

Rail security in the EU

The foiled Thalys train attack of August 2015 has put EU rail security under the spotlight. Increasing passenger and freight flows and relatively open access to EU rail infrastructure make rail transport a soft target for unlawful acts. A ministerial-level meeting at the end of August examined the challenges facing rail security and the possibilities for a strengthened EU response.

The context

Unlike aviation security policy, which has evolved extensively over the years and has had a rapid uptake by the Member States, the EU's rail security policy is not as sophisticated and practices vary widely across the board. Rail security is mainly the responsibility of national authorities, generally the Ministries of Home Affairs and/or Transport. Owing to specific safety requirements for the Channel Tunnel and UK border controls, the Eurostar service enforces security and identity checks and screening for passengers and luggage. Baggage checks for long-distance train journeys are also carried out in Spain. In France, gendarmes or other military personnel carry out patrols in major stations. Italy and the Netherlands recently introduced entry and exit gates in some high-traffic stations to increase passenger security.

Often confused with each other, rail **security** and **safety** differ in nature and issues. Rail security consists of measures and tools to prevent unlawful interference with passengers, freight and infrastructure. Rail safety refers to methods and technical instruments to protect people and goods from risks directly arising from transport.

The EU framework

Currently, there is no specific EU legislation on rail security. Nevertheless, passenger security was considered as a priority in the Commission's 2009 [communication](#) on a sustainable future for transport. In its 2010 [Internal security strategy](#), the Commission underlined that there was justification for a broader EU approach to land transport security. In 2012, in a working paper on transport security, the Commission [proposed](#) to set up an expert group composed of Commission and national government experts, as well as stakeholders' representatives. Known as LANDSEC, this group was [created](#) the same year, with the task of assisting the Commission in formulating and implementing EU land transport security activities and to encourage an exchange of information and best practices. The Commission also identified measures that needed to be taken to improve security, among them setting EU-wide standards for high-speed rail, delivering training in security awareness, drawing up contingency plans, launching research programmes (for instance [Protectrail](#), financed by the Seventh Framework Programme) and revamping the information-sharing mechanisms. Rather than lay down prescriptive rules, the Commission suggests a 'case-by-case' approach.

Recent and future developments

At a [meeting](#) on 29 August, interior and transport ministers from eight EU Member States plus Switzerland, together with the European Commissioners responsible for Home Affairs and Transport discussed a new impetus to enhance rail security. The Commission [is said](#) to favour a more systematic use of video-surveillance cameras on high-speed trains as well as the introduction of marshals on trains and differentiated control procedures. Ministers agreed on a move towards generalising named long-distance train tickets, carrying out spot checks, increasing mixed police patrols for international trains on the basis of the existing European police network [RAILPOL](#), and reinforcing information exchange between the police, transport and intelligence services. Ahead of the Transport Council on 8 October, LANDSEC gathered on 11 September and debated further possible options to enhance rail security. Soft policy instruments, video-surveillance, exchange of good practices and contingency plans were among the measures discussed with a view to providing an appropriate level of security based on risk assessment.