

CER urges strong rail integration in EU Port Strategy to boost competitiveness, resilience, and climate action

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) has adopted a sector position on the forthcoming European Port Strategy, setting out key rail-focused recommendations to enhance Europe's connectivity, security, and sustainability. Ports are vital to Europe's economic strength and strategic autonomy. As gateways to global trade, they must be at the heart of a modern, multimodal, and climate-resilient logistics system — and that system must be rail-integrated.

The European Commission has just released new details and is gathering feedback on its proposed policy initiative for a European Port Strategy aimed at supporting the long-term competitiveness of ports. CER welcomes the opportunity to highlight the crucial role that rail, including combined transport, block trains, and single-wagon load, plays in unlocking the full potential of ports.

Despite this, rail's share of land traffic in and out of European ports remains too low. For example, major ports like Rotterdam, Antwerp-Bruges, and Valencia record rail shares of under 10%. In contrast, Hamburg and Bremerhaven demonstrate the transformative potential of rail, with modal shares above 30% and 50% respectively.

CER calls for the EU Port Strategy to set an ambitious target: raise rail's modal share at European ports to at least 30%.

Rail-connected ports: essential for Europe's climate, competitiveness, and sovereignty

According to a recent EU-funded study, better integration of rail freight across logistics chains is essential for achieving net-zero logistics. Rail outperforms road transport even in comparison to an ambitious baseline scenario assuming a 90% reduction in truck emissions by 2050. €1 invested in sustainable and efficient logistics will generate €5 euro of added value for European society. CER's position paper stresses that integrating ports with the European rail network is not just about freight efficiency — it is about reaching Green Deal targets, strengthening supply chains, and reinforcing Europe's global competitiveness and security.

To achieve these goals, the paper proposes concrete policy actions, including:

- **Investing in port rail infrastructure**, including 740m loading tracks, IT-supported track management, and direct ship-to-rail transfer facilities;
- **Integrating rail planning into port expansions**, to avoid future bottlenecks;
- **Accelerating the implementation of the European Transport Corridors (ETCs)** and improving hinterland rail links;
- **Expanding rail-road terminal infrastructure** along key corridors;

- **Enhancing cooperation with non-EU countries** to improve rail flows through strategic ports such as Piraeus and Thessaloniki;
- **Reducing port-related rail costs** through better competition and targeted operating aid;
- **Revising the Combined Transport Directive ambitiously** aimed at enhancing modal shift to more sustainable intermodal operations and lowering combined transport costs.

Securing European control and strategic resilience

CER also stresses the importance of EU management control over key port assets. With rising geopolitical risks and recent economic tensions such as US tariffs on EU exports, safeguarding European sovereignty is paramount. The Port Strategy must reflect this, ensuring resilience through diversified trade routes, enhanced rail connectivity, and infrastructure readiness for both civilian and military logistics.

The paper highlights the importance of **rail's dual-use capacity** in ports to support the EU Action Plan on Military Mobility. This includes upgrading transshipment infrastructure and integrating ports into a functional governance system involving both civilian and defence stakeholders.

Financing the shift

The upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034 will be decisive. CER calls for ambitious investment in rail connectivity through the MFF, Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), and national budgets — with a new CEF envelope of at least EUR 100 billion to support infrastructure upgrades, including in and around European ports.

CER Executive Director Alberto Mazzola said: *"The European Port Strategy must dedicate a significant place to rail. It's not just a matter of efficiency — it's a strategic imperative for Europe's green, secure, and competitive future. Investing in port-rail connectivity is investing in the resilience and sovereignty of the Union. CER members stand ready to work with EU institutions to help shape and implement this strategy. The battle for revitalised European ports will be fought on land and rail is central to winning it."*

➤ Read the **full position paper** [here](#).

➤ The **related study** "Net-zero logistics: The contribution of rail transport" is accessible [here](#).

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About CER

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) brings together around 70 railway undertakings, their national associations as well as infrastructure managers and vehicle leasing companies. The membership is made up of long-established bodies, new entrants and both private and public enterprises, representing 78% of the rail network length, 81% of the rail freight business and about 94% of rail passenger operations in EU, EFTA and EU accession countries. CER represents the interests of its members towards EU policymakers and transport stakeholders, advocating rail as the backbone of a competitive and sustainable transport system in Europe. For more information, visit www.cer.be or follow us on Twitter [@CER_railways](#) or [LinkedIn](#).