside shift planning from national silos to European-level optimisation, supporting dynamic allocation and faster, cleaner recovery from disruptions.
- Common technical interfaces ensure the ability to seamlessly and safely interconnect equipment from differing suppliers, in both national and cross-border contexts.
- In-service demonstrations of improved planning/regulation algorithms, and the TMS-ATO link, unlock higher throughput and smoother operations with data-driven, repeatable processes rather than one-off local practices.
- ATO GoA3/4 and ASTP drive repeatable running times and stable headways, while a mature onboard architecture provides a consistent integration point for future capabilities.
- The ERA extended ontology, extended across all subsystems and TSIs, underpins semantic interoperability; coupled with a federated rail data space interlinked with common European Mobility Data Spaces (EMDS), it enables scalable, trust-preserving integration of planning, operations, maintenance and logistics services.
- Structured semantic alignment with urban public transport data ecosystems including current developed standards enables integrated planning and real-time coordination with urban public transport.
- FRMCS development aligned with other deployments minimises costly re-touch of systems and ensures

communications keep pace with automation and capacity management advances.

- Establishing a unified, secure rail data space with standardised models and APIs creates a single source of truth, enabling seamless, real time information exchange across all stakeholders and modes. This foundational layer supports data-driven decision-making for optimal network management.
- Integrated digital platforms leverage this unified data to optimise routing, tracking, and scheduling for both freight and passenger services, facilitating efficient multimodal logistics chains and unlocking the full potential of rail as a central component of integrated European transport networks.

Resilience and improved security

- Simplified, harmonised architectures reduce operational fragility and the attack surface inherent in bespoke, aging hybrids; cybersecurity and long-life software maintenance are treated as first-class design and migration concerns.
- FRMCS Edition 2 validation, with compatibility and coexistence (e.g., IRIS², Wi-Fi evolution), strengthens secure, sabotage-resistant data exchange for safety-critical operations.
- The federated rail data space includes governance frameworks (roles, access levels, EU-compliant sharing) and stress-tested cross-border pilots to harden operations against physical and cyber threats.
- Harmonised degraded-mode rules, modular onboard fallbacks, and standardised processes for automated operations raise reliability under disruption and speed safe service restoration.
- More affordable standardised and modular equipment facilitates repairs in any locations and reduces the costs of implementing key systems redundancies.
- By consolidating demand on interoperable, European solutions, ESIRS supports a robust supply chain and long-term maintainability, enhancing Europe's ability to sustain critical rail services under shock.
- Automation and infrastructure independence make urban rail systems even more resilient to external events, whether accidental, climate-related, or intentional.
- Real time data visibility and standardised interfaces allow for quicker detection of disruptions and more agile responses across the network and different transport modes. This foundational digital layer enhances the overall resilience of the rail system by enabling faster recovery and more adaptive operations.

Flagship Initiative 2

The Next-Generation Rail Freight Operations with European Digital Solutions

Europe stands at a pivotal moment where decarbonisation, digitalisation, competitiveness and geopolitical challenges intersect. As supply chains become more complex, climate imperatives more pressing, and global competition more intense, the European Union must reinforce the European systems that underpin its economic sovereignty, sustainability and strategic autonomy. Rail freight plays a central role in this transformation.

Transport accounts for 29% of all greenhouse gas emissions³ in the EU, with rail producing only 0.4% of Europe's total transport emissions⁴, highlighting the significant environmental benefits of modal shift to rail. Therefore, each percentage point increase in rail's modal share is estimated to reduce transport-related CO₂ emissions by approximately 3 million tons annually. However, rail currently accounts for a small and declining share of land freight transport (16.4%⁵ in Tonne-Kilometres) in Europe, despite its clear environmental advantages and capabilities beyond EU borders. Decades of underinvestment, fragmentation of rail freight market with a high-cost pressure, a lack of coordination across stakeholders, a lack of level playing field between different transport modes and outdated technologies have limited rail's competitiveness against road transport. At the same time, the sector faces mounting pressure to modernise, decarbonise, and support strategic logistics, including military mobility and crisis response capabilities. To unlock its full potential, the rail freight system must be developed as an integrated, automated, and digitalised logistics ecosystem—capable of seamless cross-border

and multimodal operations, resilient to disruption, and responsive to both civil and military needs.

This flagship initiative addresses these challenges by setting an ambitious goal: the deployment of a fully integrated, digitalised, automated and interoperable European rail system by 2050, enabling a modal shift from road to rail, supporting the development of rail freight, enhancing efficiency and resilience, and reinforcing Europe's industrial and technological leadership.

Central to this transformation is a system approach that brings together infrastructure, rolling stock, digital platforms, and human capital but also allows an efficient combination of existing systems with new assets. This approach combined with the other Flagship Initiatives (addressing key enablers like ETCS, FRMCS) must prioritise the development, integration and deployment of key enabling technologies.

The Next-Generation Rail Freight Operations with European Digital solutions requires seamless integration with multimodal logistics chains and comprehensive digitalisation to enhance rail freight's competitiveness against road transport but also reinforce co-modality. To achieve this, rail freight must become significantly more flexible and responsive, with adaptive access points, interchange nodes, and routing capabilities that respond dynamically to real-time demand. This transformation depends on intelligent systems that enable the integration of diverse service providers into coordinated intermodal offerings, supporting near-full asset utilisation while ensuring reliable, efficient and predictable operations that meet the cost, speed, and quality expectations of modern logistics.

Advanced IT tools for Train Planning and Traffic

³ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/transport-and-mobility?activeTab=fa515f0c-9ab0-493c-b4cd-58a32dfaae0a>

⁴ https://www.era.europa.eu/system/files/2024-07/20242052_PDF_TR0924239ENN_002.pdf?t=1756872250

⁵ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/52c07e98-a3f4-11f0-97c8-01aa75ed71a1> / Modal split of freight transport on land 2023

Management in a federated European system must evolve into components for a comprehensive multimodal freight coordination platform. These systems will integrate real-time data from rail, road, maritime, and inland waterway transport modes. AI-driven algorithms will enable dynamic rescheduling and seamless modal transfers while maximising network utilisation through predictive capacity management and flexible routing optimisation.

By ensuring trusted access to operational, capacity, and demand-related data, this framework supports transparency, efficiency, and innovation in multimodal freight chains. In parallel, the Telematics Technical Specifications for Interoperability provides the regulatory and technical backbone for harmonised data exchange within the rail sector, defining common standards for information such as train composition, path requests, consignment notes, and real-time operational updates. Together, the federated data space and the Telematics TSI create the conditions for reliable, AI-driven coordination across transport modes, ensuring that rail freight can integrate seamlessly into digital logistics ecosystems while maintaining interoperability, safety, and compliance at a European scale.

Effective first-mile and last-mile integration, based on efficient railway access to well dimensioned freight yards, is critical to eliminating logistical bottlenecks. By digitally synchronising various freight transportation modes with rail schedules and cargo flows, connecting ports, distribution centres, and industrial facilities to flexible rail access points throughout the network, real-time optimisation—powered by hybridised mathematical optimisation and artificial intelligence — will enable dynamic, predictive logistics management across the entire multimodal network. This is in line, for example, with the EU Ports Strategy adopted by the Commission on 4 March 2026 which included measures to improve the connection between ports and the EU rail system.

Harmonised interoperability standards including Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC), standardised loading and transshipment technologies including the respective interfaces (rules/requirements/IT) between stakeholders/modes, and unified data exchange protocols will enable to achieve seamless cross-border operations while reducing complexity for operators.

Innovative digital platforms will provide state-of-the-art routing, automated documentation, unified booking and tracking, and dynamic pricing capabilities. These tools will level the playing field, ensuring competitive access for small and medium-sized operators while enabling flexible and secure interoperability between different logistics services.

Migration scenarios require careful coordination across multiple operators with standardised protocols ensuring interoperability during transition to automated freight operations that deliver predictable service quality.

Digital coordination of freight flows and improved hub capacity can also enable innovative concepts such as the coordinated movement of passengers and goods on rail infrastructure.

Additionally, the new rail digital harmonised system will provide a platform for integration of the entire supply chain, driving the further integration of ports with railways and covering for example the needed development activities to close the existing technical and capabilities gaps.

This comprehensive system approach will transform rail freight into a modern, integrated, and intelligent logistics ecosystem that maximises efficiency, resilience, and predictability, while laying the groundwork for a truly interoperable European rail freight system by 2038.

It will require not only technological investment but also a skilled and adaptable workforce. The rail freight sector must attract new talents, retrain existing workers, and foster a culture of innovation and digital competence. Developing training programs aligned with the digital and automated future of rail is critical to ensuring a just and inclusive transition.

Flagship Initiative 2

The Next-Generation Rail Freight Operations with European Digital Solutions

Pre-deployment coordinated activities across EU and associated R&I

Pre-deployment is essential because the Next-Generation Rail Freight Operations cannot be implemented through isolated national initiatives due to the inherent cross-border aspect of rail freight. Without pre-deployment activities, the entire vision for rail freight⁷ risks fragmentation, inefficiencies, and loss of cross-border interoperability.

Areas of pre-deployment and associated research and innovation coordinated activities for next-generation rail freight operations

1. The European Automated and Digital Freight Train with Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC) as key enabler

a. Context

Rail freight still relies heavily on manual processes, fragmented digitalisation, and diverse national practices that limit efficiency and cross-border interoperability. One of the most significant bottlenecks is the manual coupling of freight wagons, a time-consuming and physically demanding task that constrains productivity, puts workers' safety at risk, and weakens rail's competitiveness compared to road transport.

The Digital Automatic Coupler (DAC) has been identified as a game-changing technology by the sector⁸ and the European Commission⁹ to address these challenges. It represents the key enabler for the European Automated and Digital Freight Train, a concept that integrates smart wagons, predictive maintenance, and automated yard operations into a seamless, data-driven ecosystem. Its successful implementation requires a synchronised approach to fleet migration, trackside readiness, and coordinated deployment alongside other key technologies, such as ERTMS. It involves close collaboration among infrastructure managers—including first- and last-mile infrastructure—terminal operators, vehicle keepers, maintenance companies, freight operators, and the wider supply industry across Europe.

Additionally, enhancing the competitiveness and capacity of rail freight transport through digitisation is only possible if, alongside technical enablers (e.g., Digital Automatic Coupling), a structured network of interfaces is created, particularly for the automated collection and exchange of real-time data. Given the current decline in rail freight market share, quickly implementable and cost-effective digital solutions (such as RFID and video gates) are necessary for train localisation and integrity as bridging technologies and future components of a fully automated freight transport system. Planning must consider the financial capacity of the rail freight sector in different regions of the EU and beyond, as well as the time needed for adaptation.

Moreover, the transformation of freight wagons and operations must support emerging logistics needs, including the safe transport of commodities which have not played a major role in rail freight transport to date. Smart and flexible freight wagon concepts will be essential to support the energy transition and evolving industrial supply chains across Europe.

A balanced and non-discriminatory European funding and financing framework including the private

⁷ International rail freight services accounts for 54% of total rail traffic since 2019 (see https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-modes/rail/market/rail-market-monitoring-rmms_en)

⁸ https://www.cer.be/images/publications/positions/230728_DAC_Sector_Statement.pdf

⁹ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c1472590-4276-49b8-9194-8300f6197e2c_en?filename=COM_2023_440.pdf

sector is essential to support deployment while positively influencing the uptake of new technologies and subsequently the market share of European rail freight. The initiative also necessitates a central managing structure to maintain the system and serves as a prerequisite for automated yard operations, fully unlocking the benefits of digital freight train operations in European shunting yards.

b. Objective

By 2038, following pre-deployment activities, freight wagons equipped with DAC (full package) will fully operate across 6 major European routes, fully integrated with ERTMS deployment and Traffic Management Systems (TMS) as well as logistic chains, enabling up to 60%¹⁰ reduction in coupling and uncoupling time and further competitiveness of rail freight while delivering net zero logistics.

c. Pre-deployment activities

Pre-deployment activity 1: Large-scale Field Demonstrations on European Transport Corridors

- Around 50000-60000 wagons and 500-600 locomotives equipped with DAC (including CCU) operating across six major routes including corresponding number of required locomotives
- Enlarge the number of business cases over Europe to adapt the existing solutions in diverse operational environments (cross-border traffic, different wagon fleets, climatic conditions) including validation of:
 - derailment prevention systems;
 - Self-diagnosing wagons
 - Dynamic wagon composition
 - Advanced goods condition monitoring
 - Predictive train integrity
 - Automated wagon tracking for real-time visibility and logistics optimisation
 - Self-propelled freight wagons operating in synergy with DAC and virtual coupling, enabling flexible, automated train formations without locomotives.
 - Routes may for example include (part of) the corridors Atlantic corridor, North Sea - Rhine - Mediterranean corridor, North Sea-Baltic corridor, Scandinavian-Mediterranean corridor, Baltic Sea – Adriatic Sea corridor, Rhine-Danube corridor, Mediterranean corridor, Western Balkans –Eastern Mediterranean corridor, and Baltic Sea - Black Sea - Aegean Sea corridor (to ensure geographic and operational diversity).
- Simplified and harmonized authorization process for the vehicles (considering the large number and diversity of freight wagons and locomotives):
 - Locomotives are an integral component of the rail freight system and must therefore be fully considered in all deployment activities. Consequently, the specific challenges related to locomotives should be addressed with particular focus, including through the development of multiple and innovative solutions such as suitable modular adapter concepts.
 - In addition, any large-scale deployment ambition requires an authorisation process for placing on the market that is efficient, proportionate and fit for the operational realities of the sector, thereby supporting timely and scalable deployment across the rail freight system
- Evaluation of the EU-wide need for modular adapter solutions and their requirements to operate in different countries (separated for shunting/mainline locomotives)

¹⁰ DACcelerate Shift2Rail project - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2210539525000951?>

Flagship Initiative 2

The Next-Generation Rail Freight Operations with European Digital Solutions

- Development and validation of modular adapter solutions for locomotives, addressing the high diversity of locomotive types in Europe, ensuring seamless integration of DAC (including CCU) across legacy and new locomotive fleets, and enabling interoperable, cost-effective and scalable deployment across European Transport Corridors.

Pre-deployment activity 2: Pilot operations in freight terminals and yards

- Deployment of DAC-enabled wagons in marshalling yards, first/last mile terminals, and logistics hubs, enabling automated coupling, digital data exchange, and seamless integration with terminal and network operations.
- Development and implementation of digital and automated solutions to enhance personnel safety and physical security in terminals and yards, including access control, real-time monitoring, and automated alerts.
- Pilot automated and digitally coordinated yard operations, including integration with any kind of planning systems, terminal management systems, traffic management systems, and mainline railway systems, enabling automated train preparation, digital train composition, remote operations, and improved coupling and shunting efficiency. The interface between systems will be developed on the basis of harmonised and standardised concepts.
- Deployment of data-driven and interoperable digital platforms supporting real-time wagon and asset tracking, automated planning of yard operations, predictive maintenance, and optimisation of terminal capacity and throughput.
- A selection of strategic terminals and yards along major European freight routes to ensure operational diversity and cross-border interoperability of automated and digital solutions, enabling multimodal flexible future supply chain concepts.
- Self-propelled freight wagons operating in synergy with DAC and virtual coupling, enabling flexible, automated train formations without locomotives (to be implemented in a controlled environment – shunting yards).

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail and other initiatives.

- the technology development, testing, demonstration and standardisation activities carried out in the Europe's Rail Flagship Areas 2, 5 and System Pillar Task 4, including support to the migration plan. Europe's Rail Flagship Area 5 develops and demonstrates key enablers such as Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC) and freight train digitalisation, ensuring interoperability, operational reliability, and integration with logistics and traffic management systems. These activities include technology development, testing, large-scale demonstrations, and standardisation support, contributing directly to the DAC migration plan and the industrialisation of digital freight train technologies. Europe's Rail Flagship Area 2 develops advanced train control and headway optimisation technologies. It focuses on digital and automated train operations, including ETCS Level 2 with hybrid train detection, moving block concepts, advanced Automatic Train Operation, and traffic management integration. Europe's Rail System Pillar Task 4 contributes to the definition of system requirements, interoperability specifications, and standardisation frameworks for digital freight train technologies, including DAC and interfaces with ERTMS and Traffic Management Systems. This work ensures a harmonised European approach and supports the preparation of a coordinated migration strategy.
- The pre-deployment activities conducted in the European Pioneer DAC train project.

- The work done in the European DAC Delivery Programme.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

R&I efforts will play a crucial role in enabling pre-deployment activities and preparing for industrial ramp-up. Key focus areas include:

Modular and scalable technology development including adaptors

- Design plug-and-play modules or adaptors to accommodate diverse rolling stock fleets across the EU and ensure compatibility with legacy systems.

Lifecycle and maintenance innovation

- Apply safe and trusted AI, IoT, and predictive analytics for lifecycle cost reduction.

Open standards and vendor interchangeability

- Align with ERA and European standardisation bodies to establish harmonised technical specifications.

Structured network of interfaces

- For the automated collection and exchange of real time data:
 - R&I for quickly implementable and cost-effective digital solutions for train localisation and integrity as bridging technologies and future components of a fully automated freight transport system
 - research for novel digital approaches and standards support. Development of digital monitoring technologies (sensors, IoT systems, condition monitoring) to ensure safe handling and real-time monitoring of sensitive or hazardous cargo

Smart and Flexible Freight Wagon Concepts

- Research and development of modular and adaptable freight wagon concepts capable of transporting a wider range of commodities.
- Adaptation and modernisation of existing wagon fleets to safely transport commodities which have not played a major role in rail freight transport to date.

2. Yards and logistics hubs

a. Context

Transshipment points—rail yards, terminals, ports, and logistics hubs—are vital for seamless door-to-door intermodal freight transport. Yet today, their operations remain manual, fragmented, and labour-intensive, creating delays, higher costs, and safety risks:

- Transshipment points are important in the door-to-door transport process, and therefore, to improve the delivery of goods to their final destination.
- Automation and digitisation of transshipment process improving workers safety will bring significant added value to the planning of the entire freight transport process.
- Digital transshipment management enables seamless intermodal integration, ensuring smooth coordination and handover between rail, road, maritime, and inland waterway modes through standardised interfaces and real time data exchange.
- Integration of yards/terminal with their specific offerings and needs in the multimodal supply chain planning and routing is vital for planning and executing reliable transport service offers.

Flagship Initiative 2

The Next-Generation Rail Freight Operations with European Digital Solutions

By combining Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC) with digital yard management, automated shunting, and interoperable data platforms, Europe can transform these nodes into faster, safer, and more efficient hubs, boosting rail's role in multimodal logistics and supporting Green Deal and supply chain resilience objectives.

In addition, rail-connected logistics hubs and terminals can play a key role in enabling sustainable urban logistics. By acting as transshipment points for goods for cities, these hubs can support the development of low-emission “green city logistics” systems.

b. Objective

- Reduce average transshipment time by 30–50% by 2038
- Cut work-related accidents in yards/terminals up to 40% by 2038.
- Boost terminal throughput by 20–25% by 2038 without major infrastructure expansion.

c. Pre-deployment activities

Pre-deployment activity 1: Pilot digital yard operations

- Deployment of digital yard management systems in at least 10 strategic freight yards along European Transport Corridors.
- Test automation of wagon sorting, tracking, and scheduling, integrated with DAC and automated shunting systems, including self-propelled freight wagons.
- Selected yards on European Transport Corridors

Pre-deployment activity 2: Rail–Port/Inland Waterway, Intermodal Hub Capacity and Interface Pilots

- Large-scale pilots at key intermodal hubs where rail connects with road, maritime ports, and inland waterways to validate and optimise digitalised operational processes for container handover, slot booking, and administrative procedures, improving hub capacity utilisation.
- Test and validate standardised digital interfaces and data-exchange solutions enabling seamless interoperability between rail, ports, inland waterways, and road logistics systems. These solutions will support real-time data exchange, process automation, and improved coordination, reducing operational bottlenecks and increasing capacity at hubs.
- Integrate and demonstrate rail–maritime and rail–inland waterway interface solutions, including digital adaptations, infrastructure adjustments, and operational coordination mechanisms to streamline cargo transfers and optimise hub performance.
- Pilots will be implemented at major intermodal hubs and corridors across Europe, ensuring a diverse range of geographic, operational, and logistical environments where rail interfaces with ports, inland waterways, and road networks, allowing validation of solutions that enhance efficiency and expand effective hub capacity.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail and other initiatives.

- The technology development, testing, demonstration and standardisation activities carried out in Europe's Rail Flagship Area 5 and in the System Pillar Task 4.
- The digital yard pilots and automation demonstrations undertaken in Shift2Rail projects (e.g. digital yard management systems, automated shunting, wagon tracking).

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

R&I efforts will play a crucial role in enabling pre-deployment activities and preparing for industrial ramp-up. Key focus areas include:

Interoperable data standards

- Develop open APIs and standardised data models for intermodal cargo exchange.

AI optimisation

- Research advanced simulation and optimisation tools for capacity planning and disruption management.

Human-machine interaction

- Explore safe interaction between workers and automated equipment in complex yard environments.

Cybersecurity & data governance

- Develop frameworks to ensure secure and competition-neutral data sharing.

Ports and inland waterways integrations

- Development of interoperable data exchange models and harmonisation of operation for interfaces with rail.
- Development of innovative European harmonised solutions (that can be deployed at scale) addressing the physical bottlenecks impeding more freight transport by rail from European ports and inland waterways.

Cost-benefit analysis models

- Assess lifecycle benefits of automation (efficiency, safety, emissions reduction) versus investment costs.

Green City Logistics and Integrated Passenger-Freight Transport

- Research innovative logistics models integrating rail freight with urban distribution systems.
- Development of digital platforms enabling coordinated planning of passenger and freight flows on rail infrastructure.
- Evaluation of operational models enabling the joint or coordinated transport of passengers and goods where feasible.

3. Electro-pneumatic brakes on freight vehicles

a. Context

Conventional pneumatic brakes of freight wagons are an important factor to spark capacity bottlenecks in rail. They slow down braking response times, lengthen headways between trains, and reduce the ability to run freight trains at higher speeds or mixed with passenger services.

Electro-Pneumatic (EP) brakes, already used in passenger rolling stock, allow:

- much faster and uniform brake application across the whole train;
- shorter headways and better train path allocation;
- increased line capacity and safety;
- compatibility with digital freight technologies (DAC, ERTMS, TMS).

Flagship Initiative 2

The Next-Generation Rail Freight Operations with European Digital Solutions

b. Objective

- Increase effective line capacity by 10% on upgraded corridors by 2038, by allowing shorter headways.
- Reduce average brake response time.
- Speed & Flexibility: Enable 15–20 km/h higher average operating speeds for freight trains on mixed-traffic lines by 2038.

c. Pre-deployment activities

Pre-deployment activity 1: Pilot corridors demonstrations

- Operate ~1,000 EP-equipped wagons in mixed passenger–freight traffic to validate capacity and braking performance.
- Test reduction in headways, braking response, and operational flexibility under real conditions.
- Where: 3–4 Major European route with high freight traffic.

Pre-deployment activity 2: Fleet retrofitting pilots

- Retrofit a representative sample of freight wagons across different types, operators, and keepers.
- Test technical feasibility, installation workflows, and lifecycle maintenance needs.
- Selected commercial services on major European route or European Transport Corridors.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail.

- The work on EP-brake architectures and monitoring done in the Flagship Area 5.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

R&I efforts will play a crucial role in enabling pre-deployment activities and preparing for industrial ramp-up. Key focus areas include:

System integration

- Research compatibility between EP brakes, DAC power supply, and ERTMS.

Optimisation models

- Quantify network capacity gains with EP brakes in real traffic simulations.

Retrofit solutions

- Develop modular, cost-efficient retrofit kits for different wagon fleets.

Impacts

Service quality enhancement

- Provide a coherent EU-level deployment roadmap that avoids fragmentation and secures stakeholder confidence.
- Enable automated yard operations, unlocking the full benefits of digital freight trains.
- Enhance operational resilience through predictive maintenance and digital decision support.

- Enable seamless intermodal integration through real time data exchange between rail, road, maritime, and inland waterways.
- Enhance network-wide efficiency by improving visibility of cargo movements and resource availability.
- Enable sustainable urban logistics solutions by integrating rail freight with green city logistics systems.
- Support emerging industrial supply chains through flexible freight wagon concepts capable of safely and efficiently transporting commodities which have not played a major role in rail freight transport to date.
- Up to 50% faster transshipment times, reducing bottlenecks in door-to-door supply chains.
- +10% line capacity, shorter stopping distances, improved schedule reliability.

Cost effective solutions

- Expand workshop capacity and workforce skills for large-scale retrofitting, ensuring a temporary but crucial industrial boost.
- Create export opportunities for European suppliers, reinforcing EU technological leadership.
- Improved terminal and asset utilisation, reducing logistics costs.
- More freight per day without new infrastructure; lower lifecycle costs.

System optimisation

- Stimulate European industrial capacity in strategic rail technologies, in line with the Draghi report.
- Reduce physical strain in coupling operations, addressing challenges of an aging workforce and making rail more attractive to younger workers.
- Stronger European industrial position in automation and digital logistics technologies.
- Energy efficient yard operations through digital optimisation.
- Harmonised, interoperable systems across borders.
- Strengthen the role of rail in achieving Green Deal targets by making freight more competitive.
- Contribute directly to net-zero logistics by shifting more freight to rail.

Resilience and improved security

- Strengthen EU strategic autonomy by reducing dependence on non-European suppliers in critical infrastructure technologies.
- Increase resilience of European supply chains through more reliable, digitally integrated freight transport.
- Strengthened EU strategic autonomy in logistics and digital platforms.
- Contribution to TEN-T and Green Deal objectives by enhancing multimodality and competitiveness of sustainable freight transport.
- Significant reduction in accidents and improvement of workers' safety by reducing exposure to manual, physically demanding tasks.
- Modal shift incentives from road to rail and waterborne, lowering CO₂ emissions.
- Up to 50% reduction in rear-end collision risk; safer yard operations.
- Up to 12% energy savings per train; supports CO₂ reduction and modal shift to rail.
- Strengthens EU leadership in rail technology.

Flagship Initiative 3

Resilient and Recoverable Railway System

To address emerging threats from among others climate change, cyber-physical attacks (hybrid threats), and the need for dual use of the rail infrastructure to expand the capabilities regarding military mobility, the Re²Rail flagship integrate dual-purpose resilience strategies by increasing the resilience of the railway infrastructure as well as the availability of these assets through reduced maintenance efforts and enabling the rail infrastructure for military mobility. This Flagship Initiative addresses both rail freight and passenger in addition to addressing aspects related to intermodal transport.

A future resilient railway operation needs to re-consider the operational value of individual assets in the railway system. It integrates reinforcement of the asset capabilities, climate adaptation, secure protocols, and cyber-physical redundancy to ensure uninterrupted service under extreme stress.

The Resilient and Recoverable Railway System requires comprehensive resilient multimodal (under single contract) and intermodal (separate contracts) integration to create a robust European transport network and service offers, that maintains essential mobility services during climate emergencies, cyber-physical attacks, severe incidents, system failures and military mobility requirements. This vision centres on crisis-adaptive platforms connecting rail with other transport modes through hardened APIs and the resilient Train Planning System (TPS), which evolves to emergency-responsive coordination integrating real-time data from railways and backup transportation modes during disruptions. In metropolitan contexts, this requires coordinated crisis-management frameworks linking mainline, urban and metro operational control centres, ensuring continuity of passenger flows, protected transfers, and structured disruption communication across interconnected

networks.

A resilient railway system requires coordination across infrastructure managers and operators of any kind with different elements: redundant protocols ensuring system recovery capabilities, while mathematical optimisation, AI and Quantum Computing supported by digital twins will enable complex real time crisis optimisation coordinating backup schedules, emergency capacity, and evacuation flows while maintaining social cohesion through preserved community connectivity. This comprehensive approach transforms the rail system into a crisis-resistant mobility ecosystem that maintains essential connectivity and social resilience during disruptions while delivering a more efficient but also more resilient and recoverable European railway system by 2038.

Military mobility refers to a set of measures and capabilities that enable the swift, smooth and unimpeded cross-border movement of troops, military equipment and materiel in times of peace, crisis and armed conflict. Key areas for the implementation of these measures include transport infrastructure, regulatory, legal and political frameworks, digital tools, and effective coordination within a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. It should cover the required loading gauge, train length and weight requirements and addressing special operation requirement of military mobility.

- Considering part of the rail system as a military critical infrastructure that need to be protected.
- Incorporating “military-grade” cyber and electronic protection where needed to avoid accidents or destructions.
- Recognising major metropolitan interchange hubs and energy/telecommunications assets as critical infrastructure requiring reinforced physical and cyber protection.
- Creating enough resilience in terms of energy and telecommunications to the system, including resilience against small drone attacks.

- Ensuring redundant power supply and communications continuity in underground and dense urban rail environments, where infrastructure concentration increases vulnerability.
- Integrating the rail technology with space-based technology, either to replace vulnerable groundbased systems, improve reliability and performance or to reduce costs.
- Designing the next generation secure system that can make use of the latest digital/technical capabilities.
- Migration strategies.

Harmonised resilience requirements across the European rail network ensure consistent emergency response capabilities across borders during disaster reliefs, cyber-attacks, or general crisis situations. Comprehensive accessible emergency procedures and simplified interfaces accommodating all users regardless of abilities, ensuring no one is left behind during crises including solutions for multilingual visual and audio alerts, PRM compliant evacuation routes, cognitive accessibility support during high-stress situations. They also provide the additional benefit of improved maintenance and performance, as well as increased availability of the network in normal times.

In metropolitan contexts, harmonised accessibility and emergency communication standards must align with urban public transport data models and passenger information systems to ensure coherent and intelligible crisis communication across mainline and urban rail services.

Identifying and applying in real networks the requirements for resilient railway operations and the necessary measures and technologies, including those needed to maintain operations and maintenance even in the event of a loss of essential personnel, is part of the work of this Flagship Initiative.

Prior to the R&I project, studies are needed to consider climate change, identify affected routes, and develop necessary measures for the sustainable protection of the relevant railway infrastructure. A key focus is basic research into the requirements

for resilient railway operations and the necessary measures and technologies, including those needed to maintain operations even in the event of a loss of essential personnel. Furthermore, concepts must be developed to maintain railway operations when communications and IT are disrupted or unavailable. Furthermore, research activities are required to determine how maintenance work on railway infrastructure can be enabled with a high degree of robotisation.

Climate adaptation strategies should explicitly include urban heat-island effects, flood-prone underground infrastructure, and drainage resilience in metropolitan rail systems, which are particularly exposed to extreme weather events. Robotic and remote inspection technologies may be prioritised for tunnel and confined urban environments where access is constrained during crisis situations.

Definition of R&R:

- Addressing • State of the art rail systems can resist to stress but at a certain time service might be disrupted and time is needed to recover a nominal service.
- Recovery allows to move from a disrupted service to an acceptable level of service, sometime different than the initial nominal service. Recovery requires to assess degradation, to coordinate, to repair and to restart operation.
- A more robust railway system resists longer to stress (or to higher stresses) and nominal services are recovered faster.
- A resilient railway system, should minimize disruption and allows to restore fast minimum service (Presilience) before full recovery.
- An antifragile system is robust and resilient. It prevent stresses, adapts to avoid disruption and learn from stress to mitigation stress occurrence and impacts.

Flagship Initiative 3

Resilient and Recoverable Railway System

Pre-deployment coordinated activities across EU and associated R&I

Pre-deployment is essential because the European resilience levels that Re²Rail envisions cannot be achieved through isolated national implementations, and require testing and validation at EU scale and collaboration across authorities from different Countries. The effort that the European Union is currently doing in addressing both military mobility and climate change can be capitalised with such EU-wide and ambitious PPP programme among the sector with the public authorities.

Areas of pre-deployment and associated research and innovation coordinated activities for a resilient and recoverable railway across the EU

1. A cyber secured railway network

a. Context

The increasing digitalisation and connectivity of Europe's railway systems—driven by ERTMS, ATO, digital platforms, and IoT-based infrastructure—have significantly expanded the sector's vulnerability to cyber threats. The interconnected nature of rail services demands a harmonised cybersecurity approach across EU Member States.

This vulnerability is particularly acute in metropolitan and urban rail systems (metro, suburban and tram/light rail), where highly automated operations, integrated operational control centres (OCCs), passenger information platforms, and public-facing digital services create expanded cyber-physical attack surfaces.

Urban rail environments combine signalling, rolling stock control, energy management, CCTV, ticketing, retail integration, and multimodal data exchange within dense passenger areas, making them critical nodes in the European cyber-resilience landscape.

b. Objective

By 2038, the objective is to achieve a harmonised, resilient, and proactive cybersecurity framework for the European railway network, integrated into both legacy and future digital rail systems, and fully aligned with the EU cybersecurity framework (NIS2 Directive, Cyber Resilience Act, etc.).

c. Pre-deployment activities

- Develop, test, and validate cybersecurity-by-design architectures for rail systems,
- Safe and trusted AI-enabled threat detection systems,
- secure communication protocols, continuous and rapid information sharing across stakeholders,
- interoperable incident response mechanisms for rail-specific assets (e.g. signalling, rolling stock, control centres).
- coordinated incident response frameworks between mainline infrastructure managers and urban public transport operators at major urban mobility hubs to prevent cascading operational failures.

- To anticipate evolving cyber threats, avoid fragmented national responses, and ensure secure interoperability across the Single European Railway Area.
- At least 3 cross-border testbeds and living labs in critical rail and urban hubs with high automation levels.
- Enable remote traffic operations (RTO) for seamless handover between control centres during cyber or physical disruptions.
- Integrate cyber-physical protection systems for critical infrastructure, with AI-driven surveillance and anti-drone technologies.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail.

- Foundational work through its System Pillar, including the publication of cybersecurity guidelines.
- Demonstration works are expected to take place in the second half of the EU-Rail programme.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

Future efforts must focus on:

- real time resilience analytics, detection protection, resolution,
- dynamic risk assessment tools;
- integration of quantum-safe cryptography, and cyber training for operational staff;
- collaborative frameworks for sharing threat intelligence across national rail operators are needed.

2. Intelligent video gates

a. Context

As rail freight aims to become more competitive, automated and seamless border control of wagons and cargo is essential. Intelligent Video Gates (IVGs) are emerging as a key enabler for digitalising freight operations by allowing the automatic identification, inspection, and tracking of trains and wagons at terminal entry and exit points. Developed under Shift2Rail and further enhanced under EU-Rail, IVGs leverage AI-powered video analytics to increase transparency, safety, and efficiency in freight terminals. The concept has begun to be applied to passenger services to increase control of rolling stock condition mainly for EMUs/DMUs, being able to identify train composition and exchange information across the supply chain (RUs, IMs, ECMs).

b. Objective

By 2035, the objective is to deploy Intelligent Video Gates widely across European rail freight terminals, enabling near real time monitoring, automated asset recognition (e.g. wagon number, hazardous materials placards), and seamless integration with digital freight platforms and customs systems. Also, to integrate IVGs or Railway CheckPoints concepts in singular points such as cross-border connections for passenger services or connections to rolling stock workshops.

c. Pre-deployment activities

- Design and validate interoperable IVG prototypes.
- Establish data-sharing protocols that are secure, GDPR-compliant, and harmonised across operators and

Flagship Initiative 3

Resilient and Recoverable Railway System

Member States.

- To overcome current manual inspection bottlenecks, reduce terminal dwell times, and ensure compatibility across different terminal infrastructures and operators.
- Deployment and testing could focus on major freight corridors and terminals.
- Cross-border pilot sites (at least 3) on TEN-T Core Network Corridors could also be targeted in order to ensure a European coordinated approach.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail.

- On the basis of the work done in Shift2Rail (FR8Rail III project) where IVGs were developed
- The concept was further matured within EU-RAIL (FP5-TRANS4M-R project) for freight and extended to passenger services at either pre-operational or operational levels. Proofs of concept have been successfully tested in operational environments (in Sweden, The Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Germany)

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

- Advanced safe and trusted AI algorithms for anomaly detection (e.g. damaged wagons or EMUs),
- Integration with blockchain-based freight traceability tools, standardised APIs for terminal management systems, and solutions for energy efficiency of IVG systems.
- Socio-technical aspects, such as operator training and change management, must also be addressed.

3. Minimum viable operations

a. Context

The ability of Europe's rail system to continue safe and coordinated operations under degraded, emergency, or crisis conditions—such as cyberattacks, natural disasters, or crisis situations—depends on a new framework for Minimum Viable Operations (MVO). This includes harmonised rules, technical fallback procedures, resilient planning, secure digital operations, and human-system integration to maintain continuity and safety across all operating scenarios and with degraded systems.

In dense urban areas, where high-capacity metro, suburban, and light rail systems carry the majority of daily passengers, disruption has immediate socio-economic consequences. Minimum Viable Operations must therefore explicitly consider high-frequency urban environments, dense passenger flows, and interconnected interchange hubs where failures can rapidly cascade across multiple networks.

b. Objective

By 2035, implement and validate a harmonised, cross-border MVO framework across key TEN-T corridors, ensuring rail operations can safely continue under disruption through ERTMS-based fallback profiles, resilient infrastructure planning, cyber-protected operations, and decision support systems linked to live asset data. The final objective is to validate a unified European approach to safe degraded-mode operations that ensures continuity of passenger and freight services under crisis, supports military mobility objectives, enhances resilience to climate and cyber threats, and reduces downtime through predictive and automated systems.

c. Pre-deployment activities

- Implement and test harmonised operational rules for emergency scenarios, including civil defence and military mobility.
- Integrate and adapt MVO profile for ERTMS with reduced but safe operating functions under degraded communications or signalling.
- Implement EU-wide planning rules for infrastructure resilience and recovery.
- Include metropolitan resilience planning, addressing underground infrastructure, high-density stations, and intermodal hubs vulnerable to climate and cyber-physical threats.
- Run Traffic and Capacity Management Systems (TMS/CMS) with live asset condition data, including power, tunnels, and rolling stock.
- Test cyber-isolation protocols (“locked-up” mode) for critical zones and simulate nomadic cyber threats.
- Validate augmented human-machine interfaces (HMI) under high-stress conditions.
- Validate HMI solutions for dense passenger environments, supporting safe evacuation guidance, multilingual alerts, and accessible emergency communication across urban rail systems.
- Validate supply-chains under stress-conditions.
- Validate infrastructure to meet dual-use (civil/military) standards and develop autonomous maintenance capabilities for fallback lines.
- Where relevant, ensure that metropolitan feeder corridors and strategic urban nodes are included in dual-use resilience validation, avoiding bottlenecks in crisis mobility scenarios.

R&I activities should be prioritised along high-value TEN-T corridors, especially where cross-border coordination, civil protection relevance, or military interoperability is critical. Pilot implementations should occur at operational control centres (OCCs), intermodal hubs, and fallback lines.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail.

- Activities on simulating cross-border scenarios for CMS and TMS in FA1.
- Development of ATO solution (up to GoA4) over ETCS in FA2.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

- Field validation of harmonised emergency operational rules, with joint IM-RU-military exercises;
- Include coordinated exercises involving urban rail operators and transport authorities to validate multi-level crisis management.
- Finalisation of the ERTMS MVO functional set and procedures for switching between full and degraded modes;
- Full integration of fallback communications and localised train control under cyber-isolated conditions;
- Development of ERA-approved planning handbooks, including recovery timetables and climate stress design criteria;

Flagship Initiative 3

Resilient and Recoverable Railway System

- Operationalisation of AI-enhanced decision support tools and SOC (Security Operations Centre) integration with CMS platforms (including AI-enhanced for GRC Cyber Crisis Center and CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team));
- Apply AI-supported passenger-flow and crowd modelling tools in dense urban multimodal stations to support safe evacuation and service prioritisation during crises.
- Standardisation of dual-use infrastructure design and robotic maintenance capabilities for fallback route readiness.
- Restoring minimum service and recovering to nominal condition requires rapid assessment of damage and immediate access to replacement materials and components. This implies the need for a resilient and responsive supply chain. Therefore efforts for harmonization of infrastructure and rolling stock key components should be part of the supporting R&I activities;
- Standardised processes investigation for the failure of centralised control and monitoring units, as well as technologies that allow for provisional decentralised operation and oversight. In particular, provisional redundancies in train routing (such as switch points and signalling).
- Explore climate change impacts and investigate the development of early warning systems.

4. Self-standing operation under massively disturbed conditions in adjacent networks

a. Context

The increasing risk of large-scale disruptions—whether from cyberattacks, climate extremes, or regional conflict—necessitates the ability for rail networks to operate in isolated or “emergency island” mode. Selfstanding operation under such conditions requires decentralised control, localised communications, fallback rolling stock, and resilient asset management tools independent of central systems or public networks.

Nevertheless, a solution should be implemented for making those “island” able to communicate and allowing interoperability and connectivity across the European network.

b. Objective

By 2035, enable certified, safe, and interoperable self-standing rail operations (“island mode”) on key strategic corridors, including fallback communication, decentralised and reconfigurable traffic control, resilient positioning, and autonomous infrastructure monitoring—ensuring operational continuity during extended disruptions and supporting civil and military emergency response.

c. Pre-deployment activities

- Implement and test local interoperable communication technologies (e.g. UWB, direct radio, secure satellite links) for train-to-train, train-to-trackside as well as trackside to trackside connectivity in isolated areas.
- Validate autonomous route-setting, relative positioning, and localised traffic management systems (TMS/CMS) on the basis of a harmonised solution for use when cut off from centralised networks.
- Deploy augmented satellite train positioning (ASTP) with cyber-resilient GNSS solutions for fallback navigation.
- Validate resilient positioning shall be based on multi sensor fusion (GNSS, inertial, odometry and complementary sensing) to achieve the required SIL levels under normal and degraded conditions
- Pilot resilient rolling stock tailored to operate on secondary and fallback lines.

- Implement AI-based asset monitoring and satellite-supported diagnostics (e.g. for terrain shifts or bridge health) in isolation mode.
- Test automated track clearance and demining technologies for dual-use operations under defence or emergency scenarios.
- Validate interoperability and connectivity across the European rail network.
- Deploy condition-based maintenance systems optimized for increased reliability including embedded sensors in climate-vulnerable infrastructure components monitoring thermal stress, moisture ingress, and structural integrity in real-time, automated component replacement scheduling based on climate exposure history, and harmonized European climate maintenance protocols ensuring consistent asset protection across Member States.
- Validate remote maintenance capabilities for extreme climate and cyber-attack scenarios featuring satellite-connected maintenance diagnostic systems operating independently of terrestrial networks during extreme weather, remote-controlled maintenance vehicles capable of operating safely during hazardous climate conditions, and AI-powered predictive failure analysis preventing climate-related asset failures before they occur.

To maintain safe, reliable operations even when central systems are unavailable—ensuring continued movement of passengers, freight, and defence assets during natural disasters, cyberattacks, or geopolitical crises. This supports EU priorities on climate resilience, military mobility, and infrastructure sovereignty.

Considerable number of targets within the capabilities to be developed for the rail sector can be enhanced in connection with the Earth Observation Component of the European Space Programme developed by EUSPA, Copernicus, especially with their services component based on satellite monitoring technology, measurements and data available from the current Sentinel missions and their further evolution, and even the Copernicus Contributing Missions (CCMs).

Target cross-border TEN-T corridors and fallback rail nodes near high-risk regions or critical infrastructure. Pilot «island mode» operations in corridors with existing military mobility relevance and climate vulnerability.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail.

- Work on localised TMS/CMS integration, are ongoing in FA1.
- Predictive maintenance platforms are ongoing in FA3.
- Satellite-based positioning work is ongoing in both the System Pillar and FA2.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

- Develop and certify fallback communications protocols integrated with FRMCS and satellite constellations (e.g. IRIS², GovSatCom).
- Test and validate decentralised train control systems, short-range headway management, and autonomous local routing algorithms.
- Finalise ASTP safety cases and integration procedures with ETCS/ATO for degraded networks.

Flagship Initiative 3

Resilient and Recoverable Railway System

- Standardise specifications for minimal viable rolling stock and track elements for fallback service.
- Expand cybersecure AI-based diagnostics and confirm satellite imagery as a trusted asset monitoring channel.
- Integrate dual-use clearance and demining robotics with EU defence logistics and resilience operations.
- Create and distribute operational handbooks and training for infrastructure managers (IMs) and railway undertakings (RUs) for self-standing operation scenarios.
- Research integrated maintenance-operations systems for climate/cybersecurity resilience developing maintenance protocols that maintain asset availability during climate emergencies while ensuring safety standards, automated maintenance priority systems reallocating resources based on real time climate/military threat assessment, and cross-border maintenance coordination protocols enabling rapid European mutual assistance during widespread climate events.
- Address risks and mitigations in relation to blackout of energy and telecommunication system.

5. Integration for resilience and recovery

a. Context

To maintain operational continuity during major crises—whether caused by cyberattacks, natural disasters, or geopolitical conflict—Europe’s rail network must ensure that mainlines and backup secondary lines can interoperate under stress. This includes seamless rerouting, rapid infrastructure recovery, and support for the fast deployment of military assets. Integration of resilient digital systems, standardised rolling stock and infrastructure, and automated processes is key to delivering this objective.

In major metropolitan areas, where mainline corridors interface with urban rail networks, resilience must also address high-density passenger systems whose disruption can rapidly amplify socio-economic impacts and constrain corridor recovery capacity.

b. Objective

By 2038, ensure full-scale deployment of resilient, dual-use railway capabilities, enabling rapid recovery, remote control operations, and seamless interoperability between main and fallback networks—supporting both civilian traffic continuity and 96-hour EU-wide military deployment across the TEN-T network.

c. Pre-deployment activities

- Deploy modular and precast infrastructure solutions featuring plug-and-play trackside equipment designed for rapid replacement during extreme weather events, to restore thermally affected rail tracks, damaged lines or bridges within hours or days.
- Assess applicability of modular replacement concepts to urban rail infrastructure, including tunnel systems, substations, and station equipment in climate-exposed metropolitan areas.
- Pilot wind-resistant infrastructure standards including enhanced structure design specifications for sustained winds up to 150 km/h, active wind monitoring systems with automatic speed restriction protocols, and aerodynamically optimised rolling stock profiles for high-wind corridor operations.
- Deploy climate-hardened assets designs capable of operating in extreme temperature conditions from -40°C to +60°C ambient temperature, including enhanced HVAC systems, thermally stable braking systems, and climate-adaptive traction control for both passenger and freight applications.

- For metropolitan rail systems, validate resilience of underground and elevated infrastructure to heat island effects, extreme rainfall, and thermal stress, including enhanced drainage and ventilation systems.
- Validate flood-resistant rolling stock systems with waterproof traction equipment up to 300mm water depth, emergency buoyancy systems for passenger coaches, and rapid-drain designs for freight wagons, tested on flood-prone corridor sections.
- Implement autonomous climate-adaptive maintenance systems featuring weather-resistant robotic inspection units capable of operating in temperatures from -30°C to +50°C, automated track geometry correction systems responding to thermal expansion effects, and drone-based infrastructure monitoring with enhanced sensors for climate-related deterioration detection.
- Develop input into standards for dual-use assets (e.g., rolling stock, traction, gauge clearance) to enable traffic on both main and fallback lines (also in context of military mobility).
- Automate military convoy tracking, authorisation, and exceptional routing, including NRBQ (nuclear, radiological, biological, chemical) detection.
- Secure power supply resilience for signalling and telecom systems via decentralised, autonomous energy sources (renewables, batteries, fuel cells, hydrogen).

These activities ensure that during disruptions, Europe's rail system can continue operations securely and efficiently, enabling fast civil recovery and uninterrupted military logistics.

- Priority focus on TEN-T corridors, cross-border nodes, terminals, and strategic fallback routes - particularly those relevant for defence mobility or climate risk, e.g. Eastern frontiers, Alpine crossings, and coastal or flood-prone areas.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already in EU-Rail.

- EU-Rail has initiated activities on modular infrastructure components developed in FA3.
- Work on climate change adaptation done in FA4 (risk assessment, adaptation, mitigation, etc...).

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

- Validate in demonstrators remote traffic operations (RTO) and cross-border OCC fallback procedures using degraded communications.
- Field-test and standardise modular bridge and telecom infrastructure for EU-wide rapid deployment.
- Pilot automatic gauge-change, dual-power locomotives, and harmonised TMS/CMS interfaces for mainline-secondary integration.
- Investigate harmonised interfaces between mainline CMS/TMS and urban traffic management systems to support integrated recovery planning.
- Deploy AI-enhanced cyber/physical surveillance systems, including anti-drone countermeasures integrated with operational control centres.
- Certify energy-resilient signalling and telecom assets, capable of autonomous operation for ≥ 72 hours using renewable or hybrid systems.
- Develop advanced materials research for extreme climate railway applications including ultra-high temperature rail steels maintaining structural integrity up to 70°C rail surface temperature, composite

materials for trackside equipment with enhanced UV and thermal cycling resistance, and self-monitoring smart materials with embedded climate condition sensing capabilities.

- Investigate climate-resilient infrastructure protection technologies including automated infrastructure shading systems for extreme heat protection, rapid-deployment flood barriers for railway corridors, and real time structural health monitoring systems detecting climate-induced infrastructure degradation with predictive failure analysis. Investigate aspects related to reducing the need for human intervention in case of extreme temperature.
- Research adaptive rolling stock thermal management systems featuring AI-powered climate control optimising energy consumption during extreme temperature operations, phase-change material cooling systems for critical onboard electronics, and predictive thermal stress monitoring for traction motors and braking systems under harsh climate conditions.
- Develop harmonised climate resilience standards for European rolling stock and infrastructure establishing unified testing protocols for extreme climate operation validation, standardised climate adaptation retrofit specifications for existing fleet and infrastructure.
- Validate in demonstrators integrated climate-security systems combining climate monitoring with cybersecurity threat detection recognising that extreme weather events can create vulnerabilities exploited by cyber threats, and developing resilient communication systems maintaining operation during combined climate-cyber incidents affecting multiple infrastructure domains simultaneously.
- Research maintenance robotics for extreme disruptions AI-powered diagnostic systems detecting climate-specific asset deterioration patterns invisible to human inspection, and swarm robotics for coordinated large-scale infrastructure inspection during post-storm recovery operations.
- Develop predictive maintenance algorithms for climate-stressed assets featuring machine learning models analysing the correlation between climate exposure patterns and asset degradation rates, digital twin technology modelling infrastructure behaviour under various climate scenarios to optimise maintenance timing, and quantum computing applications for complex optimisation of maintenance resource allocation during multiple simultaneous climate events.
- Investigate advanced climate-resistant maintenance materials and techniques including selfhealing materials for infrastructure components exposed to thermal cycling, nanotechnologyenhanced protective coatings extending asset life in harsh climate conditions, and bio-inspired maintenance solutions adapting natural climate resistance mechanisms for railway infrastructure applications.

Impacts

Service quality enhancement

Enhanced resilience and digitalisation in rail services lead to greater reliability and punctuality, even during crises or cyber incidents. Automated inspections and improved surveillance reduce delays and human error **by 50%**, fostering user confidence in both passenger and freight services.

Cost effective solutions

Proactive investments in resilience, cybersecurity, and digital technologies significantly reduce long-term costs by minimising emergency repairs **by 20-30%**, manual processes, and service downtimes. Embedding security and automation at the design phase avoids costly retrofits and boosts operational efficiency.

System optimisation

Flexible infrastructure, secure digital platforms, and real time data integration enable dynamic rerouting, optimised traffic management, and more efficient use of network capacity and terminal resources. These capabilities support faster recovery from disruptions and higher throughput without major infrastructure expansion. Increase terminal throughput **by 15–20%** without major infrastructure upgrades.

Resilience and improved security

A harmonised approach to infrastructure reinforcement, cybersecurity, and dual-use capabilities strengthens the rail system's role in both civil and defence contexts. Advanced surveillance, anomaly detection, and cybersecurity frameworks ensure continued operations and protection against both physical and digital threats. **Achieve 99 % system availability** during cyber incidents and maintain **85% capacity during extreme weather events** through real time system monitoring, condition-based maintenance, and adaptive operations based on real time data. Enable dual-use capacity on 6 strategic corridors supporting both civilian operations and 96-hour EU-wide military deployment capability.



Flagship Initiative 4

Innovative EU High-Speed Rail Corridors

Europe's high-speed rail network is central to achieving faster, cleaner, and more connected mobility across the continent. As the EU pursues ambitious modal shift targets and seeks to triple high-speed rail traffic by 2050, the sector faces significant challenges: fragmented national approaches to high-speed development, rising infrastructure and rolling stock costs, inconsistent energy integration, and the need for seamless cross-border interoperability. New high-speed development must evolve beyond today's fragmented architecture, integrating next-generation digital and clean technologies within a single European framework.

At the end of 2025 European Commission unveiled “a comprehensive plan to accelerate the development of high-speed rail across the EU, offering passengers significantly reduced travel times. By boosting fast, comfortable, safe and reliable rail services, the plan supports the EU's twin goals of becoming carbon-neutral by 2050 and strengthening Europe's global competitiveness.”¹¹ The aim of this plan to accelerate investments and harmonising a truly interoperable European high-speed rail network, creating an attractive and competitive framework for rail services, supporting a strong, innovative and harmonised European rail sector and strengthening EU-level governance to coordinate and deliver the vision, fits well under the remit of this Flagship Initiative and the PPP structure of a Joint Undertaking.

The European Commission encouraged to bring the needed underlying technologies to the market, indicating in the high-speed Plan that “the rail supply industry, infrastructure managers and railway companies must continue joint research under the

2028-2034 Horizon Europe programme and the proposed European Competitiveness Fund”.

The Innovative EU high-speed rail corridors Flagship Initiative addresses today's challenges by developing a harmonised, fully digital, and climate and cyber-security resilient high-speed system that ensures efficient, zero-emission operations across national borders. By unifying traffic management, advancing new technologies, deploying digital twins, pioneering materials innovation, and implementing predictive maintenance within an interoperable European model, this initiative enables dramatic improvements in reliability, cost efficiency, and energy performance.

Those improvements are essential for the realisation of an EU high-speed network. To complete the currently planned TEN-T high-speed rail network by 2040, the European Commission estimated that EUR 345 billion will be required. An independent EU-Rail study estimated that going beyond the TEN-T and tripling the size of the existing EU high-speed rail network at speeds of 250 km/h or above would cost more, but it will also bring significant bigger socio-economic benefit to Europe¹². Every euro saved during implementation thanks to pre-deployment activities, every unit of electrical energy not consumed and every improvement in asset availability and performance resulting from this Flagship Initiative will directly strengthen the business case and support the successful system-wide implementation of the EU high-speed network.

As indicated in the EC High Speed Plan, “transport infrastructure works as a network, so if a small segment does not comply or is not operational, it can hamper the efficiency and competitiveness of the system as a whole”. Through harmonised corridors implemented as early pre-deployment pilots, the initiative will reduce the risks faced by early adopters and build

¹¹ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/commission-launches-plan-accelerate-high-speed-rail-across-europe-2025-11-05_en

¹² <https://rail-research.europa.eu/publications/smart-and-affordable-rail-services-in-the-eu-a-socio-economic-and-environmental-study-for-high-speed-in-2030-and-2050/>

investor confidence in system-wide deployment. This will ultimately contribute to reducing travel times between major European urban nodes, create seamless multimodal links with regional networks and airports, and strengthen Europe's industrial and technological sovereignty in high-speed mobility. This Flagship Initiative also address additional key socio-economic objectives: balancing the benefits of high-speed connectivity while mitigating territorial exclusion through integrated planning and ensuring equitable accessibility to all regions.

The flagship builds on outcomes of Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking, notably on ERTMS, traffic management systems (TMS), asset management and cybersecurity.

While Europe's Rail has provided foundational core technologies, this flagship represents the first dedicated, system-level focus on integrated high-speed innovation at European scale. The initiative will pioneer harmonised pre-deployment corridors serving as early implementation pilots for future pan-European high-speed expansion, testing new technologies – including ETCS Level 2-only operations, predictive maintenance, and harmonised EU capacity management—under real operational conditions, ensuring safe, reliable, and cost-effective scaling.



Flagship Initiative 4

Innovative EU High-Speed Rail Corridors

Pre-deployment coordinated activities across EU and associated R&I

Pre-deployment is essential because the transformation that Innovative EU high-speed rail corridors envisions cannot be implemented through isolated national initiatives. Harmonised European high-speed rail mobility requires coordinated testing and validation across multiple Member States to prove interoperability, operational efficiency, and economic viability at system level before large-scale deployment.

Areas of pre-deployment and associated research and innovation coordinated activities for or Innovative EU high-speed rail corridors

1. High Speed automated operations, modular onboard (including full Advanced Safe Train Positioning) and full trackside CCS system solutions for ETCS only operations

a. Context

As indicated in the Flagship Initiative 1 European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS), the development and deployment of higher levels of automation is key enabler to future operational efficiency, system resilience and increased flexibility across the European rail network. It will contribute significantly to improving service reliability, optimising network capacity, and reducing operational costs while maintaining the highest safety standards. In this context, the automation of the high-speed rail network should be considered a strategic opportunity for the European rail sector, enabling more efficient traffic management, better utilisation of infrastructure, and enhanced passenger service performance across European corridors. The progressive introduction of automated operations up to Grades of Automation (GoA) 3 and 4, supported by modular onboard architectures and advanced safe train positioning technologies, will facilitate a more flexible and scalable deployment of rail services, supported by the new digital railway capabilities. Such technologies will allow high-speed rolling stock to integrate seamlessly with next-generation traffic management systems, enhance interoperability and support real-time operational decision-making. Additionally, in order to address the challenges of increasing costs and complexity it is essential for pre-deployment activities on a full trackside CCS to fully test, validate and demonstrate the operational and costs benefits of an harmonised approach for high-speed rail operation.

Specific pre-deployment activities are considered in this Flagship initiative based on the R&I and harmonisation activities conducted in Flagship Initiative 1, becoming the vehicle that ensures the fast adaptation, validation and integration of automated operations, modular onboard and full trackside CCS system solution in the highly innovated, competitive and visible context of European High-Speed operations. It is of utmost importance to ensure interoperability, safety, operational harmonisation, and compatibility with existing and future signalling and communication systems, including the evolution of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS).

b. Objective

By 2036, following the completion of the planned pre-deployment activities:

- There will be ATO GoA3 in at least four cross-border high-speed European corridors using harmonised specifications and operational processes, and safety frameworks, as well as relying on equipment from different suppliers

- There will be a fully tested and validated modular on-board system including full Advanced Safe Train Positioning and perception systems enabling reliable and interoperable automated train operations on the high-speed rail network.
- There will be a fully validated end-to-end CCS trackside (with ETCS Level 2) implementation using simplified and harmonised specifications and processes on high-speed rail network

c. Pre-deployment activities

Pre-deployment activity 1: ATO GoA 3

- Pre-deployment and operation of ATO GoA 3 systems on high-speed European corridors across at least 4 Member States, including trans-border high-speed operations by 2036.
- Test and validate at high-speed, including:
 - The definition and application of harmonised operational rules
 - The consolidation of mature ATO specifications
- Revision of processes and associated training/upskilling for staff, with focus on human factors and cultural aspects, in at least five Member States.

Pre-deployment activity 2: future CCS onboard

- Pre-deployment of modular on-board system including full Advanced Safe Train Positioning in High-Speed Train across at least four Member States, including cross-border high-speed operations by 2036.
- Test and validate at high-speed, including:
 - The consolidation of mature specifications supporting modular onboard architectures and advanced positioning functions

Pre-deployment activity 3: CCS trackside system ETCS L2 based installation

- Pre-deployment of an end-to-end CCS trackside (with ETCS Level 2) implementation using simplified and harmonised specifications and processes on high-speed rail network by 2036
- Test and validate at high-speed , including:
 - Harmonised operational rules and L2 engineering rules together, including degraded mode

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will indirectly build on the ongoing work carried out in EU-RAIL through the EU-Rail input into Flagship Initiative 1 European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS) R&I and harmonisation activities and will aim at translating these results into pre-deployment and operational implementation in the high-speed railway network.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

The efforts on High Speed R&I and associated harmonisation activities will be corresponding to the ones identified within the scope of Flagship Initiative 1 - European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS) as well as any specific activities for High Speed.

Flagship Initiative 4

Innovative EU High-Speed Rail Corridors

2. Future rail radio communications in high-speed operation

a. Context

As indicated in the Flagship Initiative 1 European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS), the development of FRMCS Edition 2 will improve the reliability and performance of high-speed rail operation. It will provide new communication capabilities supporting advanced digital railway applications, including higher levels of automation such as ATO, as well as other data-intensive operational and safety services. Reliable, high-capacity and low-latency communication systems are essential for ensuring safe and efficient railway operations at very high-speeds.

Consequently, specific pre-deployment activities shall be considered in Flagship Initiative 4 based on the R&I and harmonisation activities conducted in Flagship Initiative 1 to ensure that European high-speed rail network swiftly benefit from FRMCS next generation.

b. Objective

By 2036, following pre-deployment activities:

- There will be a tested and validated solution for high-speed rail operations available for the future rail radio communication system in Europe based on an extended use case set compared to the FRMCS Edition 1.

c. Pre-deployment activities

Pre-deployment activity : FRMCS Edition 2

- Extend the pre-deployment campaign for the FRMCS Edition 2 in high-speed rail operation across at least four Member States, including trans-border high speed operations by 2036.
- Test and validate at high-speed, including:
 - Consolidation of mature specifications for FRMCS Edition 2
 - Confirm in an ambitious high-speed operational setup both the Satellite Navigation for Safety-Critical Applications as well as the European Satellite Communication for strategic resilience

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will indirectly build on the ongoing work carried out in EU-RAIL through the EU-Rail input into Flagship Initiative 1 European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS) R&I and harmonisation activities and will aim at translating these results into pre-deployment and operational implementation in the high-speed railway network.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

The efforts on High Speed R&I and associated harmonisation activities will be limited corresponding to the ones identified within the scope of Flagship Initiative 1 - European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS) as well as any specific activities for High Speed.

3. Future rail traffic and capacity management for enhanced high-speed operations

a. Context

As indicated in the EC High Speed Plan, one of the main obstacles to boosting long-distance and cross-border passenger services is the difficulty in obtaining attractive cross-border train paths. Building on the developments initiated in the Flagship Initiative 1 European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS), as well as on regulatory aspect on the use of railway infrastructure capacity¹³, this pre-deployment activity will implement the first commercial solution addressing in a systemic way capacity planning, allocation and traffic management with a strong focus on cross-border coordination and digitalisation. By adapting fragmented national or regional traffic and capacity management systems, not designed for a truly European High Speed network, and integrating them into a standardised, distributed and interoperable platform, high-speed trains can seamlessly cross borders, reducing delays caused by incompatible scheduling, capacity allocation and operational procedures. This streamlines train path requests and optimises network use, enhancing punctuality and service efficiency.

The shift to dynamic, real-time capacity allocation is especially valuable for high-speed rail and a European rail traffic and capacity management approach will be paramount to maximise networks efficiency, ultimately creating a more resilient, user-centric, and environmentally friendly European High Speed rail network.

b. Objective

By 2035, and in parallel to the pre-deployment activities conducted in Flagship Initiative 1 European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS), Flagship Initiative 4 will ensure that a significant part of the high-speed traffic in Europe benefit from the implementation of advanced Capacity Management Systems (CMS) and Traffic Management Systems (TMS) innovations.

This will be achieved through targeted high-speed pre-deployment activities and, where relevant, the integration of customised high-speed features designed to further enhance the seamless operation of the high-speed rail network and its interface with conventional lines. The outcome will be a more efficient, reliable, and interoperable high-speed rail network, supporting real-time operational optimisation, improved capacity utilisation, and better service quality for passengers across Europe.

c. Pre-deployment activities

Extending the activities foreseen in Flagship Initiative 1, the following pre-deployment activities will be conducted:

- Pre-deployment and validation of digital systems supporting existing European framework across at least four Member States, covering a significant part of the European high-speed traffic by 2036. It will include:
 - improved planning and regulation algorithms
 - implementation of TMS to ATO link for optimised high-speed operations
 - digital operational communication systems
 - pioneering AI-supported traffic management
 - Multi-network capability to enabling seamless operation across national and regional networks.
 - Multimodal integration with airports

¹³ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the use of railway infrastructure capacity in the single European railway area, amending Directive 2012/34/EU and repealing Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 (COM(2023) 443 final)

Flagship Initiative 4

Innovative EU High-Speed Rail Corridors

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will indirectly build on the ongoing work carried out in EU-RAIL through the EU-Rail input into Flagship Initiative 1 European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS) R&I and harmonisation activities and will aim at translating these results into pre-deployment and operational implementation in the high-speed railway network.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

The Flagship Initiative 4 will develop adaptor solutions to enable the integration of harmonised specific trans-European high-speed traffic management functionalities without requiring immediate full-scale system redesign in each country or regions. These adaptors will support interoperability, rapid deployment, and tailored solutions for complex cross-border operational scenarios. At the same time they will ensure future readiness for migration into new standardised and commercially validated European solutions.

Additional efforts on High Speed R&I and associated harmonisation activities will be focusing on specific activities for High Speed not covered within the scope of Flagship Initiative 1 - European Simplified and Integrated Railway System (ESIRS).

4. Future rail traffic and capacity management for enhanced high-speed operations

a. Context

The growing digitalization and connectivity of Europe's rail networks made the sector more exposed to cyber threats and vulnerabilities. Additionally, with the creation of a connected European Network of High Speed services, new digital exchanges will be established across countries making the subject of particular relevance in this Flagship Initiative for research and pre-deployment activities. Consequently, the need for harmonised cybersecurity strategy as expressed in Flagship Initiative 3- Resilient Railway (Re²Rail) is also essential for high-speed rail networks across all EU countries.

b. Objective

By 2038, and in line with the objective of cybersecurity pre-deployment activities in Flagship Initiative 3, the most relevant cybersecurity solutions shall be pre-deployed on European high-speed rail network ensuring robust protection, operational continuity and resilience across Member States.

c. Pre-deployment activities

- Develop, test, and validate cybersecurity-by-design architectures for rail systems and demonstrate in high-speed rail operational context.
- Pre-deployment of AI-enabled threat detection systems on high-speed rail network
- Pre-deployment of interoperable incident response mechanisms for rail-specific assets on high-speed network.
- Enable remote traffic operations (RTO) on high-speed network for seamless handover between control centres during cyber or physical disruptions.

- Integrate cyber-physical protection systems for high-speed critical infrastructure, with AI-driven surveillance and anti-drone technologiesd. EU-Rail activities

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will indirectly build on the ongoing work carried out in EU-RAIL through the EU-Rail input into Flagship Initiative 3 Resilient Railway (Re²Rail) R&I and harmonisation activities and will aim at translating these results into pre-deployment and operational implementation in the high-speed railway network.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

The efforts on high-speed R&I and associated harmonisation activities will be limited corresponding to the ones identified within the scope of Flagship Initiative 3- Resilient Railway (Re²Rail) as well as any specific activities for High Speed.

5. Future rail traffic and capacity management for enhanced high-speed operations

a. Context

Infrastructure is one of the main cost drivers of the rail system. Construction, renewal and maintenance are expensive, and the Letta¹⁴ and Draghi¹⁵ reports both highlight this as a structural challenge. This challenge is even more acute for high-speed development, where new civil works and new alignments are unavoidable.

A coordinated European effort in innovation and pre-deployment activities in this Flagship Initiative aims at reducing the cost of upgrading existing lines, renewing ageing components and building new infrastructure.

Additionally, to offer passengers a seamless high-speed journey and an attractive service, both rolling stock and infrastructure assets must be capable of operating under extreme mechanical and thermal stresses, requiring sophisticated maintenance strategies to ensure safety, reliability, and cost-effectiveness. Traditional time-based maintenance approaches result in over-maintenance of some components and under-maintenance of others, increasing lifecycle costs and reducing availability.

The European high-speed rail network is a critical infrastructure that may be affected by external disruptions. It is therefore essential also to preventively ensure that the system is protected against such disruptions. While cyber security aspect is addressed in the previous pre-deployment activity, this activity will focus on enhancing climate resilience.

b. Objective

The objective is to create a European wide approach to developing cost effective and climate resilient infrastructure and maintainable high-speed assets.

For infrastructure, this includes standardised families of core asset types, modular and automated construction methods and harmonised engineering solutions that can be deployed in multiple Member States. The goals are to reduce lifecycle costs, shorten construction and renewal time, improve safety and ergonomics and ensure long term maintainability.

An additional objective is to create economies of scale. When infrastructure components and construction methods are shared across Europe, costs fall and industrial capacity can grow. This avoids

14 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf>

15 https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/draghi-report_en

Flagship Initiative 4

Innovative EU High-Speed Rail Corridors

the current situation in which each project develops its own methods and interfaces, often without considering long term maintenance or cross border reusability.

Ensuring the availability of the high-speed network under all climate conditions and addressing future climate change challenges is another key objective for providing a reliable and resilient transport service.

Predictive maintenance enabled by digital twins, AI analytics, and comprehensive sensor networks offers the opportunity to optimise maintenance scheduling, reduce unplanned failures, extend asset lifecycles, and significantly reduce operational costs while contributing to the overall safety of the future European high-speed network. This applies to both for rolling stock and infrastructure, building on the groundwork already conducted by EU-Rail. Through this Flagship Initiative, harmonised maintenance approaches for high-speed rail can be validated across diverse European countries, paving the way for industrial-scale and European-wide future implementation.

c. Pre-deployment activities

Pre deployment activities 1: harmonised infrastructure assets

Pre deployment activities will initially focus on several core infrastructure domains where standardisation and industrialisation would have immediate effect. The following areas remain open for expansion:

- I. Track and civil assets

Turnouts are among the most expensive and sensitive assets of high-speed rail network. A small set of European reference families can reduce fragmentation and enable seamless cross-border high-speed operation. Slab track systems, with long life and high capital cost, will benefit from interoperable platforms, while transition modules between slab and ballast (widely used) are vulnerable to accelerated degradation when inconsistent.

- II. Power and overhead line systems

Masts, foundations and structural elements vary significantly across countries, complicating high-speed train operation and maintenance. A shared set of structural types will reduce cost and simplify spare management of the future European High-Speed Network. Neutral sections and switching modules should not be project specific.

- III. Lineside components

Cable routes, troughing and chambers are installed on every high-speed line and involve substantial labour, making them strong candidates for modularisation and automation. Lineside cabinets and equipment bases are repetitive and suited to consistent physical and spatial interfaces.

- IV. Structures and drainage

Bridge and culvert typologies are major cost drivers in high-speed rail construction. Reference designs will avoid repeated engineering efforts and promote cross-border standardisation. Drainage systems, earthworks and soil protection measures are widely used, maintenance intensive and vary considerably between Member States. Standardisation and best-practice design will enhance network reliability and reduce long-term maintenance costs.

- V. Access and inspection

Trackside walkways and access solutions appear in thousands of locations on high-speed lines. A small

number of shared modules will simplify design, installation and future upgrades while maintaining safety for high-speed operations. Improved access supports logistics, routine maintenance, and rapid intervention, all essential for safe, efficient, and reliable high-speed service.

These domains will form the basis for innovation on which pre-deployment activities can validate a European standardised approach.

Defined pre-deployment will consist in installing, running and validating those assets across at least four Member States by 2035.

Pre deployment activities 2: Predictive maintenance for high-speed assets

Validation and pre-deployment of:

- Unmanned monitoring vehicles fleet (including drones) for the monitoring of High-Speed rail assets, including enhanced sensors for climate-related deterioration detection.
- Modular Robotic units supported by AI technologies for maintenance/construction/renewal intervention on high-speed lines
- Harmonised railway checkpoints, including high-speed relevant Intelligent Video Gates features for the daily monitoring of critical HS Rolling Stock components.
- Structural Health Monitoring (bridges, tunnels, track) and environmental sensors integrated into the twin; anomaly detection and remaining-useful-life models.
- Centralized Intelligent Asset Management System integrated with Traffic Management Systems for all critical high-speed assets monitoring, from rolling stock to infrastructure, including energy and signalling, so asset condition drives high-speed traffic decisions (speed restrictions, re-routing, maintenance windows, energy savings, etc.) in a safe manner.
- Harmonised onboard condition monitoring standards for high-speed assets.
- Cross-border high-speed maintenance depot interoperability pilots, validating harmonised inspection procedures, certification frameworks enabling high-speed trains to receive scheduled and unscheduled maintenance at qualified facilities.

Defined pre-deployment across at least eight Member States by 2035.

Pre deployment activities 3: Resilient and Recovering enhanced high-speed infrastructure

Deploy high-speed tailor-made modular and precast infrastructure solutions featuring plug-and-play high-speed trackside equipment designed for rapid replacement during extreme weather events, to restore thermally affected rail tracks, damaged lines or bridges within hours or days.

Pilot wind-resistant high-speed infrastructure standards including enhanced structure design specifications for sustained winds up to 150 km/h and active wind monitoring systems with automatic speed restriction protocols

Deploy Energy Railway Smart Grid in High Speed Lines, integrated with trackside infrastructure and operational monitoring, to optimize the traction network performance, enable real-time power flow control and support efficient energy billing, complementing resilience measures and ensuring reliable high-speed operations under extreme conditions.

Secure power supply resilience for signalling and telecom systems via decentralised, autonomous energy

Defined pre-deployment across at least four Member States by 2035.

d. EU-Rail activities

This work will build on ongoing work already within Europe's Rail Flagship Area 3 (FA3):

- Assets monitoring technology developments, testing and demonstration activities carried out in FA3, including wayside, onboard and unmanned vehicles
- Outcomes from the Robotics platform demonstrators
- European checkpoints demonstrators developed for mix-traffic operations
- Results from the Wayside Monitoring and TMS link demonstrators

This work will also build on the Shift2Rail outcome (IN2TRACK3 project) and Europe's Rail Flagship Area 3 for the validation of enhanced infrastructure asset components.

e. R&I and harmonisation activities

R&I activities should address both design, execution and maintenance solutions. This includes modular and standardised components, automated and robotised construction, maintenance and renewal processes, data driven asset design, lifecycle modelling and harmonised engineering specifications. Additionally, outcome of the FI3- Resilient Railway (Re²Rail) R&I and associated harmonisation activities will be exploited and adapted to pave the way of specific High Speed pre-deployment activities not covered within the scope of FI3.

Impacts

The impacts of Flagship Initiative 4 represent a transformational advancement for European high-speed mobility, delivering enhanced service quality, cost-effectiveness, system optimization, and environmental performance while strengthening European industrial leadership.

Service quality enhancement

Reduced travel times between major European urban nodes through optimized operations and higher operational speeds, enhanced reliability and punctuality through predictive maintenance and advanced traffic management, and seamless multimodal integration with regional networks and airports enabling convenient door-to-door journeys.

Cost effective solutions

Reductions in lifecycle costs via predictive maintenance and optimized rolling stock and infrastructure assets utilization, simplified ETCS Level 2-only infrastructure reducing deployment and maintenance costs, standardised European designs enabling economies of scale for manufacturers, and energy efficiency improvements reducing operational expenses while supporting climate objectives.

System optimisation

Increases through AI-supported traffic management, harmonised operational rules enabling seamless cross-border operations without delays, validated migration pathways from current systems to simplified future architectures, and enhanced integration between high-speed and conventional networks maximizing overall system efficiency.

Resilience and improved security

Strengthen European mobility through climate-resilient infrastructure designed to withstand extreme weather conditions, ensuring reliable operations despite increasingly frequent climate events. Cybersecure digital systems protect critical high-speed operations from cyber threats. Ensure equitable accessibility across all EU regions through integrated planning that prevents territorial exclusion and improves connectivity for peripheral regions. Strategic autonomy is reinforced through European technological sovereignty in critical high-speed systems—eliminating dependence on non-EU suppliers for essential technologies including traffic management, and cybersecurity solutions.



Horizontal R&I framework

This section introduces R&I topics that can be considered as horizontal and complementary to the Flagship Initiatives developed earlier in this document. It focuses on using artificial intelligence, digital tools, and modular technologies to make trains more autonomous, efficient, and easier to upgrade. It also includes the use of drones, robots, and satellite communication to reduce reliance on fixed infrastructure. Special attention is given to cybersecurity, staff training, and better coordination between Member States—especially for cross-border and military-civil operations.

It also provides a framework for more disruptive or fast-paced R&I into marketable solution.

Below some examples that could be expanded based on the technical progress and needs:

1. Artificial Intelligence & Autonomy

AI Certification & Safety Integration

- Develop a European safe and trusted AI certification framework for rail aligned with safety standards (e.g., EN 50126/8/9).

AI Certification & Safety Integration

- Develop SIL2+ AI perception modules for environment recognition, obstacle detection, and image-based navigation.
- Complement ETCS L2/3 to enable GoA3/4 autonomous train operations (incl. decentralized route setting, dynamic TSR management).

2. Modularity, Interfaces & Virtual Certification

Modular Architecture

- Shift towards modular sub-systems with stable, scalable, data-centric interfaces.

Virtual Certification

- Use digital twins and behavioural models for certification of software/electronic updates.

3. Drones & Robot Swarms

- Develop common EU specs and shared middleware for multi-vendor drone/robot fleets.

4. Training & Change Management

- Coordinate EU-wide staff training programs.
- Harmonise procedures for semi-automated/remote operations.

- Provide certified translation tools for driver-TMS/traffic management communication.
- Address human factors for automation and workforce transformation.

5. Drones & Robot Swarms

- Develop EU-compliant data sharing protocols, using role/entity-based access.

6. Modularity, Interfaces & Virtual Certification

Design for Resilience

- Standardise interfaces for cross-useability and scalability (e.g., automatic gauge change, dual-power systems).
- Reduce dependency on infrastructure using vehicle intelligence.

Asset Protection

- Use safe and trusted AI surveillance, anti-drone tech, cybersecurity protocols, and dual-use military technologies.

7. Fast & Safe Adoption of Functional Change

- Develop safety models and behavioural digital twins.

8. Operations Under Fundamental Uncertainty

- Develop adaptive planning and non-probabilistic resilience strategies.
- Build comprehensive situational awareness from incomplete/low-quality data

9. Modularity, Interfaces & Virtual Certification

Human-Machine Interface (HMI) & Workforce

- Research human factors, training needs, and inclusive automation.
- Support safe transition to digital systems.

Lifecycle Costing

- Use full lifecycle analysis in design, asset management, procurement, and maintenance
- Balance cost, reliability, and sustainability.



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