



State aid: Commission approves Austrian measures to support rail freight and passenger operators affected by the coronavirus outbreak

Brussels, 25 November 2020

The European Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, two Austrian measures supporting the rail freight sector and one measure supporting the rail passenger sector in the context of the coronavirus outbreak.

Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"The measures approved today will enable the Austrian authorities to support not only rail freight transport operators, but also commercial passenger operators in the context of the coronavirus outbreak. This will contribute to maintaining their competitiveness compared to other modes of transport, in line with the EU Green Deal objective. We continue working with all Member States to ensure that national support measures can be put in place as quickly and effectively as possible, in line with EU rules."*

The two measures supporting the rail freight sector will ensure increased public support to further encourage the shift of freight traffic from road to rail. The first measure amends the 2020 budget of an existing support scheme (last approved in case SA.55507), which will cover grants for a total estimated amount of €150.7 million in 2020. The second measure has an estimated budget of €115.7 million and will enable Austria to relieve rail freight operators of the costs related to track access charges (i.e. the charges that railway undertakings have to pay for the use of the rail network) during the period 1 March to 31 December 2020. This will allow rail freight operators in Austria to cope with the difficult situation caused by the coronavirus outbreak and prevent the loss of market shares to road operators.

The third measure introduces temporary relief for rail operators providing passenger services on a commercial basis. With a budget of approximately €9 million, the measure will waive the payment of track access charges due by commercial rail passenger transport operators during the period 8 October to 31 December 2020. The measure aims at preserving the competitiveness of rail passenger operations, in particular private rail undertakings operating on a commercial basis. Furthermore, the measure ensures that normal service levels are maintained, thereby preserving citizens' mobility throughout the coronavirus outbreak.

The Commission found that the measures are beneficial for the environment and for mobility as they support rail transport, which is less polluting than road transport, while also decreasing road congestion. The Commission also found that the measures are proportionate and necessary to achieve the objective pursued, namely to support the modal shift from road to rail whilst not leading to undue competition distortions.

Finally, the waiver of infrastructure access charges provided for in the second and third measures described above is in line with the recently adopted Regulation (EU) 2020/1429. This Regulation allows and encourages Member States to temporarily authorise the reduction, waiver or deferral of charges for accessing rail infrastructure below direct costs.

As a result, the Commission concluded that the measures comply with EU State aid rules, in particular the [2008 Commission Guidelines on State aid for railway undertakings](#) ("the Railway Guidelines").

Background

The Railway Guidelines clarify the rules set out in EU treaties for the public funding of railway companies and provide guidance on the compatibility of State aid for railway companies with the EU treaties.

The non-confidential version of the decision will be made available under the case number SA.57371 in the [State aid case register](#) on the Commission's [competition](#) website once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. New publications of State aid decisions on the internet and in the Official Journal are listed in the [State Aid Weekly e-News](#).

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