

The next edition of the traditional autumn conference will take place on October 16 – 17, 2025. This time, we will meet in the prestigious Fanta Hall at Prague Main Station.

In cooperation with the Faculty of Transport Engineering of the University of Pardubice, Správa železnic, the Association of Passenger Railway Carriers, and with the support of our traditional partners (ČD Telematika, Oltis Group, Siemens, Borcad), this year's conference will once again offer a current topic in railway transport. The theme is transport route capacity – its planning, allocation, and management. Capacity is undoubtedly a key commodity that determines the development of the entire sector.

Why this topic?

The topic of capacity is very relevant in the sector for a number of reasons. Capacity limits are beginning to have a significant impact on the efficiency and reliability of passenger and freight transport and play a key role in the development of the sector and its competitiveness. The importance of this topic is also confirmed by the European Commission's initiative to prepare new regulations in this area. These are intended to bring greater transparency, harmonize rules across countries, and eliminate national differences that complicate international operations – from administrative barriers to technical differences (e.g., track lengths) or planning of service disruptions.

The complexity of the issue

Capacity management is particularly challenging in a non-segregated infrastructure environment, where the different requirements of passenger and freight transport collide. While passenger transport requires regularity and high frequency, the freight sector prefers flexibility and space for ad hoc needs. Finally, liberalization has brought a greater number of carriers seeking favourable market conditions, which further increases pressure on capacity and on the creation of fair and predictable rules.

The need for a change in approach

The current system provides carriers with certainty only within a single timetable, while contracts (especially in passenger transport) are concluded for longer periods. This mismatch between long-term investment and short-term capacity certainty represents a significant business risk and needs to be addressed. The sector has been aware of this mismatch for some time and has responded with the Europe-wide TTR (TimeTable Redesign) project, which served as the technical basis for the new EU regulation. Its aim is to introduce systematic, multi-annual planning and capacity allocation in line with the European framework, which includes:

- analysis and forecasting of capacity demand,
- coordination between infrastructure managers and transport operators,
- creation and publication of draft timetables,
- taking into account closures and infrastructure restrictions.

According to the TTR principles, railway capacity planning takes place 1–5 years in advance. This is a major change from the annual perspective. It also emphasizes international coordination, predictability, and bindingness. There are two main challenges that TTR must address: (i) setting reserve capacity for emergencies and future needs to ensure flexibility and stable operations, and (ii) how to plan for service disruptions. The most important challenge for carriers, contracting entities, and other stakeholders is to understand the new rules. It will be necessary to develop methodological guidelines ("cookbooks") that provide specific instructions well in advance on how to approach the planning process, how to organize and coordinate it, and how to ensure its predictability.

What will the conference bring?

The aim of this year's conference is to take a look under the hood of the new regulation and to approach and discuss the issues that arise in connection with the implementation of the new rules from various angles. The spectrum of views that this year's conference will bring will be unusually broad – as usual, it will not only be transport operators, infrastructure representatives, industry, associations, and customers who will present their views. This year, you can also look forward to representatives from the European Commission, regulators, and academia. We will not only look at the situation in the Czech Republic, but also at how things are done elsewhere in Europe.

In the presentations and, in particular, the discussions, we will seek answers to questions that are seemingly clear and less clear:

1. What is capacity? How should it be planned and calculated? Do we have realistic expectations? What does flexibility and stability mean?
2. How do we understand capacity across the EU when individual countries have different priorities and different legal frameworks?
3. Is capacity a scarce commodity? If so, what does this mean and how should we deal with a situation where infrastructure managers expect transport operators to adapt, while transport operators demand greater stability, transparency, and long-term predictability?
4. What role does the market play and what role does the public sector play? What and who is the market when the market = a set of different actors (transport operators, customers, passengers, infrastructure managers), but these entities do not actually create a single "market voice"? On the contrary, their market expectations are often opposite.
5. What is the relationship between liberalization and capacity planning, and how can they influence each other?
6. How realistic is it to achieve a harmonized environment given all the national differences and specificities? Isn't harmonization just a utopia that is objectively unachievable without complete infrastructure modernization?

7. To what extent does the introduction of effective TTRs require the introduction of IT tools, and to what extent can the new instruments envisaged by the regulation – such as socio-economic assessment, auctions, framework contracts, etc. – help? Can these tools be used objectively on an international scale? Who stands to gain and who stands to lose as a result?

8. To what extent will the new regulation change the roles and responsibilities of individual entities and their power? To what extent, for example, will customers and carriers be able to formulate their needs decades in advance, and how binding should these requirements be?

9. What options will the new regulation offer for resolving conflicts in capacity requests and how can construction and closure work (TCS), which in many cases are the source of conflicting requests, be planned effectively? How do temporary timetables (TCR) disrupt stability and how can conflicts between additional/new demand and existing services be resolved?

10. Is it possible to draw inspiration from other sectors, such as aviation, when resolving conflicts?

11. How should we deal with the fact that there is not just one network and that, even from a European perspective, we distinguish between TEN-T and other infrastructure? However, trains need to move across networks. Is it realistic to achieve uniform rules and technical standards? How willing will member states be to implement standards on other networks?

We could easily continue listing areas and other questions. But we won't. At least not now. We will discuss them together on October 16 at the Main Railway Station in Prague.

We look forward to your participation and active involvement in the expert debate.