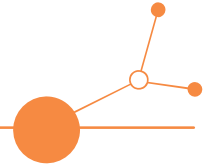


Policy conference (Final event) Documentation



Erfurt, Gotha and Ohrdruf (DE), January 14th & 15th, 2026





FINAL EVENT DOCUMENTATION

Policy conference on 14 & 15 January 2026 in Thuringia (DE)

1. Participants

In total, 58 representatives of all project partners as well as stakeholders of rail freight transport participated in-person in the event. Among the participants were representatives of the Styrian Railway Company as associated partner of Rail4Regions, railway undertakings, infrastructure managers and freight forwarders.

2. Conclusions and expected follow-up

- Presentation and discussion of the project's elaborated solutions highlighted their added value for the promotion of rail freight transportation in Central European regions
- Uptake of project solutions in all partner territories
- Commitment to future collaboration beyond the project lifetime

3. Minutes - Public event of January 14th, 2026, in Erfurt

Welcome & Opening

Klaus Bongartz as representative of the Lead partner opens the event and welcomes the participants to Erfurt. He shortly presents the event's agenda and introduces Matthias Gather, Senior Professor at the University of Applied Sciences, as host and moderator of the event.

The opening session was completed by Christophe Ebermann as representative of the Joint Secretariat (Vienna) who gave a presentation titled "Setting Rail4Regions project to the larger framework of the Interreg CE programme".

Keynote

The keynote speech for the event is delivered by Michael Lehmann, Professor at the University of Applied Sciences and Director of the Transport and Spatial Planning Institute. The keynote is titled "Fostering Rail Freight Transport in Europe - Status quo and challenges". In the keynote Michael Lehmann highlighted that the volumes of goods transported by rail has been steadily growing in recent years despite its decline in the modal split. He also showed recent trends in transportation and where researchers struggle to collect accurate data on the nature of goods that are transported.

Presentation of the project solutions and their uptake

The Rail4Regions project has led to four solutions, that were each elaborated by a transnational team of partners and tested in a pilot action. In their presentations, the final tools are introduced by the responsible working group leader from the project team, followed by presentations focusing on the solution's uptake and putting in a wider context of freight transportation in Central Europe.



The Railhub Finder, an online planning tool, is introduced by Klaus Bongartz. He showed the functionalities of the tool and explained its added value for both spatial and transport planners. The tool already has data from Germany, the Czech Republic and Northern Italy, and is open to additional data that can be entered either remotely by anybody interested (subject to manual verification), or manually by staff of Thuringia's state government, that assumes responsibility for hosting the tool and its maintenance. Thereafter, Tiziano Magri, Sales Manager of Gruppo Intermodaltrasporti shows how the Railhub Finder helps logistics operators to plan transports to its customers through examples from the company's practice.

The elaborated Guidelines for the revitalization of Branch- and Feeder lines is then introduced by Maryam Chegeni, T Bridge. She highlights the guideline's three stages for a successful revitalization. For branch and feeder lines further away from European corridors, the combined use of passenger and freight trains is suggested as the ultimate objective to ensure the financial sustainability of a reopened line. Vojtěch Elstner, KORDIS JMK, explains how the guideline was tested for investigating the revitalization of a branch line in the South Moravian region and the calculated costs and added value.



A Decision-making tool for sidings is the third solution produced by Rail4Regions. The use of the tool to check the economic feasibility to either maintain an existing industrial siding or to construct a new one is presented by Dobrijević Aleksandar, Prometni Institute Ljubljana. How the tool can be brought to use as means to promote regional rail freight transportation is thereafter highlighted by an intervention from Ante Klečina, University North (HR).



Due to weather conditions (closure of Budapest airport on the previous day, delay of the train from Berlin on the conference day) the presentation of a Green Paper for Single Wagon Load Transport by Cornelia Polcz, Rail Cargo Hungary, could not be realized and is replaced by a video clip that was produced to better communicate the paper. Upon their arrival, the Hungarian team briefly adds further insights to the final discussion. Instead, Vladislav Zitrický, University of Žilina, is able to give a longer presentation on a new public incentive for single wagon load transport in Slovakia, that already realizes some of the Green Paper's suggested approaches.

Future outlook

Nele Wesseln, CEO of die Güterbahnen, an interest group of rail freight operators gives the event's final presentation titled "Fostering Rail Freight Transport in Europe - Future Perspectives". She highlights the importance to level the playing field not only in comparison to road transport but also to former monopolists and in relations to the main infrastructure managers. She furthermore presents innovative approaches by member railway operators that are based on intermodal transport and mixed trains.

Final discussion

In the final discussion, now joined by the representatives of Rail Cargo Hungaria, the importance of financial incentives for rail freight transportation is addressed. The discussion highlights that the approaches in Central European countries as well as the importance of rail freight transportation still differs. Participants conclude that non-financial barriers especially for cross-border journeys require attention as those present cost-intensive bottlenecks and make rail freight transportation more challenging than road transport. The discussions are continued during a networking reception hosted by the University of Applied Sciences Erfurt.

4. Minutes - Field trip for project partners and interested stakeholders on January 15th, 2026, to Gotha and Ohrdruf

On the event's second day, project partners and interested stakeholders are invited to attend a field trip by bus to learn more about successful regional rail freight operations in Thuringia. Visited locations include Gotha and Ohrdruf. Project partners furthermore used the early afternoon to exchange about the uptake of solutions and to commit to continued collaboration for the promotion of rail freight transportation.

Field trip: Visit to RailSystems GmbH, Gotha

In a visit to RailSystems in Gotha, participants met with the management team of the company that operates 50 locomotives and offers rail freight services within and beyond Germany. The participants are able to visit the company's workshop and some of the locomotives used for operations. The management also explains the opportunities of the Ohra valley rail line and its hopes for increased use in the future.



Field trip: Visit to Ohrdruf

The Ohra valley rail line leads from Gotha to Ohrdruf where the participants are welcomed by the town's mayor who explains the historic importance of the rail line for the town's development, and how he envisions the future added value of the revitalized line. He also highlights the obstacles to reintroduce passenger services on the railway.



Partner workshop: Solutions' uptake

In a meeting among the project partners, the content of the different action plans is discussed with focus on the uptake of those solutions, that have been elaborated during the project. During the negotiations of the final action plans with stakeholders, especially the competent decision-makers on national levels and the public rail infrastructure managers, some modifications to proposed actions had to be introduced. While some of the action plans are already endorsed by the competent authorities, some partners are still in the negotiation process.

In regard to the uptake of solutions, the table below summarizes the state of play:

Table 1 - Solutions' uptake

Partner territory	RailHub Finder	Guideline for revitalisation of branch lines	Decision-making tool for industrial sidings	Green Book on Single Wagon Load transport (SWL)
Province of Novara (IT)	Solution already in use (data supplied and published)	Uptake via Action Plan	Not addressed (private ownership)	Not addressed (no SWL subsidies planned on regional or national levels)
Southern Great Plain (HU)	Not addressed (rejected by infrastructure manager)	Not addressed (no viable branch lines)	Uptake via Action Plan	Already in use (Rail Cargo Hungaria as national operator of SWL transport)
Slovakia (SK)	Direct uptake (comparable tools in use and to be merged)	Direct uptake (similar guideline applied)	Already in use (analytical tools applied by UNIZA and SK stakeholders)	Already in use (national scheme recently introduced; Green Book used as reference)
South Moravian Region (CZ)	Solution already in use (data supplied and published)	Already in use (through pilot action; further use planned)	Not addressed (due to ownership structure)	Not addressed (not a regional competence) but used for capacity building and reference)
Thuringia (DE)	Solution already in use (data supplied and published; continued hosting and maintenance plan approved)	Already in use (guideline adopted – Ohratalbahn; in preparation for other regional branch lines)	Not addressed (due to ownership structure)	Not addressed (not a regional competence) but used for capacity building and reference)
Małopolska (PL)	Uptake via Action Plan and coordination body	Uptake foreseen (revitalisation in regional strategies)	Uptake via Action Plan	Not addressed (not a regional competence) but used for capacity building and reference)
Slovenia (SI)	Uptake foreseen (to be further tested; discussions ongoing)	Uptake via Action Plan	Already in use (tool used for testing with operators)	Already in use (used in subsidy discussions on national level)
Northern Croatia (HR)	Uptake via Action Plan (WebGIS planning tool)	Uptake via Action Plan	Uptake via Action Plan	Uptake via Action Plan

Partner workshop: Continuous collaboration

The partner workshop is furthermore used to emphasize all partners' desire to continue the collaboration to promote rail freight transportation in Central European regions beyond the project lifetime. In addition to the eleven project partners and five associated partners, a number of other stakeholders additionally expressed an interest to cooperate in regard of the uptake and use of some of the project's solutions. During the event, Letters of Intent are presented and exchanged with the lead partner.

5. Annexes

- Event agenda
- Signed list of participants
- Presentations
- Photos (see below)

All annexes are available for download through the project's filesharing platform.