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INFORMATION NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: Presentation of the third Progress Report of the Platform on International Rail Passenger Transport (IRP)
– Information from the Austrian and Netherlands delegations

Delegations will find attached an information note prepared by the Austrian and Netherlands delegations on the above-mentioned subject for consideration under "Any other business" at the meeting of the Council (Transport, Telecommunications and Energy) on 1 June 2023.

Background document Transport Council 1 June 2023

AOB: Presentation of the third Progress Report of the Platform on International Rail Passenger Transport (IRP)

Information from the Austrian and Netherlands delegations

1.1 The IRP Platform

This Integrated Progress Report of the Ministerial Platform on International Rail Passenger Transport (IRP) sets forth the progress made, over the 2022 – 2023 period, regarding the ministers' declaration of the Ministries of Transport of the EU Member States, Switzerland and Norway. During the Transport Council on June 4, 2020, the European countries embraced the initiative to work on a common agenda aimed at fostering and supporting the improvement of international railway passenger transport in cooperation with the relevant stakeholders. As a result of the political declaration, a joint platform of the EU Member States¹, Norway and Switzerland was set up to further facilitate discussions. In 2022, the United Kingdom acceded as an observer. The Platform is supported by sector parties and the consumer organisations including BEUC / European Passenger Federation (EPF). It also involves representatives of the European Commission, European Union Agency for Railways, OTIF, and EU-Rail. Panteia supported the Platform in drafting this report.

1.2 Progress

Further building upon the results from the progress reports from 2021 and 2022, the Platform addressed the progress made over the last year, as set out in the accompanying Integrated Progress Report.

¹ With the exception of Cyprus and Malta.

Customer experience and digitalisation

In order for international rail to be competitive, improved customer experience is a vital element. Digitalisation, including for data sharing and ticket selling, has the potential to contribute greatly to this aim. Consequently, the Platform considers digitalisation a critical enabler for level playing field between rail and competing modes of transport. The sector has developed two, essentially interoperable, formats for open ticket selling: OSDM and Transmodel NeTEx. The member states call on the sector to avoid any delays in the full implementation of these standards. Other framework conditions important for a level playing field between different modes of transport include passenger rights, including for end-to-end journeys, and level playing field within the sector vis-à-vis other modes of transport.

Network

Today, international railway passenger services are limited by heterogeneous national framework conditions, constraints in infrastructure capacity and capacity allocation, and insufficient implementation of the European legal framework and standards. Several platform members consider that improving international railway passenger transport may ultimately require developing a shared vision on a viable and resilient European network of services. This should take into account market demand and potential, matters of international capacity allocation, and available infrastructure and bottlenecks. Network definition therefore has an important regional dimension, next to a European one.

Green Deal

In order for the EU to achieve its environmental targets as laid down in the Green Deal, international railway passenger transportation should be boosted by making optimal use of the TEN-T network and its interoperability standards. The international rail passenger network should be based on hubs, integrating international connections with other modes of public transport. In order to achieve efficient operation of international passenger services, it is essential to facilitate the correct implementation of the EU rail acquis which targets technical, administrative and procedural harmonisation. In addition, the railway and aviation sectors should offer combined attractive services in a seamless way.

Next to bottlenecks, there is an insufficient focus on impact of infrastructure conditions on international passenger services. In addition to implementation of technical interoperability standards (TSIs), it is imperative that improved infrastructure governance, including on the frameworks for capacity allocation and track access charges, delivers on its potential in the next years. Initiatives by the infrastructure managers and a potential EU framework for cross-border infrastructure governance deserves ample consideration. Finally, one of the challenges for (high-speed) through-services is posed by the availability, and financing, of rolling stock interoperable with different national technical systems. The Platform stresses the importance of continuing discussions around these issues, especially as other impediments are gradually ameliorated.

Regulatory framework

The regulatory framework should enable the development of an integrated international rail passenger network, connecting all European hubs, with integrated services. The IRP deems it essential that any initiative will contribute to a level playing field between railways and other modes of transport so that the former will receive a strong increase in the volume of passengers.

Market demand and open access competition as enablers of the desired modal shift to rail remain leading principles in EU law, whereas the possibility of PSO-driven services may be employed where the market is not expected to develop and services are considered necessary by respective competent authorities. Finally, increased cooperation between member states, infrastructure managers and railway undertakings is essential to enable more cross-border services.

In one of the annexes of the progress report the sector outlines the progress achieved on the 2021/2022 commitments expressed. Progress is made by the sector i.a. on international rail ticketing programs and the implementation of the Journey Continuation Agreement. The latter is essential for rail passengers with missed connections between (international / domestic) trains.