

To:

Brussels, 13 April 2021

Mr David Maria Sassoli,
President of the European Parliament

Mr Charles Michel
President of the European Council

Mrs Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission

Mr Frans Timmermans
First Executive Vice President of the European
Commission for the European Green Deal

Mrs Adina-Loana Vălean
European Commissioner for Transport

Cc:

Ms Karima Delli
Chairman of the European Parliament
committee on transport and tourism

Ms Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg
Member of the European Parliament

Mr Pedro Nuno Santos
Minister of Planning and Infrastructure

Mr Jernej Vrtovec
Minister of Infrastructure

Mr Jean-Baptiste Djebbari
Minister with responsibility for Transport,
attached to the Minister for the Ecological
Transition

Mr Karel Havlíček
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Industry and
Trade, Minister of Transport

**Open letter to EU Presidents on the need to extend the European Year of Rail
until December 2022**

Dear Presidents,

Dear Vice President,

Dear Commissioner,

As enthusiastic promoters of the European Year of Rail, we can but note that the constraining sanitary context is impeding the full deployment of stakeholders' activities to promote rail. We therefore urge you to consider extending this outstanding initiative until December 2022 in order to make it an even greater success at the end.

When in the course of 2020 the EU decided to dedicate 2021 to celebrate railways, the European rail sector reacted unanimously and enthusiastically – despite fears that the

pandemic could somehow affect the calendar of activities – and allocated huge financial and in-kind resources to back this excellent initiative.

In the context of the European Green Deal, the European Year of Rail is a wonderful and unique opportunity to promote rail and its key contribution to a stronger internal market, to job creation, territorial & social cohesion and of course to a smart, digital and sustainable mobility system that reconciles performance and reduction of CO2 emissions.

On 29 March, the Portuguese Presidency of the Council and the European Commission Directorate-General for Mobility officially kicked-off the European Year of Rail (EYR). After that, rail companies and associations such as ourselves – the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER), the European Rail Infrastructure Managers (EIM), the European Rail Supply Industry Association (UNIFE) – had planned to start implementing a dense series of initiatives intended to make the most out of the European Year of Rail.

As a European Year of Rail flagship initiative, the Connecting Europe Express is an exhibition train that is set to start its journey in Lisbon, travel across twenty-five Member States including Slovenia and the Czech Republic and arrive in Paris five weeks after with a series of events scheduled to take place in all capitals where the train stops. If initially CER planned to have the train leaving Lisbon in June, today – because of the pandemic – CER has been forced to schedule its departure in September 2021.

EIM members have started planning and organising specific events in their respective countries in coordination with the relevant partners, including the Connecting Europe Express initiative. Since January EIM is also deploying a bespoke social media campaign related to the EYR and the concrete activities in the field. Unfortunately, the campaign may not deploy all its full potential due to the national health and safety measures and the underlying travel restrictions. However, these activities are necessary to showcase the benefits of investments in physical and digital rail infrastructure for the society and the economy. This proves even more true in a context of reforms related to the TEN-T and the RFCs later this year.

UNIFE and its members have prepared a communication campaign covering 12 themes throughout 2021. The year-long campaign formally kicked off in January, however until now the results are not as expected due to COVID-19 effects and restrictions. The UNIFE Chairman reiterated and reaffirmed the European Rail Supply Industry's commitment for this initiative during its official launch on 29 March.

In parallel, rail companies started planning numerous communication campaigns at national level to explain – together – that rail is the most sustainable mode of transport and the safest mobility option; that rail is undergoing a digital make-over of its processes and services; that rail has its place among the deep roots of European culture and contributes to defining what Europe will be in the future.

However, in 2020 nobody could foresee that the pandemic would last this long, with the effects everybody can see today.

It is unfortunately very clear now that our collective efforts are jeopardised by a pandemic that prevents having any degree of certainty regarding the possibility to organise in-person events and other public gatherings. In fact, there is a very concrete risk that upcoming scheduled events will have to be postponed until the situation improves or just cancelled, and that the allocated resources will be spent in vain – something we can ill afford at a time when railways are suffering huge losses because of COVID-19.

Against this background, we call on all the EU Institutions and on Member States to extend the European Year of Rail until December 2022 in order to make the best out of this important opportunity and give this valuable initiative the best chances of success.

Yours sincerely,



Andreas Matthä
CER Chair
ÖBB CEO



Gorm Frimannslund
EIM Chair
BaneNOR CEO



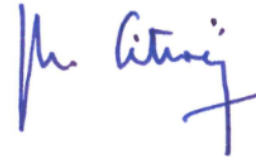
Henri Poupart-Lafarge
UNIFE Chairman
Alstom Chairman & CEO



Alberto Mazzola
CER Executive Director



Monika Heimig
EIM Executive Director



Philippe Citroën
UNIFE Director General