

## CALL FOR EVIDENCE FOR AN INITIATIVE (without an impact assessment)

This document aims to inform the public and stakeholders about the Commission's work, so they can provide feedback and participate effectively in consultation activities.

We ask these groups to provide views on the Commission's understanding of the problem and possible solutions, and to give us any relevant information they may have.

<b>TITLE OF THE INITIATIVE</b>	Connecting Europe through High-Speed Rail
<b>LEAD DG – RESPONSIBLE UNIT</b>	DG MOVE, Units B.1 “Transport Networks” and C.3 “Single European Rail Area”
<b>LIKELY TYPE OF INITIATIVE</b>	Communication from the Commission
<b>INDICATIVE TIMING</b>	Q2 2025
<b>ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</b>	–

*This document is for information purposes only. It does not prejudice the final decision of the Commission on whether this initiative will be pursued or on its final content. All elements of the initiative described by this document, including its timing, are subject to change.*

### A. Political context, problem definition and subsidiarity check

#### Political context

Connecting the EU by fast, comfortable and reliable rail services is a key element in meeting the objective of the 2020 [Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy](#) to reduce transport emissions in the EU by 90% by 2050 in order to achieve the EU’s net-zero target by 2050. The Strategy emphasized the importance of milestones such as doubling high-speed rail traffic by 2030, tripling it by 2050, and making scheduled collective travel of under 500 km carbon neutral within the EU by 2030.

Ongoing initiatives already provide a sound basis for the development of a European high-speed rail network. [The 2021 Action plan](#) to boost long-distance and cross-border passenger rail services set out horizontal actions to address barriers to the provision of services on such a network. Moreover, the [2024 TEN-T Regulation](#) maps the infrastructure needed to link major European urban centres with high-speed rail.

Both the [Draghi](#) and [Letta](#) strategic reports highlighted the development of a comprehensive, pan-European high-speed rail network as a major priority to boost Europe’s economy and increase its competitiveness. The 2025 “[Competitiveness Compass for the EU](#)” Communication reaffirmed the importance of this initiative, announcing “a plan for an ambitious European high-speed rail network.”

#### Problem the initiative aims to tackle

Improving rail connectivity, and high-speed rail (HSR) in particular, holds tremendous benefits in bringing the EU closer together, advancing the decarbonisation of the transport sector, and enhancing competitiveness, cohesion, and business productivity. The fragmentation of the TEN-T high-speed rail network along national borders however persists.

Missing cross-border sections and technical barriers when operating across networks have not yet allowed to capitalise on big investments made in individual Member States, and Eastern Europe remains poorly connected. Technical, legal, financial, and operational barriers also make it difficult for new companies to enter the market and offer new rail services.

The main identified issues that the Communication aims to address are as follows: implementation delays of national and cross-border HSR infrastructure projects ;lack of national investment and high HSR construction costs; lack of interoperability at EU level; lack of financing for rolling stock; lack of EU-wide harmonisation of train operations; limited access to service facilities and associated services; the affordability of high-speed rail services for passengers, and barriers to booking and selling rail tickets in the EU. Additionally, the initiative and the related

projected growth in rail activity will contribute to reducing transport emissions and the associated environmental and health impacts, as outlined in the [Zero pollution monitoring and outlook 2025](#).

## **Basis for EU action (legal basis and subsidiarity check)**

### **Legal basis**

Articles 91, 171 and 172 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)

### **Practical need for EU action**

Rail transport is a shared competence. The Communication itself will not create any legal obligations. It will in a comprehensive manner encompass the infrastructural, technical, financial, environmental, and service provision dimensions of EU high-speed rail connectivity in one overarching framework. Actions to establish an EU-wide high-speed rail network need to be conceived from an EU perspective. Any specific initiatives that may be announced with the Communication will address individually the issue of subsidiarity.

An EU approach to high-speed rail is necessary in order to address cross-border aspects of connectivity (e.g. timely implementation of cross-border HSR projects, harmonisation of train operations, and interoperability). For example, ticketing access and information can be a barrier for consumers to use the rail system, especially cross-border. When it comes to funding, Member States tend to prioritise national projects, at the expense of EU-wide cross-border connectivity, including for high-speed rail. Train operations across networks need to be harmonised, and the networks' infrastructure has to become fully interoperable. The EU is best placed to provide an overarching framework to address such obstacles.

## **B. What does the initiative aim to achieve and how**

The Communication will address the infrastructure, technical, environmental, commercial, financial, and service dimensions of EU cross-border high-speed rail connectivity, proposing targeted actions with a view to:

- Coordinate the planning, financing, and implementation of interoperable infrastructure
- Facilitate a citizen-centred, attractive and affordable rail offer, based on a competitive profitable business model for operators
- Strengthen the competitiveness of the European rail supply industry.

The aim is to create an enabling framework to effectively meet the growing demand for sustainable transport, support higher use of railway transport, develop an energy efficient high-speed rail network, connecting the EU with an affordable and frequent travel option, and focus investments where they are likely to be most impactful in terms of EU connectivity and therefore have high EU added value.

The Communication will build upon the agreed infrastructure network objectives of the TEN-T Regulation and put forward a series of targeted actions to address the issues identified above, with the goal to enable the coordinated development of a European high-speed rail network with key connections to be established between today and 2040. The Communication also aims to ensure that the operational, technical and economic conditions for the provision of future cross-border services are discussed at an early planning stage, in a format that includes all relevant stakeholders, so that potential barriers are identified upfront and addressed in a concerted way (including across borders), to enable operators to enter the market swiftly once the infrastructure is in place.

### **Likely impacts**

This is a non-legislative initiative, aimed at establishing an enabling framework for the creation of a seamless EU cross-border high-speed rail network. The initiative will provide clarity on current obstacles to high-speed rail connectivity in the EU and an overview of existing and upcoming legislation relating to the development of high-speed rail. Any specific initiative announced in the Communication will be subject to impact assessment as necessary.

Enabling high-speed rail connectivity can bring about numerous positive impacts:

- Strengthening economic ties between countries and regions, facilitating business travel and tourism, improving territorial cohesion, and stimulating regional economies.
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, air and noise pollution by providing a viable, cleaner alternative to air and car travel.
- Supporting the production and procurement of EU high-speed rail technology, strengthening European industries and their global competitiveness.

<b>Future monitoring</b>
The monitoring of the development of the HSR network will be conducted via the governance mechanisms established in 2024 TEN-T Regulation, along the European Transport Corridors.
<b>C. Better regulation</b>
<b>Impact assessment</b>
The initiative is a non-legislative policy Communication and therefore no impact assessment is necessary. Specific initiatives announced in the Communication that would allow for a real choice between alternative policy options and could potentially have significant impacts, will be subject to impact assessments and will come later during the mandate.
<b>Consultation strategy</b>
The Commission is inviting public and private stakeholders to provide views and input through this call for evidence. A targeted stakeholder consultation will also be undertaken, in particular to collect information and data from the following stakeholder categories: relevant national authorities, railway operators, rail infrastructure managers, manufacturers, passenger representatives, ticket vendors, social partners, financing and research bodies, NGOs. The initiative will take stock of previous consultation activities touching on HSR, as well as findings of relevant studies and reports. A synopsis report, providing a summary of consultation activities, will be prepared.
<b>Why we are consulting?</b>
The consultation will give stakeholders along the value chain the opportunity to express their views so that critical elements of the drawing up of the Communication and its future implementation can be addressed, taking into account the infrastructure-related, operators, and passengers' perspectives. The targeted consultation seeks to make sure there is common understanding of the main barriers identified in the preparatory work leading to the Communication.
<b>Target audience</b>
The main stakeholders identified as likely to be interested in the topic include national authorities, railway operators, rail infrastructure managers, manufacturers, ticket vendors, passenger representatives, social partners, financing and research bodies, NGOs, and the general public.