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# Dutch rail freight sector: finally a level playing field

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Truckers on the main highways of the Netherlands will be taxed per kilometre from 2023 onwards. This is good news for the rail freight industry. "It means the end of a market disruption that has been in place for many years. It is a step towards a fair an equal playing field for freight transportation in the Netherlands", commented RailGood, which represents rail freight carriers in the country.



The Dutch ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management has proposed a legislative bill, levying a tax on trucks per kilometre for the use of Dutch motorways (A-roads) and a number of other roads (N-roads). The height of the charge is determined by the environmental properties and weight class of the truck. The proposal is currently under review

and in public consultation. RailGood issued a position paper in response to the consultation.

## Long overdue

The lobby organisation writes that the rail freight sector is satisfied with the legislative proposal, as the level playing field between rail and road freight transport has been disturbed by the government for many years. "Since 2005, rail freight transport has been paying a kilometer charge for the use train paths, as well as for the use of overhead contact line and the parking and marshalling tracks and their facilities. From 2020, the sector itself pays from the first minute a user charge for the preparation (parking) of freight trains or wagons", director Hans-Willem Vroon explains.

According to him, promises of this kind were already made in 2005/2006, when the then Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management C. Peijs wrote to the House of Representatives that in 2013 a kilometer charge for road transport would be implemented. "A decade later it is finally time."

## Location

However, rather than implementing the new tax on certain N-roads only, it should be applicable to all roads in the Netherlands, RailGood beliefs. Also rail freight pays for the use of the entire railway network, and the level playing field should be completely level, Vroon argues.

In the meantime, it is worth studying a reduction of the truck tax on first and last mile transport towards rail terminals, in order to stimulate a modal shift to rail. More cargo on railways contributes to making the transport sector more sustainable and safer, the lobbyist argues.

## Tax revenue

The ministry intends to use the net income of the truck charge for tax reduction and innovation in order to make the transport sector more sustainable. "Considering the high external costs of road transport passed on to people, nature and society at large, it is desirable that this net income is also spent on effective measures to promote a modal shift to rail", Vroon said.

"It is precisely such measures that contribute to making the transport sector and/or freight transport more sustainable. There are various innovative concepts on the market that make it relatively easy to put trucks, trailers and standardised loading units on a train."

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