

5 EVALUATION

Trade is the most important factor that enables the European Union to grow economically. To assure the future needs of transport capacity with the lowest costs, all ways of transport have to be optimised and, some of them, need their infrastructure be expanded. Thanks to its capacity potential and its low environmental impact, the EU has bet on rail for the future as mid-and-short distance passenger transport and international freight carrier. At this point, the amplitude of the reform of rail includes all possible areas and cannot be stopped.

All the parties related to the world of railways are interested in its resurgence although the national railways have been, and some still are very reluctant to see its comfortable and competition-free position change. The details of this renewal of rail sector are being decided with the participation of all parties to reach the maximum compatibility and prevent rules being set that are unfair for one of the partakers. However, whatever is done to improve the international rail traffic demands the honest and simultaneous collaboration of all countries and parties. Willing to force an advantageous position makes the negotiation processes difficult and longer and is a detriment to the future global result.

A distinct source of conflicts between politics and operators are the costs of these reforms, which at the same time limit its pace. The standardisation of infrastructure, rolling stock, procedures, etc, and the construction of new infrastructure cannot be financed with today's users prices. Therefore network operators demand public help to adapt their facilities and tracks. However, the large number of new projects and other funds consuming processes limit the availability of public aids of the EU and the national governments, and thus private investors, loans, cross-modal financing or other new financing methods are necessary. Other transport sectors criticize the public aid on the rail system albeit the lack of investments it suffered for a long time, despite being one of the cleanest ways of transport, while almost all the rest of infrastructures were also paid with public money. In fact, the current aids destined to the rail sector will help enhance its future economical independence.

Through competition synergy will be lost between operators and national railways, and the difficulties of establishing a new market coordination (contracts, penalisations...) will slow down the first commercial attempts. On the long-term, the liberalization of the market will make the number and quality of available products raise, and more innovation will come and closer to the client.

As regards technology, the existent knowledge is almost reaching the physical limitations of the rail system. The high-speed technology is ready and proved, and nowadays, for both passenger and freight trains, the focus

has to be drawn in lowering the life-cycle costs, reducing noise emissions and other environmental impacts.

On the other hand, infrastructure management and train control and safety systems are yet to be much further developed. New systems like the ERTMS, with a high potential, will still require lots of work. Some problems have already shown up on the installation of equipment in the locomotives and on the compatibility of software versions. Its problem-free operation and its international application will presumably take longer than expected. DB for instance, considers it will be completely ready and deployed for 2030. However, the soon application of ERTMS in the major European routes is expected to show its suitability and maybe then it will become indispensable for the infrastructure operators to intensify the use of the tracks and to prevent older control systems being installed in new lines. The question of how to carry out the migration will have to be answered by the operators and railways themselves.

So far, relevant items like the taxation of fuel for aviation and inland navigation or the ubiquity of fees on the use of the transport ways (air, motorways, rail tracks or rivers) have not been seriously addressed. Meanwhile pollution will keep on going out mainly of the exhaust pipes of the less efficient vehicles used on inappropriate services. Fortunately many countries are aware of this and launch projects to eliminate road traffic at least from the most sensitive areas.

The features of rail are at the same time constraints. Whatever is done to boost the rail traffic will never make it work like roads, for all the operations have to be planned. But to be a victor in the future scenery, rail has to become a real insurmountable option in main-line connections and completely interact with the other means of transport where necessary. The EU plans are set on the horizon of 2010 and those of the ERRAC on 2020, although the changes of priorities alter them and set new objectives. Also the complexity of the renovation process prevents the forecasting of a total concussion date. Particular targets will be achieved and, gradually, the course of the years will show in how far goals have been attained.