Council of the EU

Improving the accessibility and efficiency of railway connections through Europe

Names:

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Positions:

Chair & Dep. Chair

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Introducing Your Chairs

Hiya! My name is Bernd. I'm a 19-year-old pursuing a degree in Cognitive Science & Artificial Intelligence at Tilburg University. I've done MUNs for quite a while now, culminating in the hosting of an incredible conference together with my friend Luna last year.

Aside from academics, I find joy in capturing nature through photography. I also enjoy the occasional escape into the world of video games.

I'm excited and honored to chair the European Council this year, and am thrilled to see all of you in February!

An Introduction To The Topic

In the ever-evolving landscape of transportation, railways stand as a testament to sustainability, efficiency, and connectivity. Europe, with its diverse geography and rich history, has long recognized the transformative power of railways in fostering economic growth, promoting social cohesion, and protecting the environment. However, the task of enhancing the accessibility and efficiency of railway connections across Europe remains a significant challenge.

Despite the undeniable benefits of rail travel, the current state of Europe's railway system presents several shortcomings. Fragmentation, a legacy of historical and political divisions, has led to a patchwork of incompatible rail systems, hindering seamless cross-border travel. Moreover, the lack of a unified ticketing system and inadequate infrastructure investments have contributed to delays, congestion, and reduced passenger satisfaction.

Addressing these challenges is not merely an option but an imperative. By embracing a holistic approach that prioritizes interconnectivity, innovation, and sustainability, the European Council can pave the way for a truly integrated railway network that revolutionizes transportation within and beyond its borders.

Definition of Key Terms

- Railway Network
    A large web of train tracks that goes all across a specific area.

- Passenger Trains
    Carriages carrying people travelling from place to place. These usually go to tourist locations or large cities.

- Freight Trains
    Carriages carrying goods and materials. These usually go to industry capitals and/or factories.

- Unified Ticketing System
    A system that allows passengers across the EU to buy and use tickets from the same provider wherever they are.

A General Overview of the Issue

Rail transport holds immense potential to transform Europe's transportation landscape, offering a sustainable, efficient, and accessible mode of travel. However, realizing this potential requires addressing the fragmentation, lack of interoperability, and outdated infrastructure that hinder seamless cross-border travel. To fully harness the benefits of railways, the European Council must prioritize measures aimed at harmonizing technical standards, developing a unified ticketing system, investing in infrastructure upgrades, promoting digitalization, encouraging modal shift, and prioritizing accessibility.

Challenges

Europe's railway system is characterized by a patchwork of incompatible rail systems, a legacy of historical and political divisions. This fragmentation poses significant challenges to cross-border travel, leading to delays, congestion, and reduced passenger satisfaction. Additionally, the lack of a unified ticketing system forces passengers to navigate multiple ticketing platforms, adding complexity and inconvenience to their journeys.

Opportunities

Adopting a holistic approach to railway development can unlock a wealth of opportunities for Europe. A truly interconnected and efficient railway network would:
- Enhance economic competitiveness by facilitating the movement of goods and services across the continent.
- Promote social cohesion by connecting people from diverse regions and backgrounds.
- Protect the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions compared to road and air travel.
- Improve public health by reducing traffic congestion and pollution.

Key Strategies

To achieve a truly integrated railway network, the European Council should focus on the following key strategies:

- Promote interoperability: Harmonizing technical standards and procedures across Europe will enable seamless cross-border travel and reduce the need for costly adaptations.

- Develop a unified ticketing system: A single platform for purchasing tickets for multiple legs of a journey would simplify travel arrangements and enhance passenger convenience.

- Invest in infrastructure upgrades: Modernizing and expanding railway infrastructure will increase capacity, reduce travel times, and improve passenger comfort.

- Promote digitalization: Embracing digital technologies can enhance efficiency, optimize operations, and provide real-time information to passengers.

- Encourage modal shift: Incentives, such as preferential fares and environmental rebates, can shift transportation from cars and planes to railways, reducing carbon emissions.

- Prioritizing accessibility: Ensuring that all railway stations and services are accessible to persons with disabilities will promote inclusivity and social equity.

Historical Background

1800s: The development of railways in Europe begins, with early lines connecting major cities and industrial centres.

1840s: The railway network in Europe expands rapidly, fueled by economic growth and technological advancements.

1890s: The first international rail agreements are signed, aimed at harmonizing technical standards and procedures.

1957: The European Economic Community (EEC), the forerunner of the European Union (EU), is established with a focus on promoting economic cooperation and integration.

1990: The European Commission initiates the Trans-European Networks (TEN) program to develop a high-speed rail network across Europe.

1999: The Amsterdam Treaty, the EU's founding treaty, is revised to emphasize the importance of sustainable and efficient transport.

2002: The European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) is adopted as the standard for signalling and train control across Europe.

2004: The EU expands to include ten new member states, further increasing the complexity of the railway network.

2011: The EU launches the Shift2Rail initiative to invest in research and development for the rail sector.

2016: The Four Freedoms Package is adopted, further integrating the EU's transport markets.

2018: The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) is launched, providing funding for transport infrastructure projects across Europe.

2021: The EU publishes its Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, setting ambitious targets for reducing emissions and improving efficiency in the transport sector.

2022: The EU adopts the RePowerEU plan, emphasizing the role of railways in reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

Major Parties Involved

Germany

A major supporter of improving railway accessibility, having a long history of investing, and developing its railway network. They are also a leading force in new technologies in the sector, such as autonomous trains and hydrogen-powered locomotives.

France

Another major supporter of improving railway accessibility and efficiency throughout Europe. They are committed to improving the High-Speed railway system.

ERTMS (European Rail Traffic Management System)

A consortium is currently developing a signalling system that makes cross-border railway travel more reliable and faster.

EPF (European Passengers' Federation)

An umbrella organisation of passenger associations across Europe, representing 20 million rail passengers.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

There have been many attempts to solve this issue in the past. However, this issue is not one that is easily solved. Rather, it is a field which is continually improved by scientific and political advancements. This means that there won't be any concrete solutions found in the past, not much more than is already listed in the timeline.

A notable achievement in recent years is the introduction of the hydrogen-powered train that entered service in Germany in 2018. It promises to be a long-term, climate-friendly and efficient solution.

Possible Solutions For The Issue

As stated before, this issue is not solved, rather it is continually improved upon. However, improvements might be stimulated by the following points:

- Increased funding to railway providers
- Increased funding for Research & Development
- Stimulating a larger workforce in the railway industry
- Laying more high-speed rails between large cities and industry capitals

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