

COVID-19 transport measures: Council agrees its position on temporary derogations in support of the rail sector



The EU is working on additional temporary rules to **mitigate the severe effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the rail sector**. Today member states' ambassadors agreed on a mandate regarding a proposal to give member states the possibility to help the sector by providing relief from certain infrastructure charges for rail companies, while ensuring a timely refund for infrastructure providers.

These targeted emergency rules are designed to ensure the continuity of rail transport by reducing the risk of COVID-19-related bankruptcies in the sector, which has been badly affected by a temporary lack of demand for transport services. To ensure the fair treatment of operators, the relief measures will apply in a strictly neutral, economically justified and transparent way. A sustainable rail sector is key to achieving EU climate goals and ensuring connectivity across Europe, and is one of the top priorities of the German presidency.

Andreas Scheuer, German Federal Minister for Transport and Digital Infrastructure, President of the Council

Council mandate

The temporary rules on relief from rail infrastructure charges will apply from 1 March 2020 until 31 December 2020, and are extendable if necessary. They entail a relaxation of obligations with regard to track access charges, reservation charges and mark-ups.

In its text the Council has specified that, where appropriate, member states may apply the derogation concerning track access charges according to market segments, such as passenger or freight transport, in a transparent, objective and non-discriminatory way.

It is for each member state to decide whether to implement any of these derogations or not. The Council has added an obligation for member states to inform the Commission of any measures they take, as well as an obligation for the Commission to make this information publicly available.

If needed, these derogations may be extended by means of Commission delegated acts. Under the Council mandate, the reference period can be extended by up

to six months at a time, and by up to 18 months in total after the entry into force of the regulation.

The draft regulation will enter into force the day after its publication in the EU Official Journal.

The negotiations between the Council and the European Parliament are taking place as a matter of urgency.

Next steps

The mandate agreed today by the Permanent Representatives Committee allows the presidency to liaise with the European Parliament on the final text before the Parliament adopts its first reading position.