

Business travellers call upon the governments of France, Spain and Portugal to improve their international connections by rail

More and more businesses are committing themselves to significantly reduce their climate emissions. However, transport remains a major obstacle to this, both in terms of corporate travel and freight operations. **Choosing to travel by train instead of by plane can reduce emissions more than 90% for some connections**¹. However, the lack of competitive international connections between France, Spain and Portugal complicates the efforts by businesses operating in those countries to fly less, and to choose less polluting modes of transport like the train. For instance, we have learned that the plan to reopen the Toulouse-Barcelona connection has been cancelled and that the rest of Renfe's services in France are at risk due to delays in approvals affecting their ability to serve connections to Paris. As representatives of companies across Europe we call for investment in the railway connectivity and reliability between these countries, to enable us to take our climate and sustainability commitments seriously, while strengthening our economic ties.

Concretely, we call on the governments of France, Spain and Portugal to:

- **Advance implementation of the European TEN-T regulation** and accelerate the completion of its key international connections in order to help companies shift their business travel and freight to rail.
- Create **financial incentives and public guarantees** to help rail operators acquire **interoperable cross-border rolling stock**
- Champion the EU initiative for an ambitious **Single Digital Booking and Ticketing Regulation** to enable seamless booking of cross-border and multi-operator rail journeys.

Improved railway connections between the three countries will reduce costs and travel times while improving reliability, boosting the competitiveness of our industries and fostering stronger relations. At the same, it will allow us to transport both people and goods in a more sustainable manner. This is the spirit of the **Clean Industrial Deal**, aimed at helping European businesses thrive on a global scale while advancing the green transition. **We count on your support to provide the connectivity needed for these objectives to be realised.**

Yours sincerely,

¹ <https://travelsmartcampaign.org/rail-first/>

Background explanation on context of the call – for signatories, not part of the letter:

Both the Draghi² and Letta³ reports outline the necessity of a faster and more interconnected railway network in Europe. The TEN-T regulation establishes that by 2030 the main segments of the Mediterranean and Atlantic corridors will have to be finalised. However, significant delays by all three countries threaten this objective:

- In **France**, the new Montpellier-Béziers line is expected for 2034, while the Béziers-Perpignan section does not have a clear timeline and could be finalised as late as 2044⁴. In the Atlantic Corridor the situation is similar, with the Bordeaux-Dax line being expected for 2032 while the timeline for the section between Dax and the Spanish border is unknown.⁵ The Pau-Canfranc-Saragosse line has also been delayed to 2032.⁶
- In **Spain** the new section between Burgos and Vitoria is just starting construction, making it very difficult for the line to be open before 2030⁷. On the Mediterranean Corridor the Madrid-Lisbon section between Talayuela and Toledo is still stuck in studies, so completion is unfeasible before 2030.⁸
- **Portugal** will also miss key sections of the Madrid-Lisbon line before 2030 such as Lisbon-Evora.⁹ In addition, a failure to adopt modern signalling (ERTMS) means that business travellers will be forced to change trains at the border. A solution is being worked upon but with no clear timeline for its completion.¹⁰

Cross-border services are extremely limited between the three countries. All night train services between the three countries have been eliminated, including the only direct connections between Madrid and Paris and Madrid and Lisbon. In addition, daytime services remain scarce. While part of the reason is interoperability barriers such as different track gauges and signalling incompatibilities, steps towards additional and improved services are possible today. For example, a ticket for the Porto to Vigo train cannot be acquired on CP's website despite

² https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/draghi-report_en#paragraph_47059

³

https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/news/enrico-lettas-report-future-single-market-2024-04-10_en

⁴ <https://www.ligne-montpellier-perpignan.com/>

⁵ <https://www.gpso.fr/essentiel-des-etapes>

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https://www.sncf-reseau.com/medias-publics/2024-09/sncf-reseau-pau_canfranc_synthese_projet.pdf?VersionId=ChAx.DZ7.WBy.GMT0OCA70dz5hq85RtX

⁷ <https://www.transportes.gob.es/el-ministerio/sala-de-prensa/noticias/vie-15112024-1455>

⁸

<https://www.transportes.gob.es/ferrocarriles/estudios-de-planificacion/estudio-informativo-del-proyecto-de-linea-ferroviaria-de-alta-velocidad-madrid-extremadura-tramo-madrid-oropesa-nuevas-propuestas-de-trazado-tramos-i-y-ii>

⁹ <https://www.infraestruturasdeportugal.pt/pt-pt/rede-de-alta-velocidade>

¹⁰

<https://www.railtech.com/infrastructure/2021/03/31/portuguese-consortium-to-develop-stm-system-for-rail-interoperability/>

operating it jointly with Renfe, forcing customers to use the latter's website which is not available in Portuguese. It shouldn't be necessary to wait until the Single Digital Booking and Ticketing Regulation to solve this issue.



With the support of:

