

# SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE RAIL

Safe and sustainable rail can help power the world out of the economic, climate and social crises we face today. Safe and sustainable rail is a new economic and social model for the industry that redefines the role of passengers, workers, employers, and the state.

Rail **reduces carbon emissions**. Rail and public transport are the key to the radical modal shift we need in transport. Per passenger kilometre, heavy rail today emits 75% less greenhouse gases than cars, and light rail emits 57% less.

Rail can **fuel economic and social equality** through access to employment, skilled jobs and higher wages. On average, every one job created in rail creates another job in manufacturing, food, trade or other sectors. Rail also provides citizens with the mobility needed to access jobs and livelihoods.

## SAFE

We need fully staffed rail operations and services to protect the safety of all. Two-thirds of surveyed ITF affiliates have seen staff cuts in their workplaces. Ticketing and maintenance workers were found to be most threatened by job losses, where the loss of ticketing disproportionately threatens women's jobs. This threatens the safety and security of passengers. Low staffing also puts passengers and workers, particularly women, at higher risk of [violence and harassment](#).

We need to fill skills shortages through [decent work](#) and free education and training to prepare rail for the future. We need to promote women's employment ensuring opportunities that identify and remove barriers, attract and retain women and challenge occupational segregation. Falling job formality, pay, conditions and [occupational safety and health](#) (OSH) standards are deepening labour and skills shortages. We need skilled rail workers on our trains, in our stations, and building and repairing our tracks.

We need rail **apprenticeships** to encourage young people into the sector and secure contracts with good pay and prospects to facilitate retention and promotion in the industry.

**Collective bargaining** must be used to stop exploitation (disproportionately of women and young workers), low pay, overwork, fatigue, stress, gender-based segregation, and safety failures.

We demand:

- 1. Full staffing** on trains, in stations and across all freight and passenger rail operations, and an end to driver-only and driverless operations.
- 2. Decent work** for all workers, through freedom of association, collective bargaining and respect for all [ILO Conventions](#) regarding employment and labour rights.
- 3. Occupational safety and health** (OSH) standards, safe access to decent [sanitation](#) facilities' and negotiated and respected rest and leave systems, as fundamental rights for all rail workers.
- 4. OSH committees** and elected **representatives** in every workplace, with full employer recognition

and representation of women workers.

5. Tripartite **investigations into OSH failures** and rail accidents
6. Protection of workers from **violence and harassment at work**, through ratification and implementation of [ILO Convention 190](#).

## **PUBLIC**

[Privatisation](#) puts passengers, workers, and our communities at risk. Countless examples around the world show that, in rail, the private sector:

- Fails to invest in maintenance and upgrading
- Outsources and subcontracts key operations and services
- Makes prices, ticketing and services too expensive, complicated and inaccessible
- Fragments networks into unequal and inefficient transport systems
- Reduces the amount of track, stations and rail facilities
- Overworks, underpays and exploits staff
- Siphons off public subsidies into private hands
- Relies on diesel-fuelled rail and fails to lower rail's carbon emissions
- Reduces staff, making the railways less accessible for people with disabilities

As a result, passenger miles travelled tend to fall in privatised rail. Seventy-seven percent of surveyed affiliates said rail liberalisation had worsened working conditions. Fundamentally, **privatised rail is unsafe and unsustainable**. It cannot offer the long-term planning and investment required for the modal shift to rail.

The rail freight sector is expanding worldwide, especially in the international corridors linked to China's Belt and Road Initiative. However, international investment in infrastructure and operations too often contains punitive conditions which undermine national sovereignty. Such investments are a danger to national sovereignty, as countries are at risk of losing control over their railways. This can even compromise the ability for rail systems to offer high-quality passenger services to meet social need.

**Rail is a public good.** Rail must be designed to meet the needs of workers, passengers and communities, not the needs of corporations and private capital. [Public ownership](#) is safer, better-planned, more efficient, higher-quality, more accessible, more accountable, and can help address inequalities in society.

Any profits must be reinvested in rail, used to subsidise other modes of public transport, or returned to public funds. [Public financing](#) for publicly owned and operated rail is the only way to ensure rail is safe, funded and strong enough to power us out of the crises we face today and tomorrow.

Safe and sustainable rail goes beyond reducing emissions. It offers a **new economic and social model of mobility** based on access, good working conditions, public investment, and environmental sustainability.

This social model can harness new technology to upskill workers, create decent work and make rail safer. It demands the active **participation of workers**, putting their knowledge and skills at the service of a greater public good, and providing decent, healthy, safe and fulfilling jobs.

We demand:

7. **Public ownership** of rail as a public good, and an **end to all rail privatisation**.
8. **Unitary rail systems** for both passenger and freight services, with infrastructure, rolling stock and operations all owned by one public entity and close cooperation with public entities responsible for transport at different levels of government.
9. **Sustainable public funding models** for rail, with any profits reinvested back into rail, other public transportation, or returned to public funds.

10. **Integration of rail** with other modes of public transport to provide affordable, safe and accessible services.
11. **Negotiation and collective bargaining with trade unions** to determine the transport and other needs of workers, passengers and communities.
12. All **public investment and spending** must **guarantee freedom of association**, collective bargaining and labour rights throughout the supply chain.

## **SUSTAINABLE**

We are in a climate emergency. We need a fundamental **economic transformation** to avert catastrophe. Safe and sustainable rail must be at the heart of this new economic model.

Public transport must replace the majority of cars and we must shift to less emissions-intensive modes of freight distribution to sufficiently reduce transport's carbon emissions. Safe and sustainable rail is the key to this **modal shift**.

In addition to the modal shift to rail, we must also **decarbonise rail** itself, and the [energy system](#) it relies on. While it is important for rail to transition to zero-carbon energy sources, sustainability efforts need to go beyond phasing out diesel fuel and must redefine rail as a public good that is central to a decarbonised economy. Rail infrastructure and services must also be made resilient to protect workers and communities against the new climate realities. This process will require mobilising public investment, as well as rail workers and the public in support of high-quality, zero-carbon rail services.

Governments across the world must have the freedom and fiscal space to invest in railways and zero-carbon energy systems. This means that the international financial system must be reformed to enable all countries, in particular those in the global South, to make independent decisions on public investment and fiscal policy, without undue and onerous conditionalities on debt. Climate finance must not tie beneficiaries into public-private partnerships (PPPs) and be based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR).

New railway technologies are being pushed by the private sector as green solutions, equating digitalisation and "efficiency enhancement" with sustainability. But this management-led approach comes with risks for workers and the public who rely on effective rail services.

Technologies are not neutral tools: how far they are used to achieve environmental and social goals depends on who controls them. In the name of 'greening' rail, digitalisation can be used to destroy jobs, or increase monitoring and surveillance of workers, leading to increased workloads and working time, adding more pressure on workers, affecting their physical and mental health, and potentially affecting the safety of the service.

We demand that new technology is used to improve services, working conditions and safety for all. Technological change must be introduced in a way that provides opportunities for strengthening gender equality in the rail sector. Workers need access to training and retraining. New technology should also be genuinely sustainable. A Just Transition towards digitalisation requires long-term planning that takes into account all externalities, and involves all stakeholders – including workers.

Workers and their unions must be part of the process of introducing new technologies if they are to support decent and safe work. This means information, access to data, and automated decision-making technologies, appeals processes, risk and safety assessments, as well as retraining and compensation schemes. Without this engagement workers risk negative impacts on their fundamental rights.

We demand:

- 13. National action plans** for rail, including ambitious modal shift targets for both passenger and freight, with specific commitments in **nationally determined contributions (NDCs)**, **national adaptation plans (NAPs)** and other national climate plans.
- 14.** Commitments to **public investment in rail**, including an international financial system that ensures all countries have the fiscal space to invest, and prioritising **rail in climate finance** agreements.
- 15.** Tripartite **just transition committees** for the rail sector, to give workers an active say in key decisions over the present and future of sustainable rail, **including key adaptation issues** such as **health and safety** and **social protection**.
- 16. Decent work guarantees** from rail operators and employers for all infrastructure investment and operations, including a commitment to the transition from **informal to formal work**.
- 17.** Public investment in and ownership of rail powered by renewable energy, as part of a public energy system.
- 18. Union access to data and control of its workplace uses**, regulation of automated decision-making systems, on-location labour platforms to ensure OSH and other rights are respected.
- 19. No automation or technology introduced or changed without negotiation** with trade unions. New technology used to transform transport work must benefit all workers equitably.
- 20.** Unions must be a key stakeholder in consultations on all new technological developments from very early stages of discussion and ensure that gender implications are included, that gender impact assessments are provided, and corresponding action is taken.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Rail enables people to get to work, school and medical appointments, and transports essential goods, food and raw materials. Rail connects communities across regions and continents; it is a vital part of providing mobility and independence. Rail systems must be designed and operated in a way that addresses inequality in access and mobility rights related to income level, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, (dis)ability and location.

Social justice in the rail system means communities in rural areas are not cut off when lines are no longer profitable, that fares are affordable, and that travelling and working on the railway is accessible and safe for everyone.

**Rail operates to serve the public, so it should be publicly accountable**, with workers, passengers and citizens involved in decision-making regarding planning, development and investment.

Cuts to railway staffing accentuate inequalities, as people who require extra information or assistance, such as older people and those with disabilities, are offered less assistance and are left behind. Railways must be well-staffed, to prevent violence and harassment, which disproportionately affects women workers and passengers.

As workplaces, railways should be as diverse as the communities they serve, they should promote access to decent work and equality. Inequality – whether it be based on sex, age, nationality, ethnicity, religion, disability, social origin, gender identity or sexual orientation – limits societal wellbeing and economic growth

**Collective bargaining** is the most effective and powerful form of workplace democracy and accountability, and must therefore be at the heart of safe and sustainable rail.

We demand:

- 21.** Democratic accountability in the planning and development of rail through **collective bargaining, worker representation in governance bodies**, and continuous meaningful processes of consultation with workers, passenger and other stakeholders.
- 22.** Women in decision-making and planning about the railway sector.
- 23. Publicly accountable and democratically governed transport authorities** for planning, developing and managing the modal shift to rail and other modes of public transport, and the decarbonisation of transport.
- 24.** An end to **the systemic exclusion of women railway workers from decent and secure work** and to strengthen their inclusion, rights and equality in the workplace.
- 25. Equal pay and conditions for work of equal value** for *all* rail workers, including those in outsourced and subcontracted services and non-standard forms of employment.
- 26. A social model of disability** which recognises that the exclusion and discrimination faced by disabled people is not inevitable and caused not by the person's impairment but by barriers in society.
- 27.** Quality **railway apprenticeships** negotiated by trade unions, to attract and retain young workers in the industry.
- 28. Equality and diversity assessments** carried out in partnership with trade unions and passenger organisations throughout rail and public transport systems and supply chains, to monitor progress towards equality and diversity in the workplace.
- 29.** Multinational rail operators must be held **accountable for labour and safety standards in all countries they operate in** and work with the ITF to ensure standards for decent work and equality and diversity monitoring are enforced across borders.