

Rail Transport in the Alpine Region – Joining forces for a sustainable transport and mobility system

Contribution of EUSALP states and regions to the European Year of Rail



The Alpine Region

The Alps represent an **extremely sensitive ecosystem** located in the heart of the European continent and special geographical features cause particular constraints regarding connectivity, accessibility, environmental quality and management of transport infrastructure. This makes **mobility one of the biggest challenges** for the social, economic and ecological development of the Alpine Region. Coordinated measures at macro-regional and EU levels on rail transport are required to contribute to a sustainable development in the Alps and to guarantee a well-functioning transport system on the Alpine corridors and, as far as rail is available, also in the secondary networks beyond the corridors.

With the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), a unique platform has been established, in which the regional and national levels can effectively coordinate and harmonise their activities and **implement coherent solutions**. EUSALP Action Group 4 Mobility is dedicated to promoting a sustainable transport system in the Alpine Region and actively contributing to the European Green Deal objectives and the new EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy¹, the UN sustainability goals, the Alpine Convention's and its relevant Protocols as well as general and specific EUSALP objectives².

Rail transport should form the backbone of a more efficient, multimodal, connected sustainable transport system, in particular on medium and long distances. With new infrastructure initiatives, rail should also be in the centre of a fully decarbonised transport system in line with the European Green Deal's decarbonisation strategy. While the transport sector accounts for almost a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions in the EU, railways only have a 0.6 % share of all transport-related emissions³. Currently, in transalpine freight transport rail accounts for only about 30 %, while about 70 % of goods are transported on road. Meanwhile Switzerland, which has a modal share of 74 % goods on rail, proves that with an ambitious modal shift policy railways can be the solution for long distances.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/mobilitystrategy_en

² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/cooperate/alpine/eusalp_action_plan.pdf

³ https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/transport_en



This paper builds on the cooperation of the 7 states and 48 regions involved in EUSALP that started in 2016. At the 4th EUSALP Mobility Conference in May 2021, political representatives of EUSALP regions highlighted several priorities for the Alpine Region related to rail transport. Taking advantage of the momentum provided by the 2021 European Year of Rail, we the representatives of the States and Regions in the territory of the European Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) - by adopting this declaration - call for strengthening rail transport and for supporting efforts to boost modal shift from road to rail in the Alpine Region.

We call on the European Union ...

1) ... to create a level-playing field between transport modes as basic requirement for an effective modal shift by:

- Promoting conditions to ensure the availability of adequate levels of suitable rail infrastructures and services in terms of quantity, quality, reliability and cost sustainability in comparison with road transport, also correcting competition distortions between the different modes of transport: the positive externality gap related to most rail freight journeys in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, congestion, fatalities and, in some cases, also noise, compared to their road equivalent is not appropriately addressed by the current regulatory environment and resulting market prices, as well as the initial incentives that can influence competitiveness. Taking stock of these market distortions, the provision of rail services, especially in low-density populated areas with low demand, should be sustained and subsidised.
- Improving the attractiveness for sustainable rail-based and smart mobility solutions for Alpine tourist destinations and for commuters by ensuring quality of supply, establishing attractive and integrated user-friendly passenger information and ticketing systems, fully exploiting the potentials of digitalisation.
- Supporting the optimisation of cross-border rail services including night trains

2) ... to optimise the potential of rail to serve as the backbone of a connected transport system by:

- Strengthening common activities that promote resilient smart rail and smart combined transport solutions, including rail freight transport generated from EUSALP ports and their hinterland connections, to improve the competitiveness of railways in the race towards innovation.



- Fully exploiting the potential of the railway sector in terms of digitalisation, automation, interoperability, and shift towards more sustainable rolling stock.
- Supporting the industry to ensure access to branch lines and loading places that are well connected to the main national and European rail network.

3) ... to improve infrastructure provisions for rail transport by:

- Better coordinating rail infrastructure development across borders to close missing rail links and bottlenecks in the Alpine transport network. Some of the EUSALP labelled projects identify some of those missing links.⁴
- Closer coordinating across borders rail infrastructure capacity management for international freight transport, such as slot allocation, to support modal shift.
- Supporting the expansion of terminal infrastructure for combined transport and improved rail access to fully exploit the potentials provided by the new transalpine base tunnels.
- Assessing the relevance and matching of alternative propulsion systems technologies for rail-based transport with relevant transport needs in the Alpine Region.

⁴ <https://www.alpine-region.eu/results/labelling-projects-macroregional-added-value-fostering-sustainable-mobility-solutions>



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