



TEN/710
European Year of Rail (2021)

OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

**Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on
a European Year of Rail (2021)**

[COM(2020) 78 final]

Rapporteur: **Alberto MAZZOLA**

Referral	European Parliament, 10/03/2020 Council, 13/03/2020 Council of the European Union, 13/03/2020
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Committee Bureau decision	24/04/2020
Section responsible	Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society
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Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	209/1/4

1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 The EESC welcomes the proposal of the Commission and supports its goals, in particular to encourage and support the European Union, Member States, regional and local authorities, social partners and market forces to increase the share of rail in passenger and freight mobility.
- 1.2 The EESC considers that the European Year of Rail will have to bring the broad public of citizens, railway workers, social partners, businesses and academic communities, and European youth in particular closer to the public debate of the EU institutions on EU sustainability and mobility policies and on the future of European mobility to promote rail as a sustainable, innovative and safe mode of transport.
- 1.3 The Year of Rail for the EESC should be an opportunity to communicate on the sustainability credentials of railways, also [where available](#) as a suitable replacement of short-haul flights, on the Strategy for Smart and Sustainable Mobility as well as on the EU rail investment policies.
- 1.4 The EESC recommends during the European Year of Rail to assess the quality of rail services and, if necessary, adapt them to the needs of users so that they meet the criteria set out in Protocol²⁶ on services of general interest annexed to the TFEU, to develop projects that promote a holistic approach to accessibility, to reinforce the link between digitalisation and sustainability, to exchange with the community of investors on possible initiatives against the background of the Commission's sustainable finance action plan.
- 1.5 The EESC calls for initiatives under the European Year of Rail to re-gain the trust of customers in public transport, and rail especially, to communicate better, especially to young Europeans, the attractiveness of a career in the railways, by supporting joint initiatives with social partners, universities, the academic community at large as well as European youth organisations.
- 1.6 The EESC is strongly convinced that the Year of Rail should be an opportunity to create public awareness of sustainable tourism and to give new momentum to the DiscoverEU initiative. The EESC strongly supports the initiative of the European Parliament to grant each European citizen, when they turn 18, the right to have a DiscoverEU pass as a symbol of the EU identity.
- 1.7 The EESC points out that the Year of Rail should be used to provide more information on the calendar of initiatives of Europalia as well as to communicate to wider audiences the contents created in already existing cultural events, such as film festivals (Cannes, Venice, Berlin) and arts exhibitions. In the same context, rail stations and museums during 2021 could be the setting for major initiatives connecting the future and the past of railways with major industries such as architecture and construction, design, the electromechanical sector, food and tourism. In this context, the Committee could include in its 2021 cultural programme an exhibition on the railways.
- 1.8 It is necessary that the Year of Rail seek the participation of all European rail museums, invite citizens to discover their collections including via their digitalisation, promote exchanges between museums and a European tour of rail museums.

- 1.9 The EESC is deeply convinced that the European Year of Rail should also be a chance to promote very ambitious goals with European socio-economic as well symbolic European added value – also as a way to react to the dramatic COVID-19 crisis – such as relaunching the move towards the achievement of a European rail high speed network as foreseen by the White Paper on Transport (2011) to connect all EU capitals and cities with more than 500 000 inhabitants.
- 1.10 The EESC stresses the importance of using the European Year of Rail also as a unique opportunity to communicate on rail safety records, which is unparalleled among land transport modes. In this context, the EESC recalls that each year the 11 of June is the International Level Crossing Awareness Day (ILCAD) and that in 2020 ILCAD celebrated its 12th Anniversary. Special attention should be dedicated to this day in the frame of the European Year of Rail.

2. **Proposal of the Commission**

- 2.1 The proposal to declare 2021 "European Year of Rail" aims to promote rail transport in line with the objectives set out in the Commission Communication on the European Green Deal, including with regard to sustainable and smart mobility. Through projects, debates, events, exhibitions and initiatives across Europe, the European Year of Rail will promote rail as an attractive and sustainable way to move across Europe, to citizens, business and authorities, emphasising its Union wide and innovative dimension. By reaching out to citizens, beyond the railway sector, through dedicated events and communication campaigns, it will convince more people and businesses to make use of rail¹.
- 2.2 The objective of the European Year of Rail shall be to encourage and support the efforts of the Union, the Member States, regional and local authorities, and other organisations to increase the share of passengers and freight moving by rail. In particular, the European Year should promote rail as a sustainable, innovative and safe mode of transport, by reaching out to the wider public, especially the youth. It should also highlight the European, cross-border dimension of rail, that brings citizens closer together, allows them to explore the Union in all its diversity, fosters cohesion and contributes to integrate the Union internal market. It should also enhance the contribution of rail to Union economy, industry and society at large, and promote rail as an important element of the relations between the Union and third countries².

3. **Rail and the COVID-19 pandemic**

- 3.1 The rail sector suffered and is still suffering from the containment measures taken by Member States to fight the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and from the huge drop in mobility.
- 3.2 According to first rough estimates, calculated by sectoral associations like the CER, the lost revenues suffered by all passenger operators as a consequence of the pandemic amounts to EUR°900 million per week since the beginning of the crisis. The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak caused an approximate average decline in rail freight revenues of 25% across the

¹ [COM\(2020\) 78 final.](#)

² [COM\(2020\) 78 final.](#)

European Union (EU27) over March and April 2020 and lost revenues of about EUR 78 million per week. Even though rail freight showed a strong resilience, it could have done even better if the "Green Lanes" measures fully applied to rail, if track access charges were reduced to zero, if Switzerland would have suspended the ban introduced on January 1 2020. Rail infrastructure managers are becoming increasingly impacted by the outbreak of COVID-19.

- 3.3 Despite the very sharp drop in demand, rail operators and railway workers still provided services wherever possible, managing to enable medical staff and essential workforce to commute to work. Additionally, operators have been offering medical trains to enable the transport of people affected by the virus from the most affected regions to less crowded hospitals.
- 3.4 The relaunch of Europe after COVID-19 will also be an occasion for relaunching and improving passenger and goods transport by rail. The EU recovery plan oriented towards the Green Deal and Digital Agenda will provide short-term support to rail services and focus on short to long term financing, possibly including State Aid to get rail back on track after the huge loss of revenues provoked by the virus crisis.
- 3.5 If, in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, railways are expected to replace certain air routes, they should benefit from the State aid that was earmarked for those routes, in particular to avoid job losses and for retraining the individuals concerned.
- 3.6 Transport workers have been and still are in direct contact with passengers at the front line and are at risk of contracting the virus in the performance of their daily duties. They are also the ones who are affected by the disastrous economic consequences of the virus – both operationally as employees in the rail sector and as citizens. Railway workers keep Europe moving in troubled times by ensuring that medical care and essential goods are delivered to the places where they are needed.
- 3.7 The renaissance of Europe after COVID-19 will also be a renaissance of passenger railways and the confirmation of freight railways. The resources made available by the revised MFF 2021-2027 and that will be managed both at EU and national level will also have to be destined to railways if the European Green Deal and Digital Agenda ambitions are not to be given up.
- 3.8 A wide variety of rail projects can absorb the additional resources of the MFF and of the Next Generation EU initiative: rail infrastructure projects – for passenger and freight, national and cross-border, conventional as well as high speed lines – rail rolling stock projects as well as all projects related to automation and digitisation of the rail system, which include Digital Automatic Coupling technologies, further electrification of the European network, ERTMS (European Rail Traffic Management System) deployment, wagon upgrades with brake blocks technology considering all climates and scrapping schemes for rolling stock renewal. Upgrades of rail stations (specifically platforms including a PRM access) would be another area where funds are needed and short-term positive economic effects would be achieved. Boosting the TEN-T investments and maintenance and renewal of existing lines could strongly and quickly contribute to the EU's economic recovery.

- 3.9 The overarching objectives to improve capacity and efficiency of freight and passenger rail transport, part of a smart multimodal transport system, as outlined in the Green Deal Communication may over time provide a significant contribution to economic recovery, reducing the market share of road freight and the environmental footprint of transport.
- 3.10 Initiatives under the European Year of Rail should pay particular attention to re-gaining the trust of customers in public transport, and rail especially. Initiatives aimed at raising public awareness on the additional hygiene measures taken by rail undertakings, mask policies and social-distancing policies should be put in place. Regarding passenger rights, clarity over compulsory refunds and voluntary vouchers should be provided. Such measures should go hand in hand with a comprehensive application of passenger rights to all railway services, secured all along passengers' journeys, well explained to the public and effectively enforced via alternative dispute resolution schemes and national enforcement bodies.

4. **General comments**

Historical background

- 4.1 The long history of railways and of rail technology will have many anniversaries in 2021. As underlined by Europalia in the catalogue of its 2021 arts festival, in 2021 the Belgian and French railways will celebrate the 175th anniversary of the rail link between Paris and Brussels. In 1846, these capitals became the first in the world to be linked by a railway line. That same year, Brussels and London were also linked by a rail link through the Ostend-Dover trunk. 2021 will also coincide with the 25th anniversary of Thalys and the 170th anniversary of the first service on the Saxo-Bohemian rail link between Prague and Dresden. Other railway anniversaries in 2021 are the 50th anniversary of the Mulhouse Train Museum and the 75th anniversary of Luxembourg Railways. Remarkably, 2021 will also be the year of the 45th anniversary of the first Pendolino in Italy, the 40th anniversary of the TGV in France and the 30th anniversary of the ICE in Germany. It is also the 20th anniversary of the publication of the European Union's first white paper on railways in Europe.
- 4.2 The Year of Rail will be an opportunity to celebrate railway history, the history of its technological advancement as well as the history of a progressively closer European continent thanks to railway connections. At the same time, it is also an opportunity to evaluate the developments to date.

The European Green Deal

- 4.3 In 2019, the European Commission presented its Communication on a European Green Deal. The Communication pushes the EU to progressively decarbonise its economy towards the achievement of climate neutrality by 2050, and outlines a policy strategy to reach such a target. The European Green Deal contributes to the Commission's strategy to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 4.4 Among other initiatives, the European Green Deal calls for accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility, as transport accounts for a quarter of the European Union's greenhouse gas

emissions, and is still growing. All modes of transport will have to contribute to the reduction. Amongst other actions, according to the European Green Deal, a substantial part of the 75% of inland freight carried today by road should shift onto rail and inland waterways. Rapid action is needed to implement this ambitious plan and ensure the increase of the modal share of rail, with the provision of stronger incentives for the promotion of rail freight.

- 4.5 To implement the general objectives set out in the Green Deal, the Commission will present a Strategy for Smart and Sustainable Mobility during the last quarter of 2020. That strategy will *inter alia* focus on initiatives aiming to increase capacity and improve freight capacity handling in rail and inland waterways and to create a smart, seamless and user attractive multimodal transport system with a view to reduce the market share of road transport and enhance the attractiveness of multimodality including rail. Initiatives in this sense are in fact already planned for 2021.
- 4.6 The Year of Rail will be an opportunity to underline and communicate on the sustainability credentials of railways, on the Strategy for Smart and Sustainable Mobility as well as on the EU rail investment policies. Investments in railway infrastructure are capable of boosting the economy, creating quality jobs that are socially and environmentally sustainable and making railway services more attractive to customers. Raising public awareness on this topic will help influence customers' behaviours and modal choices regarding public transport and low emission mobility.
- 4.7 The European Year of Rail will also be an opportunity to assess the quality of rail services and, if necessary, adapt them to the needs of users so that they meet the criteria set out in Protocol 26 on services of general interest annexed to the TFEU.

The European Digital Agenda

- 4.8 The EU Digital Agenda should take great efforts towards including the rail sector in the digital revolution and in all support measures designed for that purpose. It should help boost the implementation of ERTMS, the development of Mobility-as-a-Service solutions, new ticketing solutions, along with 5G deployment on the TEN-T core and comprehensive network. This will enable railways to meet the demand of their current and future customers.
- 4.9 Employees must be given adequate support in the ongoing digitisation process and their jobs must be secured. Gender-specific requirements must be given special consideration to guarantee gender equality. The concerns of the employees in this transformation process must be appropriately safeguarded by involving employee representatives and trade unions. Employees must have access to training and further education in order to remain in high-quality jobs and sustainable employment.
- 4.10 As 5G will raise mobile and internet technology to the status of a General Purpose Technology, the EESC urges the EU institutions and Member States to complete the Digital Single Market, including the development of capabilities to integrate and use 5G services to defend and improve the competitiveness of European industries such as transport, and rail in particular. The

EESC also calls on the Commission to commission a biological impact assessment of 5G radiation and the risk of interference with other frequency ranges³.

- 4.11 Demographic, economic and political trends will shape new ways of moving in urban and non-urban areas, and railways reckon that it will be imperative to adapt to be able to integrate themselves into a multimodal, ever more digitalised transport chain. In particular, an increasing number of elderly and young people may be led to use trains more frequently both in urban areas and for long distance journeys, if new needs in terms of comfort and accessibility are going to be taken care of even more by the railways. At the same time, a tech-savvy generation of customers will rely much less on private transport, over which shared mobility and public transport solutions will be preferred, provided there is an adequate level of service quality.
- 4.12 It will be especially critical for railways to improve their ticketing technologies, making the purchase of tickets easier with the possibility of combining different travel segments into one ticket as well as to foresee the future possibility of multimodal ticketing. The EESC urges the European Commission to support initiatives aimed at achieving this goal, for instance through expert guidance, sharing of best practices, awarding grants, etc.
- 4.13 Since multimodality is essential especially for rail freight, it is important to use the European Year of Rail to promote the dialogue between transport customers, rail and other transport sectors, both at national and EU levels, to define practical problems hampering the development of rail freight and finding solutions that make rail freight services attractive to customers. The EESC underscores that it is important to involve all transport sectors in such a dialogue. Finding paradigms for cooperation between companies that do not conflict with competition law may be an important aspect of such a dialogue.
- 4.14 Digitalisation of railways will also enable railways to continue adapting their services to accommodate the needs of shippers in an increasingly efficient manner, for example by maximising the use of available train capacity and mixing different types of freight services. Given the current downward trend of the market share of rail freight, the possibilities to provide improved efficiency and flexibility in the services offered should be emphasised.
- 4.15 Rail infrastructure managers will have to become increasingly digital, in order to improve their operational performance in terms of better punctuality and increased capacity. A strong push in this direction will come from rolling out the automatic train control system ERTMS. In particular, the EESC believes that ERTMS deployment should be dramatically accelerated. The required investment (more than EUR 100 billion, including digital interlockings) shall be pursued in the recovery plan and the EESC encourages rail to develop a comprehensive and interoperable Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) framework together with other modes of transport.
- 4.16 To enable rail digital transformation, the free flow of data is essential. The EESC therefore calls for effective solutions that eliminate the problems associated with the accessibility, interoperability and transfer of data, while securing adequate data protection and privacy, fair

³ [OJ C 353, 18.10.2019, p.79.](#)

competition and wider consumer choice as well as static and dynamic information to passengers. The same conditions must apply to public and private companies with reciprocity for data exchanges and compensation of costs⁴.

- 4.17 For the above reasons, the topic of rail digitalisation should be one of the focal points of the Year of Rail. In particular, the link between digitalisation and sustainability should be underlined with appropriate communication initiatives.

Railway workers

- 4.18 European railways employ around 1.3 million European citizens directly, and roughly 1 million further European citizens indirectly, making it one of the largest employers in the European Union. Railway undertakings are an essential factor in the training of young people and thus contribute to combating youth unemployment in Europe, especially in economically difficult times.
- 4.19 The European Year of Rail is also the Year of Railway Workers. High-quality jobs for transport workers and a safe, reliable service for customers must be guaranteed. In the spirit of a social Europe, the working conditions of employees must be at the centre of attention. Wage and social dumping have no place in the railway sector and must be eliminated.
- 4.20 Railway workers deserve public recognition. To this end, it is important to make their achievements visible and to recognise their challenges. Europe-wide actions should help to show recognition for the achievements of workers and underline the demands for quality jobs. All railway workers must be protected from wage and social dumping in order to maintain safe rail operations in Europe. This can only be guaranteed by active social partnership in the sector.
- 4.21 Digitalisation, of course, represents an opportunity for railways as well as a business imperative. Only by digitalising their internal processes as well as the way they deliver their services will railways be able to respond to the challenges of the present. At the same time, however, the utmost caution should be exercised when implementing digitalisation, in order to avoid disruptive transitions and social discord. It is absolutely essential that the European social partners meet as part of the EU sectoral social dialogue on railways to decide on joint projects in order to better identify and anticipate the impact of automation and digitalisation to maintain a high level of employment and social guarantees as part of a socially just transition⁵.
- 4.22 The key to address this challenge is to put the focus on professional transitions, supported by life-long learning and investments in staff's employability to avoid laying people off. For railways, two important challenges are the imbalanced age pyramid of its workforce and recruitment difficulties, especially among young people and women⁶.

⁴ [OJ C 353, 18.10.2019, p.79.](#)

⁵ [OJ C 47, 11.02.2020, p. 23.](#)

⁶ [OJ C 47, 11.02.2020, p. 23.](#)

- 4.23 The Year of Railways should be an opportunity to communicate better, especially to young Europeans, the attractiveness of a career in the railways, by supporting joint initiatives with social partners, universities, the academic community at large as well as European youth organisations.

Infrastructure

- 4.24 The TEN-T framework strongly contributed to identifying the substantial financial resources necessary for new rail infrastructure, around EUR 500 billion for the core network alone by 2030, even though available resources are still not sufficient to cover all the needs. The completion of the core network should lead to a European high speed network serving almost all capitals and major European cities (with more than 500 000 inhabitants). Furthermore, maintenance of TEN-T infrastructures is an issue that has been greatly underestimated in several countries, where it is now emerging rather dramatically, while in others it has been undertaken properly.
- 4.25 If, on the one hand, the EESC approves the promotion of railway connections between large cities by means of high-speed trains and the TEN-T network, we recall the importance of maintaining adequate levels of funding and financing for national and regional lines.
- 4.26 The EESC calls to boost the investment to complete the network, including rural and regional areas, and cover ordinary and extraordinary maintenance funding for the whole TEN-T network through the EU recovery plan. Further additional funds are needed for the development of the railways, investments in infrastructure and a denser passenger and freight network. Every euro invested in rail creates and maintains jobs, including in the rail supply industry and regions.

Sustainable Finance

- 4.27 The European Commission Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth (COM(2018) 97 final) aims to reorient capital flows towards sustainable investments in order to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth, manage financial risks stemming from climate change, resource depletion, environmental degradation and social issues and foster transparency and long-term thinking in financial and economic activity.
- 4.28 The unified EU classification system (taxonomy), which will provide clarity on which activities can be considered sustainable, is particularly important.
- 4.29 Building on the development of the EU sustainability taxonomy and the results achieved so far by the Action Plan, the Commission announced a revision of the Action Plan within the European Green Deal.

- 4.30 The EESC welcomed the proposals regarding the taxonomy as a first step towards implementing the Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth⁷. The Committee also welcomed the proposal relating to the development of new low-carbon and positive carbon impact benchmarks. That foundation also needs to mesh with the big ambitions set out in the Action Plan, which states that "Europe is well-placed to step into the role of global leader". It is now time to take action in line with that ambition and to develop the taxonomy accordingly.
- 4.31 Given their sustainability credentials, railways should be able to find opportunities in all sustainable finance initiatives. While it remains undisputed that the funding for maintenance and further expansion of railway infrastructure as such is a public task and must count on the public budget, attention should be paid to the funding needs of tomorrow's rail system, in particular rolling stock and rail stations, as well as to investigating the possibility of private investors to participate in rail projects.
- 4.32 To ensure the viability of the policy framework provided by the Commission initiatives on sustainable finance, it is important that EU Member States complete as quickly as possible the process of ratification of the 2007 Luxembourg Protocol to the 2001 Cape Town convention on international interests in mobile equipment on matters specific to railway rolling stock (aka the Luxembourg Rail Protocol).
- 4.33 It is necessary that railways and the community of private investors meet and exchange on possible synergies, also against the background of the Commission's sustainable finance initiatives. The European Year of Rail should plan activities that would allow these exchanges to take place, involving both the rail community and the community of private investors, in particular long-term investors such as insurance, investments and pension funds.

Accessibility

- 4.34 The promotion of universal access as laid down in Protocol 26 on SGI and its references to SGEI implies appropriate access for all users throughout the territory (territorial accessibility), it being understood that the conditions of access (waiting times, density of access points, infrastructure, etc.) may vary according to user needs. Equal treatment and the promotion of universal access also mean combating all forms of discrimination.
- 4.35 In order to make rail travel more attractive for daily trips as well as for long-distance and cross-border travel, it will be important to strengthen passengers' rights, make passengers aware of such protections, as well as to keep and possibly improve rail transport affordability and quality of service.
- 4.36 European railway undertakings, station managers and infrastructure managers continuously improve the travel experience of people with reduced mobility or disabilities. Rail services are by far more accessible than they were in the past and many passengers with disabilities are able to take trains without assistance. Rail operators are heavily contributing towards enhancing the

⁷ [OJ C 62, 15.2.2019, p. 103.](#)

social inclusion of people with disabilities and are dedicated to delivering on their commitments in this area together with public authorities and passengers' associations.

- 4.37 Investments have been made to continue removing barriers in stations and on trains over the next decade in order to facilitate the travel experience of passengers with reduced mobility or disabilities.
- 4.38 As such, continued third-party funding, either from national governments or directly from the EU, will be needed if the rail network's accessibility is to be continuously improved along the lines envisaged in the existing EU legislation on rail accessibility.
- 4.39 The European Year of Rail should also be an opportunity to develop projects that promote a holistic approach to accessibility, addressing not only the initiatives taken by the rail sector both in rail stations and on trains to enhance assistance and accessibility, but also everything that is needed to ensure all passengers are able to reach transport hubs in the first place.

Sustainable tourism

- 4.40 The European Union is one of the most developed and most visited tourism regions worldwide. The EU accounts for 40% of the world's international tourist arrivals and 31% of international tourism receipts. The EU is both home of some of world's largest outbound markets and world's most visited destinations. In 2016, nearly 270 million EU residents (2/3 of the then resident population) made at least one trip for leisure purposes, over a half of which were international trips. Transport typically accounts for 27% of expenditure for a leisure trip.
- 4.41 Addressing the environmental impact of transport linked to tourism is one of the main challenges identified in the EC Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism (COM2007/621).
- 4.42 The movement around Fridays for Future as well as increasing extreme weather and climate events are making citizens re-think their usual travel plans and consider rail as a mode of transport to their destination. Leisure and holiday travellers represent the biggest category of single rail travellers.
- 4.43 Today, European tourism is facing a transition phase, with well-established destinations developing new visions for developing tourism with more respect for the principles of economic, social and environmental sustainability. New patterns of tourism development are needed to address tourism's environmental impact and overtourism.
- 4.44 For many Member States, European regions and cities, tourism is a key contributor to the economic and social fabric, while also providing jobs and income. However, the COVID-19 pandemic hit this ecosystem hard.
- 4.45 In this context, action must be taken to help international, continental and national tourism resume for the sake of broad sectors of the EU economy. Railways can help develop touristic destinations that are not adequately served by aviation, open new routes and foster new value

chains. For European railways it is an opportunity to meet the growing demand of climate-minded tourists on the market.

- 4.46 The Year of Rail should be an opportunity to create public awareness of sustainable tourism and the new touristic routes that European citizens can discover thanks to rail connections. Touristic modal shift should be a concept developed and communicated with appropriate communication initiatives, with the joint support of the rail community, the European cultural industry and national and European representatives of the tourism industry.
- 4.47 In this context, the European Year of Rail should also be an opportunity to give better visibility and foster public awareness regarding historic and scenic train routes across Europe, like the Orient Express from Paris to Venice, the rail route of Creusot crossing eastern and Southern France, the Munich to Neuschwaanstein Castle line in Germany, the rail itinerary of the d'Orcia valley in Italy, the Malopolska Train Routes in Poland and many others across the continent.

DiscoverEU

- 4.48 For several reasons a substantial number of young Europeans have never or rarely travelled within Europe. Although educational exchange programmes exist, the EU has just started a tool that would allow for any European to be provided with a travel experience that would better connect young people with the European identity, raising awareness of the core values of the European Union, and familiarise them with a sustainable and clean mode of transportation. DiscoverEU is an initiative of the European Union that gives people the opportunity to discover Europe through learning experiences. Travelling predominantly by rail (there are exceptions to allow those living on islands or in remote areas to participate), young Europeans can discover Europe, its cities and towns.
- 4.49 The role played by travel in creating a European identity has been recognised since the preparatory works for the inclusion of the sector in the Treaty of Lisbon. Professor Richard Jobs recently demonstrated the more specific role played by the Interrail Pass in shaping common European values⁸.
- 4.50 The Year of Rail should be an opportunity to give new momentum to the DiscoverEU initiative, supporting its goals and reaching out to young Europeans who have not yet participated in the project. The EESC supports the initiative of the European Parliament to grant each European citizen, when they turn 18, the right to have a DiscoverEU pass as a symbol of the EU identity.

Europalia and other European rail museums

- 4.51 Every two years, Europalia presents to the public in Belgium and in neighbouring countries a programme of events and exhibitions about themes with a strong European dimension and perspective. Traditionally, Europalia attracts high numbers of visitors, many of them from abroad.

⁸

See Jobs, R.I. (2017). *Backpack Ambassador – How Youth Travel Integrated Europe*, University of Chicago Press, p. 249.

- 4.52 The theme of the next edition (starting in October 2021) will be railways and the influence they have had and continue to have on the way in which we travel, work, communicate and live in Europe. The emphasis will be on railways as "precursors" to the EU's efforts to bring nations and citizens together and on trains as game changers in the direction of green mobility, building on the ideas set out in the European Green Deal and the influence of railways on the arts and highlighting the role of rail as a powerful promotor of social, economic and industrial change.
- 4.53 In this context, it would be useful to use the Year of Rail to provide more information on the calendar of initiatives of Europalia as well as to communicate to wider audiences the contents created in already existing cultural events, such as film festivals (Cannes, Venice, Berlin) and arts exhibitions. In the same context, rail stations and museums during 2021 could be the setting for major initiatives connecting the future and the past of railways with major industries such as architecture and construction, design, tourism, the electromechanical sector, food and tourism.
- 4.54 It is also necessary that the Year of Rail seek the participation of all European rail museums, invite citizens to discover their collections including via their digitalisation, promote exchanges between museums and a European tour of rail museums.

Brussels, 15 July 2020.

Luca JAHIER

The president of the European Economic and Social Committee
