



Stepping up meaningful action and engagement on the EU Year of Rail

Dear Executive Vice President Timmermans,

We are writing to you on behalf of Generation Climate Europe, Erasmus by Train, Rail to the COP, Stay Grounded, Instytut Spraw Obywatelskich, European Environmental Bureau, Erasmus Student Network, Youth and Environment Europe, AEGEE Europe, Global Youth Biodiversity Network and Europe on Rail.

As a part of the EU's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, the Commission launched the "Year of the Rail" initiative in 2021 to highlight the benefits of **rail as a sustainable, smart and safe means of transport**. We are writing to you to share our concerns, as this year - 2021 - is so crucial for a sustainable recovery, resilience for the future generations and for **immediate actions** to tackle climate change. Whilst we warmly welcome the initiative and - quite frankly - cheered with enthusiasm about the initiative, we are weary and concerned of the way you, as the Commission, plan to do it.

For the EU Year of Rail to have a long lasting positive impact, the Commission should:

1. **Extend** the EU Year of Rail initiative to a **Decade of Rail** and
2. **Link** it to **concrete policy actions** and goals for the end of every year and
3. **Reject** the demands from the aviation industry to have a **European Year of Aviation**.

Firstly, the "Connecting Europe Express", the flagship project of the EU Year of Rail, is an awareness campaign rather than concrete policy action stimulating rail transport. Indeed, we have seen very **little concrete policy to increase accessibility, usage, interconnectedness, affordability and resilience of the**

rail sector. For the EU to deliver on its objectives on rail, it takes more than aligned communication and promises about rail mobility; it takes actual **expansion and improvement** of the passenger and freight rail sectors. Current action is insufficient to achieve the EU's climate targets for 2030 and 2050.

Secondly, the Commission has stated in several publications it wants to give young Europeans the chance to discover Europe and encourage them to travel in an environmentally friendly way. We want to support this endeavor and put rail policy and youth mobility on the agenda. The only way to achieve the EU's climate targets is **democratically, through consultation of the EU's youth.**

Thirdly, we are concerned about the recent demand from the Sky & Space intergroup of the European Parliament to designate 2022 as the Year of Aviation. While we recognise the negative impact the COVID-19 had on the sector, we believe it is the **EU's role to promote the most sustainable ways of travelling** in accordance with the EU Green Deal. As long as aviation continues to be a highly-polluting form of travel, the EU and national governments should therefore promote rail transport instead of aviation.

Finally, we share the concerns of other organisations, that concerted and resolute political action is needed: Our national governments and the EU have the responsibility to ensure a thriving Europe for future generations and this will only be possible with a fair and sustainable mobility infrastructure, which encourages a switch to sustainable mobility. Thus, if promoting sustainable and smart mobility is the goal, we **expect you to take concrete and precise policy actions** by addressing the most urgent and pressing priorities to really increase the usage of rail, which are the accessibility, the prices and the flexibility of the trains.

These priorities can be broken down in the following concrete policy actions:

- **Electrification** of railway infrastructure and 100% decarbonised electricity in the railway network by 2030
- **Cross-country ticketing**
- **Expansion and revival** of railway infrastructure within and across Member States
- Development of an affordable and frequent **night train network** for a shift from aviation to rail
- **Interconnection** of railway infrastructures with other shared and public transport modes, particularly cycling
- Strong **incentives** for the participants of the Erasmus+, Creative Europe and European Solidarity Corps programmes to **take sustainable means of transport** (such as rail)

We encourage you to have a meeting with us to discuss the next steps in this direction. We can then go into further detail on the view of the European youth and highlight synergies to curb emissions and pave the way for the future of

rail mobility. We thank you for your time and look forward to discussing these crucial and pressing matters with you.

Yours sincerely,

Generation Climate Europe, Erasmus by Train, Rail to the COP, Stay Grounded, Instytut Spraw Obywatelskich, European Environmental Bureau, Erasmus Student Network, Youth and Environment Europe, AEGEE Europe, Global Youth Biodiversity Network and Europe on Rail