

May 2015 | NEWS FROM THE FIELD OF RAILWAY TIMETABLING IN EUROPE

Redesign of the International Timetabling Process

The current timetabling system for international rail services is to some extent outdated. In the past few years the rail market has evolved very fast and new European Union legislation has been interpreted by rail industry actors on their own, often with divergent results. This obviously makes cross-border collaboration difficult and the resulting lack of harmonisation requires urgent action. We at RNE and FTE all felt the need for change; we share a common interest to improve the timetable planning process and thus the joint FTE-RNE project was launched – with the support of ERFA (European Rail Freight Association). It has already attracted much interest and involves a large number of participants, both from Railway Undertakings and Infrastructure Managers/Allocation Bodies.

Incomplete harmonisation of timetabling procedures between European countries makes it uneasy or impossible to cooperate at the international level. Railway Undertakings find it difficult to deal with divergent rules and expectations, which uses up more of their resources. Also, passenger and freight traffic are not treated in the same manner. To remedy this unsatisfactory situation, changes to current processes are urgently needed – the final objective being a comprehensive international planning process supported by common IT systems and functioning across Europe.

RNE and FTE agree on need to reform international timetabling

Timetabling has been at the heart of RailNetEurope's work since the transfer of a number of international timetabling functions from Forum Train Europe (FTE) to RNE was completed in 2005. Since then, the European Commission has not remained inactive. The legislative framework has changed, with the publication of the TAF and TAP TSI regulations (Technical Specification for Interoperability relating to Telematic Applications for Freight/Passengers), Regulation 913/2010 concerning a European rail network for competitive freight, and the recast of the first railway package (Directive 2012/34/EU), to name but a few.

Some of these legislative changes affect the international timetabling system. Railway companies, FTE and RNE responded as well they could but the end result was starting to resemble a patchwork.

In February 2014 FTE proposed to make a fundamental review of the whole process in the freight segment in order to:

- » eliminate current weaknesses
- » move closer to market expectations (end customer) and,
- » achieve a better coordination of works and possessions.

This proposal was developed, approved by the RNE General Assembly on 7 May 2014 and by the FTE Plenary Assembly on 4 June 2014. After much preparation by FTE and RNE – with the support of ERFA (European Rail Freight Association) – the official kick-off of the Redesign of the International Timetabling Process ('TTR project') took place in November 2014. It was attended by Infrastructure Managers/Allocation Bodies (IMs/ABs), Railway Undertakings (RUs) and Applicants.

Objectives

The following objectives have been agreed:

- » clear **market orientation**, possibly leading to different deadlines for path applications
- » **greater reliability**, incl. the planning of possessions and execution of works
- » **improved commitment** of all parties to international timetabling process
- » avoidance of work duplication through **greater efficiency** in the use of resources and rail track capacity
- » making **best use** of existing track capacity.

Expected impacts

- » Fully-harmonised international timetable planning process: optimised timetabling procedures and deadlines that are valid for all IMs/ABs will benefit the entire rail industry across Europe.
- » The project focus is international rail traffic. However, an optimised timetabling of cross-border rail services requires harmonised national timetabling processes – these will need to be adjusted, too.
- » The long-term impact will be a stronger market position for rail in the European transport sector.

- » implementation at national level does not always follow agreed rules
- » some definitions and process steps are perceived as ambiguous
- » there is too little flexibility, especially for freight customers.

International timetabling format no longer fit for purpose

We have come a long way from the situation that prevailed a dozen years ago, with improvements such as: the timetabling timeline (including late and ad-hoc processes), catalogue paths, or Rail Freight Corridor processes.

However, after several years of conducting international timetabling in its current format, and given the many changes taking place in the European railway sector – in a commercial, technological and legal sense – it has become manifest that:

- » the needs of applicants for passenger paths differ from those of applicants for freight paths
- » final freight path contracts often diverge from initial requests
- » the process is too resource-intensive
- » involved parties are faced with a peak season that is difficult to manage

Changes to EU legislation

The project's overall ambition is to devise an 'ideal' international timetabling process that benefits all interested parties in the passenger and freight segments of the rail market and then to help shape changes to future European Union legislation that will sustain this new way of doing things.

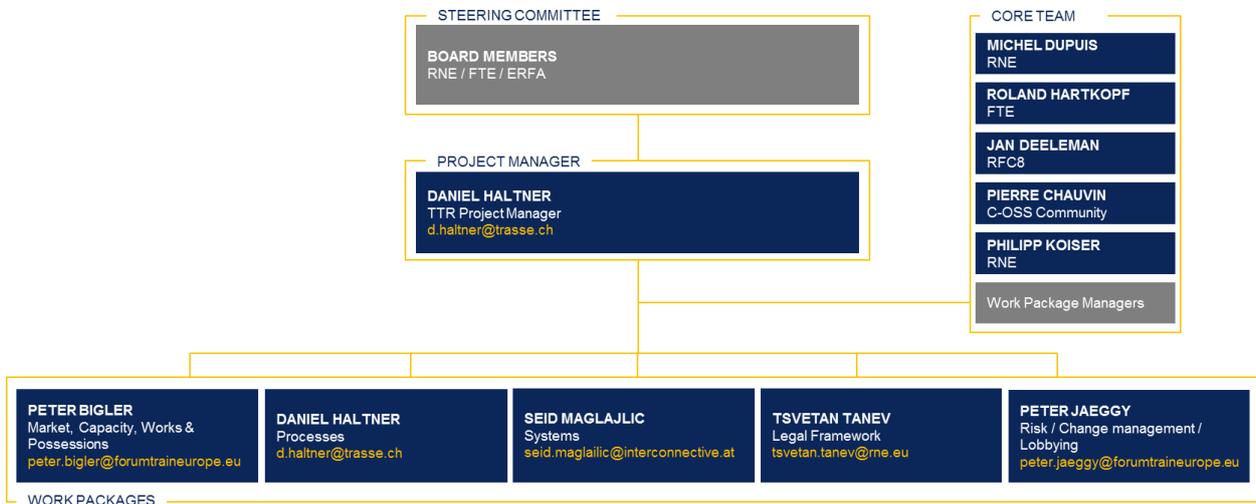
Indeed the European Commission is already preparing a modification of the Freight Regulation. It would be in the railway sector's best interest to come up with jointly-agreed ideas to optimise timetable planning for international traffic.

As regards passenger traffic, harmonised advanced planning would make it possible to open the ticket-presale phase around 4-6 months before the timetable change.

Project structure

The project structure comprises three levels, as shown in the graphic below:

- » a Steering Committee brings together management representatives from RNE, FTE and ERFA; it defines the overall direction of the project
- » the Project Manager and Core Team coordinate work with other projects
- » the five Work Packages are supervised by the Project Manager and Core Team.



Five interactive Work Packages

The review has been divided into five Work Packages (WPs) – as shown in the diagram below. These do not follow a linear approach but closely interact with each other.

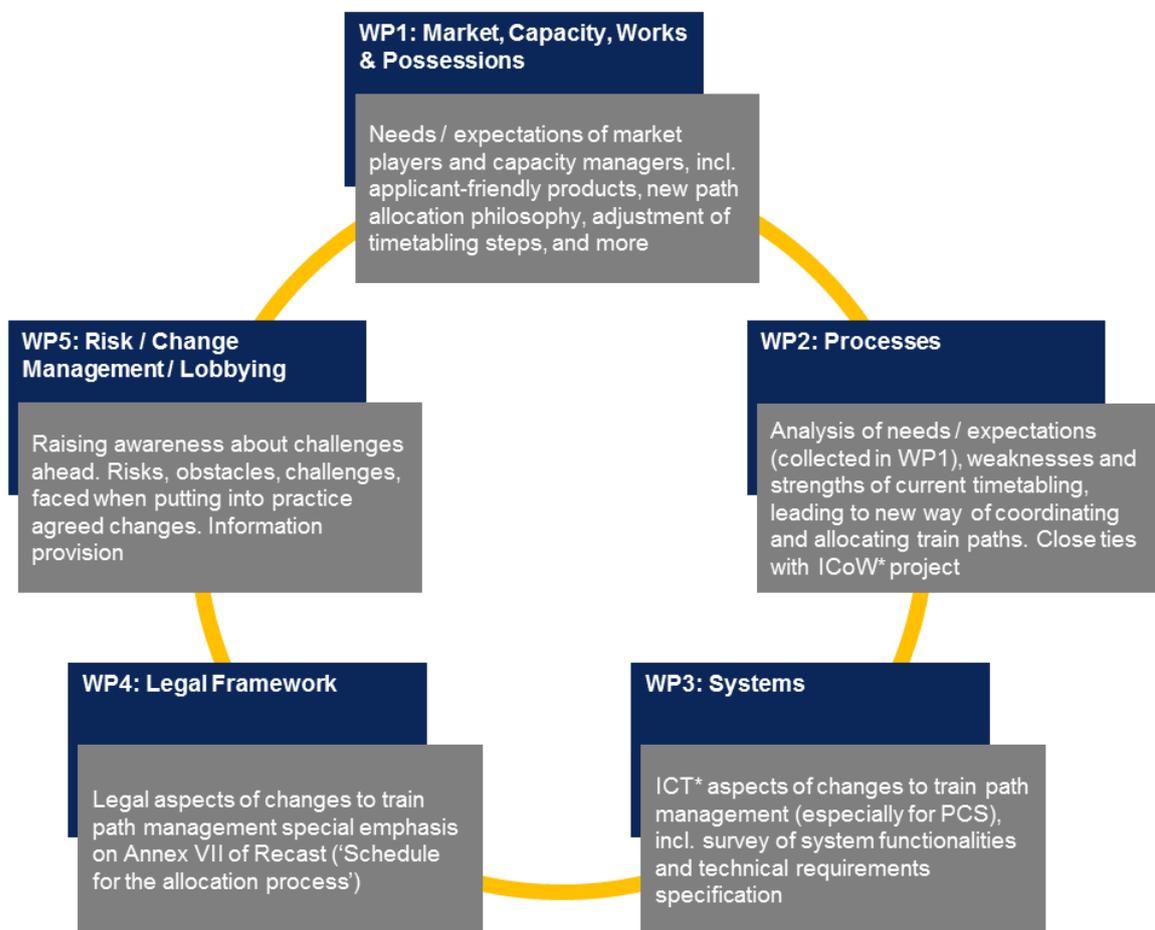
This will enable an iterative development of ideas taking into account the interests of all parties concerned.

All WPs have been tasked with analysing the current situation in their work area, identifying pressure points and/or inconsistencies and describing possibilities for improvement.

Endorsement procedure

Delivery of the redesigned international timetabling process should take place in March 2016 but what will happen after that date? FTE, RNE (and possibly ERFA) will submit the proposal to their Members in May-June 2016 (RNE General Assembly and FTE Plenary Assembly, respectively).

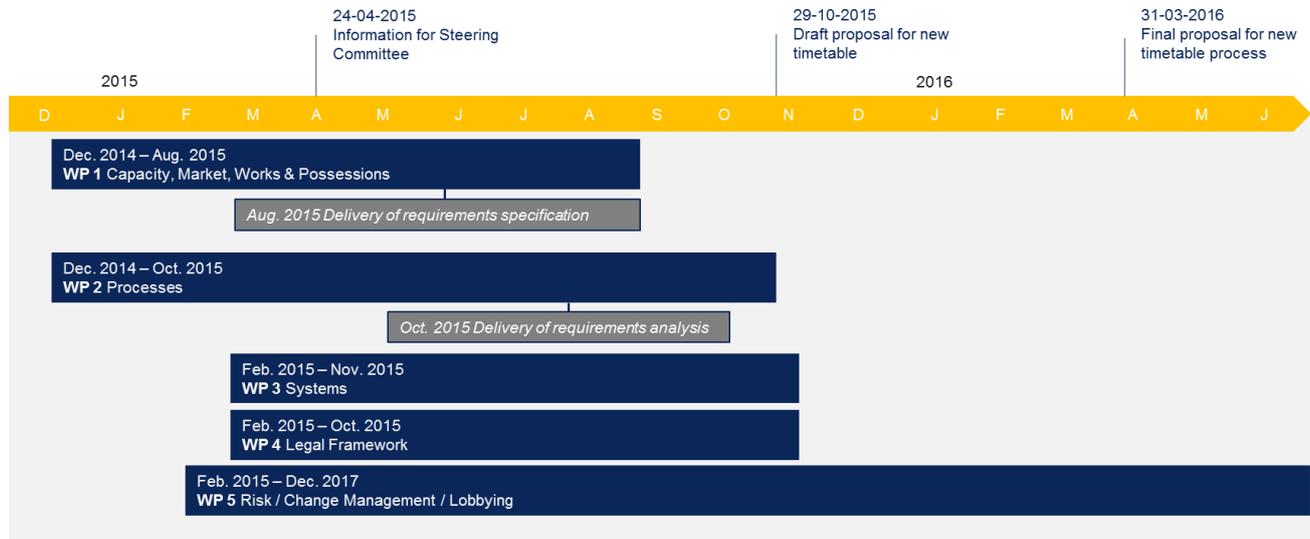
Then it is intended to launch an endorsement phase involving the top management of the companies concerned. This will enable railway companies to assess the impact of the implementation. A final decision by Members is expected at the end of 2016.



Overview of Work Packages

- *ICoW international coordination/publication of works and possessions
- *ICT information & communications technology

Project timeline



Keeping you informed

If you would like to know more about this joint RNE-FTE project and what it could mean for your company, or if you wish to contribute your views, please get in touch with:

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This introductory newsletter will be followed by more detailed newsletters as the project moves forward. You may also consult the dedicated webpage, which will be updated regularly: www.rne.eu/ttrproject.html