
Solution to Brenner bottleneck continues to elude the EU

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With queues reaching 70 km, a solution to the Brenner pass bottleneck continues to escape EU governments and authorities. Discussions may no longer be enough; the EU Commission should open its legal toolbox.

During the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council meeting in Luxembourg last week, EU Ministers of Transport debated the free movement of goods along the Brenner pass, a key part of one of the most transited EU routes.

IRU welcomes the German and Italian ministers of transport's efforts to bring the issue to the attention of all EU Ministers of Transport, raising the topic to the EU level. But a solution continues to elude the EU.

Over the past decade, goods transiting through Austria have faced major challenges. Austria's imposition of quantitative restrictions on road freight transport have caused unnecessary and burdensome disruptions.

During the meeting, both Germany and Italy emphasised that the current situation is unsustainable and causes long border queues. More importantly, they stressed that the principle of free movement should be safeguarded.

IRU appreciates the support shown by Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Romania's ministers of transport to respect the freedom of movement across the EU. This demonstrates that the Brenner pass is a European issue, impacting trade facilitation across the bloc.

IRU Director of EU Advocacy Raluca Marian said, "Unfortunately, Austria has not shown any real willingness to resolve the Brenner pass issue, which has been dragging on for years.

"We keep hearing about rail and combined transport being the solution. But as time has shown, rail alone cannot accommodate the volume of goods transiting through the Brenner pass. Both modes and their combinations are needed. Driving bans have caused massive traffic congestion. Queues are reaching 70km, and summer holidays are around the corner. This is an unacceptable situation, not to mention the CO₂

emissions. One can imagine the disastrous impact of trucks inching forward for hours, which makes Austria's attitude even more difficult to understand."

"We appreciate EU Commissioner for Transport Adina Vălean's efforts to bring Member States to the table to improve the sustainability of the Brenner pass while maintaining the free movement of goods. The Commission should use all legal tools at its disposal to unlock the situation. Discussions may not be enough," she added.

IRU has repeatedly urged EU and national policymakers to act swiftly and ensure that goods move seamlessly through one of the EU's most important transit points, which sees about 7,000 truck movements per day.

Austria's Mobility Minister, Leonore Gewessler, has confirmed that 2.5 million trucks passed through the Brenner pass in 2022. Such a high volume of transit calls for a swift solution to facilitate the movement of trucks across Austria, Germany and Italy.

Restricting the free movement of goods within the EU has a significantly negative effect on the functioning of the internal market as well as, in the Brenner case, on emission reduction efforts and air quality.

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