

A unified rail research community calls for a successor to Europe's rail joint undertaking

Under Horizon Europe/FP10 and the European Competitiveness Fund
28th January 2026

A unified academic and research community is fully committed

EURNEX, the European Rail Research Network of Excellence, unites 43 leading universities and research centres across Europe. As an academic voice in rail R&I, EURNEX drives scientific excellence, independent validation, open knowledge dissemination, and skills development critical to Europe's mobility, climate, and industrial sovereignty objectives.

Rail research, spanning engineering, digitalization, human factors, sustainability, operations, and socio-economic analysis, is indispensable to realizing the Single European Railway Area (SERA), completing the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), and achieving climate neutrality by 2050.

Academic institutions provide system-level insights, long-term thinking, and cross-sectoral innovation that complement industry-led development, ensuring solutions are interoperable, inclusive, and publicly accountable.

Yet Europe's rail system remains fragmented. National standards, legacy infrastructure, and uneven digital maturity hinder scalability. Only a stable, coordinated, and well-resourced R&I framework can overcome these structural barriers and accelerate the deployment of harmonized, green, and digital rail solutions.

A successor to EU-RAIL

Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking (EU-RAIL) has proven that structured public-private-collaboration delivers impact. Its successor under Horizon Europe/FP10 must be improved and enlarged to maintain Europe's technological edge amid global competition, particularly from state-backed actors.

Academia must be embedded as a core partner from day one, not an afterthought. Independent research ensures evidence-based policy, safeguards public interest, and fuels innovation with spillovers to SMEs and adjacent sectors. Without dedicated support, Europe risks losing its rail R&I capacity, talent pipeline, and strategic autonomy.

Our call to the European institutions

Within the proposed FP10) and European Competitiveness Fund and any other European public fund source, we urge the European Commission, Parliament, and Member States to:

1. Establish a successor to EU-RAIL, ensuring legal continuity, governance clarity, and strategic focus on systemic rail challenges.
2. Secure robust, predictable funding:
 - €3 billion for research and innovation (50% EU / 50% industry co-funding),
 - €15 billion for pre-deployment via the ECF, and private investment, enabling demonstrators, testbeds, and market uptake.
3. Guarantee inclusive governance, with formal, balanced representation of universities, research centres, SMEs, operators, infrastructure managers, regulators, and industry, reflecting their roles.
4. Engage the research community early in defining work programs, KPIs, and evaluation criteria to uphold scientific excellence, independence, and long-term capacity building.

With ERRAC, the European Rail Research Advisory Council, EURNEX and Europe's academic rail community stand ready to co-design and co-implement a successor to EU-RAIL that places scientific excellence, independence, and skills development at the core of Europe's mobility future.

We call on EU institutions to act decisively in the FP10 and ECF negotiations to secure a rail R&I ecosystem that is not only competitive but also sustainable, resilient, and sovereign. The time to lock in this framework is now, before strategic capacity erodes and global competitors fill the scientific gap.

Signed by Council:

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