

PRIME Work Programme 2024

Context

2023 was a year marked by extreme weather events affecting several countries across Europe. In a dedicated task force, PRIME members discussed their experience and strategies to increase resilience of the infrastructure against the effects of climate change. A strategic discussion on climate change adaptation was held at the June Plenary and an output paper was prepared for publication.

PRIME contributed to preparatory work of the Commission on charging and capacity management:

The charging subgroup discussed the effect of domestic market openings, based on examples from individual IMs, and looked at further steps to strengthen rail transport and ensure fair competition within rail and with other modes of transport. At a subgroup meeting in Paris, academics from Italy, Spain, France and Germany shared their insights on track access charges with the group. Using the deep dive studies carried out in 2021 and 2022 as a starting point, the charging subgroup discussed and provided input to the upcoming Guidelines on rail track access charges, which the Commission plans to publish in early 2024.

In-depth discussions on the Commission initiative on capacity management (published in July 2023) were held at the plenary meetings in November 2022 and June 2023.

The KPI and benchmarking subgroup completed a deep dive study on network condition, consisting of two parts. Key findings are insights into the connection of network condition and maintenance and renewal activities as well as preliminary indicators creating the basis for further KPI development for network condition in the annual benchmarking. The subgroup worked on the establishment of environmental KPIs and presented its annual benchmarking report in an internal and public version, now including data up to 2021, so data showing the initial recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, the studies serve as an important starting point for further discussions on best practices and improved cooperation on the development of cross-border rail.

Against the background of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, infrastructure managers have continued to engage with DG MOVE in the implementation of the Solidary Lanes Action Plan, facilitating the use of land transport routes, in particular for the export of Ukrainian agricultural products. These alternative routes are vital for the Ukrainian economy in the short and medium term.

Work priorities 2024

In July 2023, the Commission presented a legislative proposal on capacity planning and management, which assigns a strengthened role for PRIME as European network of infrastructure manager, with specific tasks and responsibilities. Guidelines for setting track access charges which support and encourage the development of long-distance and cross-border passenger services are expected to be published by the Commission in early in 2024. Both documents affect core business areas of infrastructure managers. PRIME work in 2024 will therefore be focused on preparing the necessary transition and implementation. Benchmarking performance continues to be a key source of knowledge and improvement for PRIME.

PRIME subgroups will focus on the following topics:

1) Charging

In 2024, the subgroup will work on the following:

- The Commission in its Action plan to boost long distance and cross-border passenger rail (published in December 2021), announced that it will provide guidelines in 2023 for setting track access charges. One of the aims of the PRIME subgroup on charges will be to accompany the

Commission's preparatory work and the implementation of these guidelines, including with regard to market segmentation, pricing and optimal use of capacity for both passenger and freight traffic.

- Discuss the concept, and the methodology used by IMs to define the level, of “reasonable profit” when charging for use of service facilities (“the charge imposed for track access within service facilities referred to in point 2 of Annex II, and the supply of services in such facilities, shall not exceed the cost of providing it, plus a reasonable profit.”).
- (Optional, only in case there are additional experiences to share): Continue discussions on the effect of domestic market opening processes on charging, based on new examples from IMs with the aim of presenting an overview paper.

2) Key Performance indicators and benchmarking

PRIME KPIs subgroup is building on work developed since 2014, consolidating a Global Framework of KPIs with an overview on major business areas. Since its creation, the subgroup has considerably grown and now includes 26 IMs which regularly participate in meetings and exchanges along with the Commission and observers (ERA and CER). Between 22 and 24 IMs are actively engaged in the benchmarking by providing current data for internal and mostly also external use. A public benchmarking report based on 2018/22 data is expected to be ready in April/May 2024, following an internal report prepared exclusively for benchmarking among participants (December 2023).

The benchmarking report is continuously growing due to an increase in participants as well as the continuous development and sharpening of KPIs through the work of the subgroup as well as sub-subgroups. For 2024 a continuation of the sub-subgroup environment is planned in order to further develop the pilot KPIs which are being tested in 2023. In addition, draft indicators resulting from the deep dive study on network condition conducted in 2023 will be further developed by a focus group of IMs with the goal of including pilot KPI on network condition in the 2024 benchmarking data collection.

This continuous development of the data scope adds value to the report and allows for more detailed benchmarking, however it also increases the time required for collecting, processing, and discussing the data. A focus for 2024 will therefore be to increase the efficiency of the KPIs subgroup's work through sub-subgroups, focus groups and a shift from bilateral e-mail communications to communal discussions through a shared teams channel. Further, the structure of the benchmarking report as well as the accompanying internal catalogue detailing all the KPI definitions should be discussed and eventually be adapted to give more guidance to the reader with the help of more chapters, sub-chapters and topic clustering.

The thematic focus of the work programme is to expand and include more meaningful environmental and network condition indicators. The working focus is to maintain the functionality of the growing group with continuous participant changes (on an IM level, as well as on a personal level). Especially the integration of new participants in terms of content and deepening the common understanding of the data and the data definitions are key.

1. Sub-subgroup environment

In 2022, this PRIME KPIs group was created with the goal to include KPIs for environmental protection in both the internal and external report. Since, seven new environmental KPIs have been developed and are piloted during the data entry phase in 2023. For 2024 a first sub-chapter in the external reports is planned, giving an insight into the purpose and first key findings of the sub-subgroup. In addition, the sub-subgroup environment will continue its work to develop and sharpen the KPIs based on the learnings from the pilot phase, in order to fully integrate the KPIs for the data collection season from July to September 2024.

The upcoming steps for the environmental KPIs are the following:

- Plausibilisation and discussion of pilot data collection
- Development and sharpening of KPIs based on pilot phase learnings
- Insights into the work of sub-subgroup environment through sub-chapter in benchmarking report
- KPIs exit the pilot phase and are fully integrated into data collection for 2024

2. Focus group on network condition

In 2023 a two-part deep dive study on network condition – condition assessment and reporting, handling of maintenance and renewals, inter IM condition comparability – was conducted. The analyses of network condition indicators within the scope of this deep dive provides valuable preliminary work, which needs to be further developed and defined, in order to create pilot KPIs for the data entry season from July to September 2024. The focus group members will meet for workshops as well as provide draft data, to establish these pilot KPIs. Interim findings will be presented in the regular meetings of the KPIs subgroup to gain insights from the other IMs.

This focus group is in line with the goals of the sub-subgroup insights, which was in place from 2021 to 2022, and continues its work. The draft insights on network condition provide more insights on condition as well as maintenance and renewal, also on a financial level. It appears that the availability of granular data on maintenance and renewal expenditures by asset category is rather low for most IM. The development and, above all, the in-depth analysis of network condition indicators will therefore not be a short-term task, but will also occupy the SG in the long term.

3) Digital Subgroup

The European Commission aims to deliver a high-capacity integrated European railway network by eliminating barriers to interoperability across national networks and cross-border, promoting solutions for full integration (covering capacity management, traffic management, train preparation, management of train movement, management of wagons movements and their freight, infrastructure description including service facilities, and associated services where appropriate), and achieving faster uptake and deployment of innovation, including through projects co-financed by the EU. Railway and multimodal stakeholders should be able to re-use information and data, and contribute to corresponding data flows, as if it was one infrastructure in Europe. Fair and non-discriminatory principles must apply and it must be clear what information and data is available, where to get it and how.

In support of IMs and decision makers, the PRIME digital subgroup is working on the implementation of a vision, the deployment of associated digital systems, and the planning of corresponding financial needs, for rail information and management systems to meet the EU's ambitions.

PRIME digital supports the coordinated development of digital solutions, assists in establishing their regulatory framework and IMs' implementation thereof. In these activities, it also supports the integration and deployment of digital solutions through cooperation with the European Union Agency for Railways, the Europe's Rail joint Undertaking¹ and RailNetEurope.

Following up on the work of the digital subgroup from 2021 and 2022, three main digitalisation domains on which IMs are working were defined as follows, and a detailed work programme covering these three domains in the period 2023 to 2025 has been delivered by the digital subgroup in 2023:

- Digital Infrastructure Information
- Digitalisation of Capacity Management DCM (as digital part of TTR)

¹ 40% of the IMs are represented in the JU. The JU works a.o. on European Traffic Management System, Dynamic Capacity Management, Digital Twin, Satellite Navigation and future GovSatCom.

- Digital Train Information

These three domains should specifically support the deployment of digital solutions referred to in the Commission proposal for a Regulation on the use of railway infrastructure capacity. In particular, the development and maintenance of technical specifications for interoperability relating to the subsystem telematics applications should be the digital enabler for the implementation of above-mentioned Regulation.

4) Transition Taskforce Capacity Management

The Commission proposal for a Regulation on the use of railway infrastructure capacity in the single European railway area (COM (2023) 443/2) foresees a strengthened and more operational role for PRIME. The proposal is still subject to negotiations between the co-legislators. In order to be ready for a swift implementation following the final adoption, a new task force will be set up to analyse and prepare necessary changes to the structure and working procedures of PRIME, based on a review of the competences and tasks outlined in the Commission proposal for the European network of infrastructure managers and the Network Coordinator. Deliverables of the task force could involve a proposal to revise the rules and procedures of PRIME accordingly.

PRIME Plenary meetings are planned for **27 June (Brussels)** and **28 November 2024** (place tbc).