



‘Rail Baltica’ axis Warsaw–Kaunas–Riga–Tallinn–Helsinki

Upgrading and renewing the north–south rail network in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, including making it more interoperable with the rest of the European network, will help make rail a more attractive option in the region.

What is the axis?

The Baltic countries currently make little use of rail for international traffic in the north–south direction. The existing network, built according to Russian standards, is slow, and is not interoperable with the Polish and German networks. Near the border between Lithuania and Poland, for example, there are considerable delays for passenger and freight trains. On some sections, speed is limited to 40–60 km/h.

The three Baltic countries already have a recently renewed north–south road axis, the so-called Via Baltica, which provides an improved road link with central and southern Europe. To boost European integration further, technical options for developing the rail network on the same north–south axis now need to be examined.

What are its expected benefits?

Better rail traffic conditions on this north–south route will help improve the three Baltic countries’ links through Poland with the heart of Europe, thus helping to integrate these countries in the enlarged Union. For freight traffic, the project will help increase the capacity of the rail network and improve intermodal transport potential, thus boosting trade with other European countries. For passengers, improving services and cutting journey times to central and southern Europe will bring an appreciable reduction in the volume of road traffic to Poland and Germany. This will improve transport sustainability and help the free movement of citizens and goods in the enlarged European Union.

What is its current status?

A feasibility study will be launched by the Commission on behalf of the countries concerned (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland) towards the end of 2005. This study (to be financed by the Cohesion Fund), will analyse traffic demand, technical solutions and possible alignments for new lines. Further estimates of traffic loads and, more specifically, of the potential shift from road to rail still need to be confirmed by more detailed analysis.

Implementing the project will, moreover, depend on the closest possible coordination between the three Baltic countries, and with Poland, as the Rail Baltica line connects with the important rail link running from Berlin via Warsaw towards Minsk and Moscow. At present, the three Baltic countries still have to settle on the technical options and the alignment on the Riga–Tallinn route. The technical choices, which will determine how much investment is needed, need to take account of the expected profitability of the rail link. Particular focus will have to be given to finding long-term solutions: notably, constructing a modern European standard line.

On 20 July 2005, the European Commission designated Mr Pavel Telicka as European coordinator for priority axis No 27.

Priority section	Type of work/status	Distance (km)	Timetable ⁽¹⁾	Total cost as of end 2004 (million EUR)	Investment up to 31.12.2004 (million EUR)	TEN-T contribution, including studies, up to 31.12.2004 (million EUR)
Warsaw–Kaunas	Reconstruction / new construction	437	2004–10	300 ⁽²⁾	0	0
Kaunas–Riga	Modernisation / new construction	283	2010–14	850	0	0
Riga–Tallinn	Modernisation / new construction	470	2010–2018 (2016)	1 500	0	0
TOTAL		1 190		2 650	0	0

(1) In brackets, completion date listed in the 2004 guidelines, if different from the date notified in 2005 by the Member State.

(2) The costs for the Polish section are not included here.

