

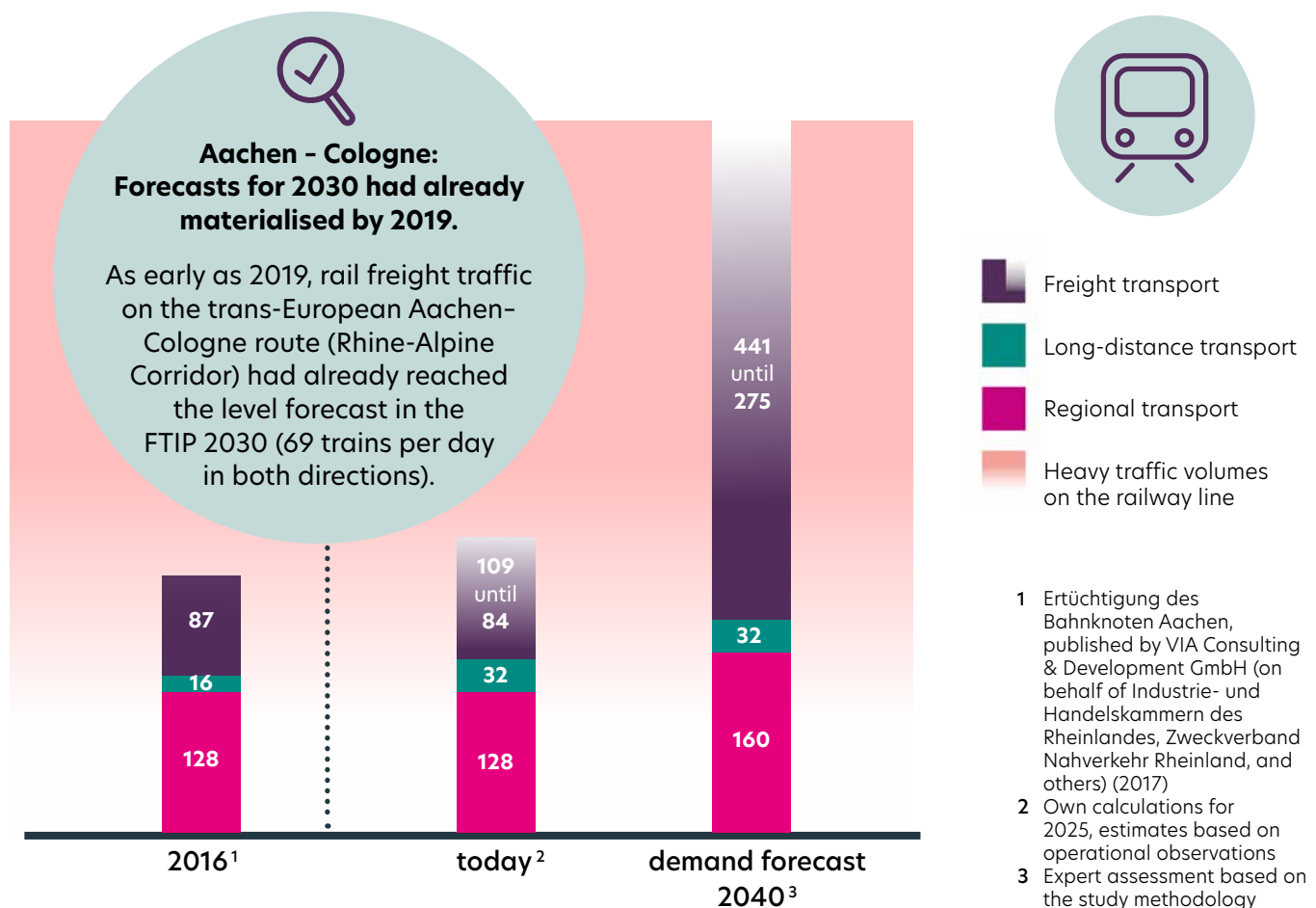
Aachen urban node – Shaping passenger and freight transport for the future

Initial situation

The Aachen urban node is a key junction in the European rail network. In addition to its international significance, it is of crucial importance both for economic development and for a successful transport transition in the *Rheinisches Revier* (Rhineland lignite mining region).

The current situation is already revealing alarming capacity bottlenecks in the rail infrastructure at the Aachen urban node. Even if all the planned investments set out in the Federal Transport Infrastructure Plan 2030 (FTIP 2030) and the Coal Regions Investment Act are implemented, future capacity will still be insufficient to cope with the forecast growth in rail freight.

Due to the extreme utilisation of the infrastructure and the tight scheduling of high-speed, regional and cross-border rail freight services, even the slightest delays in operations trigger a knock-on effect across the European and German railway systems.



Key challenges

1

Growing freight volumes at the ZARA ports (Zeebrugge, Antwerp, Rotterdam, Amsterdam)

There are several reasons for the rise in rail freight volumes:

- The ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam, amongst others, are investing in transshipment facilities and rail infrastructure.
- The modal share of rail freight transport at these ports is set to double by 2040.
- Handling volumes at these two ports are forecast to grow by around 67 per cent between 2010 and 2030, which will place a considerable strain on the rail infrastructure in the Rhineland.



2

Inaccurate assumptions in the federal government's previous transport forecast

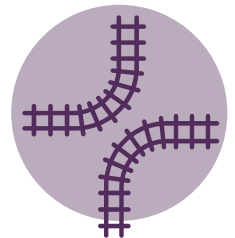
- The transport forecast in the FTIP 2030 does not take into account the actual growth in rail freight traffic from the ZARA ports.
- As early as 2019, the freight train volume forecast for 2030 in the FTIP 2030 had already been reached (69 trains per day in both directions).
- By 2040, transport demand on this section is set to rise to up to 475 trains per day in both directions.
- Even if all infrastructure measures planned to date under the FTIP 2030 and the Coal Regions Investment Act are implemented, they will not be sufficient. There will not be enough capacity to meet the demand for rail freight transport.



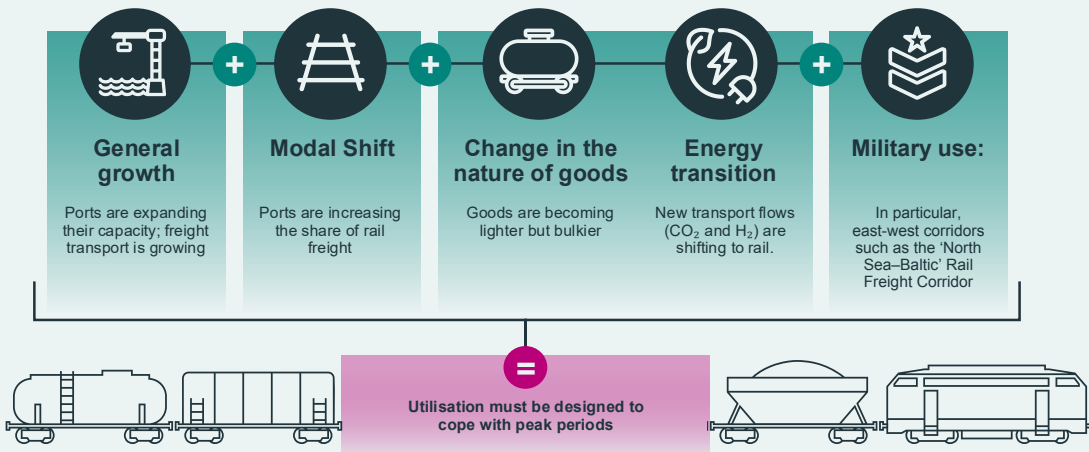
3

Increasing conflicts over train paths between freight, long-distance and local transport

- Additional national and international passenger transport links are also driving growth on the rail network.
- Without capacity increases and measures to separate traffic flows, there is a risk of serious consequences for local and long-distance transport, as well as for regional rail freight transport.
- Utilisation must be designed to cope with peak periods.



Five factors driving the rise in demand for freight transport



Key demands

1

Adjustment of traffic forecasts

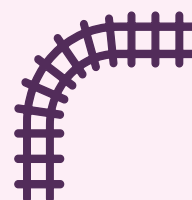
→ Realistic growth figures for rail freight transport from the ZARA ports must be incorporated into the Federal Transport Infrastructure Plan. Rather than simply extrapolating the status quo, the forecast must be based on the accelerated global transformation by 2040.



2

Taking international transport into account

→ Future demand for international high-speed services (e.g. to London, Paris and Brussels) and local transport links (e.g. to Brussels) must be reflected in the infrastructure measures.



3

Implementation of the already planned infrastructure expansion measures and resolving the over-capacity railway network between Aachen and Cologne

→ The Aachen urban node measures set out in the FTIP 2030 and the Coal Regions Investment Act must be implemented without delay. This will provide short-term relief for the Aachen urban node. However, these measures alone are no longer sufficient to cope with the forecast volume of rail traffic.



4

Creation of legal certainty and binding funding plans

- Upgrading the Aachen urban node measures in the FTIP 2030 to 'urgent priority' status in order to create legal certainty, including for the Burtscheider Viaduct, and binding funding plans for DB InfraGO AG.
- Decoupling from annual budget allocations and adjusting to construction cost indices when funding rail infrastructure projects.



5

Critical infrastructure

- The Aachen urban node is the 'rail bottleneck' between Belgium and Germany and is relevant to a potential main corridor for the eastbound transport of NATO troops and equipment from seaports. Improvements to critical infrastructure must be taken into account in current and future funding arrangements and special funds.



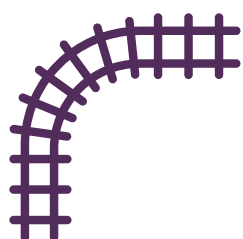
Recent study: 'Aachen urban node - shaping passenger and freight transport for the future'

The recent study by go.Rheinland highlights the extent to which growing freight traffic is already placing a strain on the existing infrastructure at the Aachen urban node. It highlights the urgent need for action to limit bottlenecks and negative impacts on local, long-distance and (regional) freight transport. Based on a thorough analysis, the study sets out specific solutions to ensure the Aachen urban node can be developed in a way that is both efficient and future-proof.



Objectives of the study

- An **update** on the findings of previous studies. These studies had already identified the need to expand the Aachen urban node.
- A **(re)assessment** of known and potential infrastructure measures under **changed circumstances**.
- **Prioritisation and recommendation** of suitable measures for unbundling long-distance, freight and local transport in order to ensure the reliability of services at the Aachen urban node.
- A focus on increasing **capacity and quality in long-distance, local and (regional) freight transport**.
- **The overarching objective is a resilient rail network.**

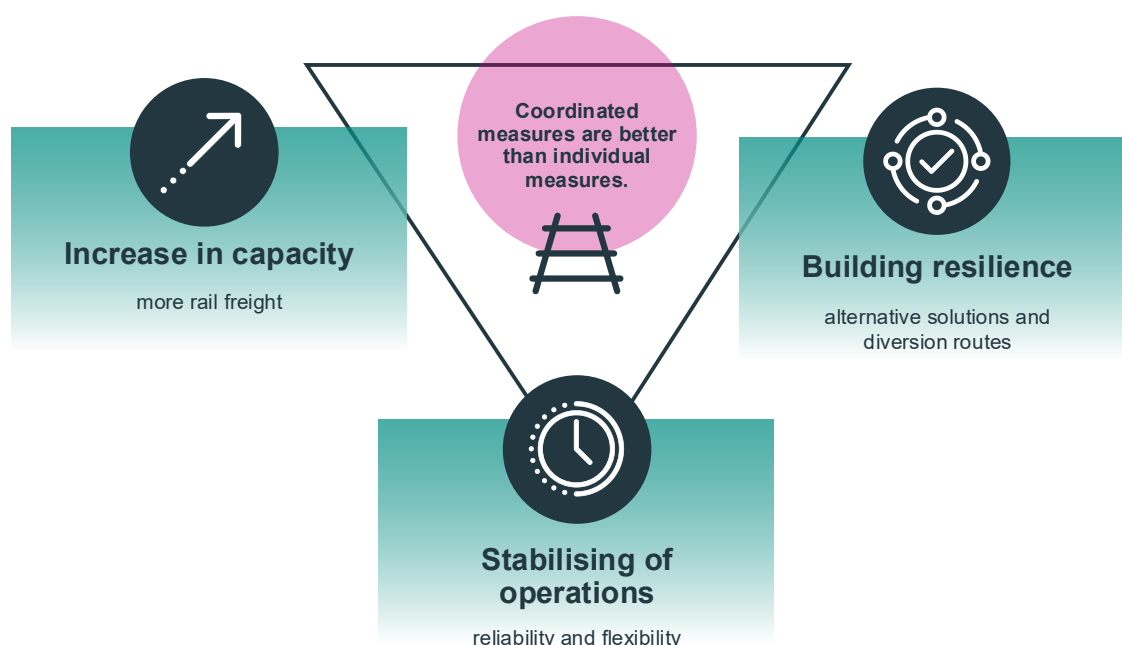


The 'Aachen urban node' Advisory Board as a source of political support

An Advisory Board actively promotes the necessary attention and political support for the Aachen urban node. It creates a sense of commitment and pressure to act amongst political decision-makers, drawing attention to infrastructure bottlenecks, a lack of operational stability, capacity shortages, the need for cross-border action, and issues of political prioritisation and funding.

At the same time, it brings together local and regional authorities, transport associations and funding authorities, other infrastructure operators, as well as stakeholders from the business sector, chambers of commerce and associations. In this way, the Advisory Board highlights the urgency of the issue to the relevant decision-makers and strengthens its political impact. Its clear objective is to establish rail transport in the Aachen region in a holistic, resilient and future-proof manner.

Duties of the 'Aachen urban node' Advisory Board



Sources:

- Ertüchtigung des Bahnknoten Aachen, published by VIA Consulting & Development GmbH (on behalf of Industrie- und Handelskammern des Rheinlandes, Zweckverband Nahverkehr Rheinland, and others) (2017)
- Güterverkehrsstudie für das Gebiet der Metropolregion Rheinland, published by Metropolregion Rheinland and go.Rheinland (2021)
- Plan zur Erhöhung der Schienenwegkapazität (PEK) für den als überlastet erklärten Schienenweg Stolberg Hbf – Aachen West (Strecken 2550, 2600), published by DB InfraGo (formerly known as DB Netz AG) (2019)
- Schieneninfrastruktur ertüchtigen – Bedeutung der ZARA-Häfen für die Infrastruktur im Rheinland, published by IHK-Initiative Rheinland (2025)

Contact

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