

EN

E-002107/2026

Answer given by Mr Tzitzikostas
on behalf of the European Commission
(17.8.2026)

The rail freight market has three main segments. Block trains (coal, metals, chemicals) are declining due to economic change. Intermodal transport (containers and semi-trailers) is growing but not yet enough to compensate for block train losses. Single wagon load faces structural high costs, fragmentation, and empty runs, making it less competitive than road haulage.

The Commission is actively strengthening rail freight competitiveness through key initiatives, as outlined in the answer to the Parliamentary question E-003039/2024¹. One of these initiatives is the pilot deployment of Digital Automatic Coupling. It could make single wagon load more efficient and attractive by making shunting faster, safer and less labour-intensive, since wagons no longer need to be coupled manually.

Since the most recent reply to a parliamentary question on this subject in 2025, two new initiatives have entered into force. Firstly, in March 2026, modernised State aid rules for transport were adopted². They allow Member States to support actions benefitting freight shippers and rail freight companies. Secondly, in June 2026, the Rail Infrastructure Capacity Regulation entered into force³. It introduces the possibility for short-term capacity allocation, and more reliable train paths for freight.

¹ Parliamentary question E-3039/2024 of 10 April 2025, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2024-003039-ASW_EN.html.

² Communication from the Commission. Guidelines on State aid for land and multimodal transport (C/2026/1656) OJ C, 30.3.2026.

³ Regulation (EU) 2026/1184 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2026 on the use of railway infrastructure capacity in the single European railway area, amending Directive 2012/34/EU and repealing Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 (Text with EEA relevance) (OJ L, 2026/1184, 10.6.2026).