



The European Year of Rail  
Make it work for mountainous regions

## EUROMONTANA'S RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL TO MAKE 2021 THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF RAIL

APRIL 2020

### FOREWORD

The density of permanent population in mountainous regions is often under the EU average and some mountain areas are facing depopulation challenges, mostly resulting from the lack of attractiveness and services, like in Spain or Romania. This low density greatly reduces the economic viability of public transport lines - a viability that is furthermore very much reduced due to the high cost of infrastructures to cross mountains, such as tunnels.

The natural, geographical and sometimes demographic handicaps of mountain areas thus lead to a high dependency on road transport, both for permanent residents, who often need to travel a certain distance for work, education, services and leisure activities and for seasonal tourists. Road transport dependency is also a challenge for freight. In the Alpine Space for instance, one-third of the 40 million tons of goods transported each year is conveyed by trucks through mountain areas<sup>1</sup>, with heavy consequences on mountainous ecosystems due to emissions. This dependency is worsened in cross-border territories,

<sup>1</sup> ["Background : Combined Transport – a sustainable alternative to road freight transport"](#), AlpInnoCT, October 2018

which are often mountainous, due to a lack of train offers and a bad coordination of the different train companies in these regions<sup>2</sup>.

## Rail in mountain areas: a challenge for people, businesses and the environment

Reducing emissions with rail transport must be an opportunity for all territories in view of the European Green Deal. It is thus essential to maintain a dense train lines network, including small rural ones. Multimodality should be further encouraged by a stronger coordination between different national and regional transportation schemes in cross-border regions<sup>3</sup> as well as between operators from the same region to provide adapted transport connections with common prices and tickets, as illustrated by the regional transport strategy implemented in the former Auvergne region in France<sup>4</sup>.

Opportunities to increase freight transport have also recently been demonstrated by the Alpine Space AlInnoCT project. Encouraging goods transportation through rail for instance needs more investments for multimodality. Other recommendations, such as better harmonizing freight and passenger transport and prioritizing freight transport at certain non-peak times, can support a transition towards sustainable transportation and help to decrease the pollution in valleys.

## Recommendations to make the European Year of Rail work for mountainous regions

To ensure that no one is left behind in the transition towards more sustainable transport, Euromontana calls upon the European Commission to address the issue of rail in mountain areas during the European Year of Rail, by:

- ▶ Involving DG REGIO in the work of DG MOVE to ensure the organisation of events in all territories, including in the most rural and remote mountain areas, in close collaboration with regional authorities and local communities and to reflect on the opportunities for rail under the post-2020 Cohesion Policy objectives for a greener and more connected Europe.
- ▶ Building on the OECD study, expected for late 2020, on the cost of public services in rural areas, to explore opportunities to improve the viability of rural train lines, such as mixed passengers/freight train lines, to maintain quality of life and protect the environment.
- ▶ Organising debates with citizens addressing the issue of rail freight transport in mountain areas to reduce the pollution in valleys.
- ▶ Organising events in mountain areas to debate the issue of sustainable mobility in the tourism sector with last mile transport thanks to rail and combined transport.
- ▶ Encouraging the organisation of cross-border events to accelerate the harmonization of rail

<sup>2</sup> [“Comprehensive analysis of the existing cross-border rail transport connections and missing links on the internal EU borders”](#), European Commission, March 2018

<sup>3</sup> [“Transport in the European Union Current Trends and Issues”](#), European Commission, March 2019

<sup>4</sup> [“Coordination of the authorities organising transport in neighbouring territories, Auvergne \(France\)”](#), Move on Green, 2014

transport schemes between mountainous regions.

- ▶ Proposing solutions for mountain rail in the expected Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy.
- ▶ Presenting data on rail networks at NUT3 level in its assessment of the European Year of Rail.

## For more information

To find out more on:

- sustainable mobility in mountain areas: <https://www.euromontana.org/en/working-themes/mobility-and-infrastructures-ict/>
- good practices on mobility: <https://www.euromontana.org/en/project/move-on-green-2/mog-good-practices/>

### Euromontana - the European Association for mountain areas

Euromontana is the European Association for mountain areas. Founded in 1996, it assembles around 65 organisations (regions, universities, chambers of commerce, of agriculture, development and environmental agencies) from 15 European countries in and out of the EU. Dedicated to the improvement of the quality of life of mountain people, Euromontana is working on different themes of crucial importance for mountain areas, such as cohesion policy, rural development, climate change, innovation, mountain products, tourism, agriculture and forestry, transport, youth among others. Euromontana is also officially supporting the RUMRA (Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas) & Smart Villages intergroup of the European Parliament.

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