

## IBERIAN WORKSHOP ON RAILWAY INTERCONNECTIONS

On June 22, 2021, took place the first Iberian Workshop on railway interconnections between Spain and Portugal, led by Unify Portuguese partner ZERO.

### Justification within the project

The initial purpose of this kind of event was to organize various exchange visits between both partners to build a better shared CSO knowledge of key cross-border decarbonization issues and jointly evaluate links to NECPs.

Originally, the idea was to carry out a face-to-face CSO 'exchange visit' in which project staff from SEO/BirdLife and ZERO could hold meetings with key institutions in each country, allowing both NGOs to learn more about the work currently undertaking by these entities in terms of railway interconnections and the state of play of interconnections between countries.



### Final structure of the workshop

Due to the pandemic and the resulting mobility restrictions, the Iberian workshop has finally become a closed event, carried out through a virtual platform in both languages and with simultaneous translation, since this format has allowed the joint participation of key institutions and competent entities in the issue of renewable power interconnections from both countries.

The moderator, Francisco Ferreira, President of ZERO, welcomed all attendees, briefly introduced the participants, and explained the scheduled agenda to start the workshop. First, Francisco made a quick first intervention to introduce the project and contextualize the workshop within it. Then he presented as an introductory intervention the Portuguese NECP, the objectives established in it for the transport sector and highlighted the importance of railway development in reducing emissions in the transport sector.

After this introductory bloc, it was the turn for the key institution's representatives, with a 10 minute-round of intervention as follows:

- » Frederico Francisco, representative of the Ministry for Infrastructure and Housing – MIH, to talk about the National Railway Plan in Portugal, development of the national railway and interconnections
- » Jorge Ballesteros, representative of the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda – MITMA, to talk about the railway network in Spain

- » Paulo Duarte, representative of the Portuguese Railway Platform – PFP, to talk about development of railway interconnections between Portugal and Spain
- » Joaquín Briones, representative of the Railway Infrastructure Administrator – ADIF, to talk about railway interconnections between Spain and Portugal in figures

Following all the interventions, there was a 30-minute exchange roundtable among the attendees under the following topic: the role of railway interconnections between Portugal and Spain in the energy transition to meet climate goals. To this purpose, the moderator launched the following questions to the attendees to be jointly discussed in this dialogue bloc: What is the current situation of cross-border railway interconnections? Where are the biggest gaps? • Why is this not improving faster? Which are the obstacles encountered and the possible most feasible solutions? Where to find the policy opportunities?

Some of the main items discussed by the speakers were: regular train services between the two capitals and promotion of the Atlantic corridor to compete with airplanes; boosting in this decade Iberian railway interconnections with the resumption of the high-speed connection between Lisbon and Madrid, and next connection between Porto and Vigo; the promotion of goods transport by train is paramount to reduce transport by road or boat; increasing the efficiency of old technologies to contribute to decarbonisation; the achievement in the short term of a 100% electrified railway network; the need to involve the entire value chain of the railway network and all its actors, while boldly counting on new technologies, innovation and a good investment; the promotion in cities of complementary intermodal solutions such as combining commuter train with tram or metro; raising citizen awareness and the need to attract the end user to choose train over other transport options; the support of a smart connection on both sides of the border to bridge the currently existing gaps between countries; the boost of a railway model that respects the environment and contributes to fight against climate change.

### Event closing

To summarize and conclude this workshop, Francisco Ferreira highlighted the relevant information and data shared by the participants from both sides of the Iberian border. Despite the great progress made in recent decades, in Spain since the early 1990s with the inauguration of the Madrid-Seville AVE, some data raised are discouraging: the rail mode of freight transport represented only 6% of the total trade between Spain and Portugal in 2018, and the rail traffic on the Atlantic Corridor declined by more than 50% between 2007 and 2018. There are still pending issues in the railway sector: isolated areas without railway connection, part of the railway network without electrification, a deficit freight transport that cannot compete with transport by the large highways, a non-modernized commuter system, among worrisome aspects.

Thanking the presence of all attendees and their active participation, this informal and intimate exchange, short but very profitable, has helped us to understand where we are in terms of transport by train and railway interconnections and where we must work together, take firm steps forward. Before opening their railway interconnections to Europe, Spain and Portugal first need a solid, 100% electrified, and well-structured railway network that connects well all points of the Iberian Peninsula.

### **Speakers presentations**

- » Spain-Portugal railways connections by Joaquín Briones (ADIF)
- » Red ferroviaria en España Transporte de mercancías y de personas, movilidad convencional y de alta velocidad by Jorge Ballesteros (MITMA)