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Mobility of the future: moving the traffic of goods onto the rail track

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Currently only a third of transport is by rail. However, in domestic transport (i.e. Austria), 60% is possible, and even 85% in cross-border traffic – a clear signal that should be heeded by rail infrastructure strategies. In addition to a socio-ecological tax reform, a comprehensive turn-around in mobility is a crucial factor in the fight against the climate crisis. Goods traffic plays an important role in this context. Whoever is late for the train, will be left with burnt coal.

CO₂ emissions overview

The shift of goods traffic from the road to rail benefits both man and environment. Rail traffic is the most environmentally friendly way of getting goods and people from A to B. The constant increase in road transport and its massive CO₂ emissions fuel the climate crisis and harm our health and the environment. The immense burden created by truck traffic has been a problem for years especially on the main transit routes from East to West and along the alpine passes.

Rail traffic offers a sustainable solution: every tonne shipped by rail in Austria causes an average of 15 times less CO₂ emissions than transport by truck. This has a direct effect on the Austrian greenhouse gas balance. If we want to achieve the climate targets of the [Paris Agreement](#), there is no way around increasing the share of rail traffic in the traffic of goods. If we failed to achieve those targets, we would be facing billions in compensation payments from tax revenue – which would in turn create a funding shortfall for investment in other areas.

Road vs. rail: rail coming out on top

The lower external costs are another advantage of goods traffic by rail: the external costs that are caused for example by accidents, noise, or emissions are on average seven times as high for road transport as for rail transport per ton kilometre. Rail also comes out on top in Austria when it comes to abandoning fossil energy: more than 90% of the energy required in goods transportation by rail is renewable.

That being said, a lot remains to be done in order to make goods transportation by rail (internationally) competitive. In addition to doing away with the diesel privilege and to the development of an action plan for goods traffic, we urgently need EU-wide standardised regulations: some 80% of the goods traffic by rail in Austria crosses borders. Another approach is the introduction of a toll on trucks on all roads, which would include federal, provincial, and municipal roads, much like Switzerland has had it since 2001. At the moment, the Austrian truck toll only covers motorways and dual carriageways, which accounts for only 2% of the entire road network.

The comprehensive shift of goods transport from road to rail comes with benefits for the environment, health, and society. It creates room to manoeuvre for further investments in the expansion of additional sustainable mobility solutions.

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