**RAIL TRAVEL REMAINS SAFER THAN CAR TRAVEL, EVEN DURING THE PANDEMIC**

VALENCIENNES, France, 3 June 2021 – for immediate release

**The Study[[1]](#footnote-1) published today by the European Union Agency for Railways (ERA) provides a first mathematical model as a scientific approach to safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the given assumptions and based on the evidence currently available, it concludes that even under pandemic conditions the risk of dying in a car accident remains higher than the risk of dying from a COVID-19 infection after a long-distance railway journey.**

Available information suggests clearly that European citizens are concerned about travelling by train and other forms of collective transport during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people seem to have switched from using trains to travelling by car in 2020 and 2021. As always in times of uncertainty, mathematical models based on available evidence can help to estimate the actual risks and add to more objectivity. That is why ERA develops in this study a first model to estimate the COVID-19 risk when travelling long-distance by train in order to provide the necessary knowledge that can be used by decision makers and the public.

“*Most human beings, including decision makers, seem to have difficulty to estimate and manage risks* […]*When used correctly,* *the model can help to make the situation more tangible, yet controllable.* *However it is important to carefully take into account all assumptions, evidences and boundary conditions*”, says Torben Holvad, ERA’s editor of the study.

The study confirms that the overall fatality risk travelling by public transport is a multiple higher during the COVID-19 pandemic than in other times. However, individual car travel currently remains more dangerous than rail, taking into account the overall safety risk, also under the COVID-19 pandemic. In the context with vaccines being rapidly distributed, the overall picture is even clearer in terms of the ranking of overall fatality risk ranking between rail and car. Sensitivity testing, e.g. including more infectious new virus variants, has confirmed the robustness of the results that can be obtained by using the model.

When safety measures are in place, like masks and distancing, cleaning and discouraging infected people to travel, the risk of being infected when travelling by train can be significantly reduced.

*“”During this pandemic the Agency is supporting the railway sector by giving technical advice, e.g. with the COVID-19 Rail Protocol and the COVID Ventilation Bulletin published in 2020 and it continues to closely monitor the situation in permanent contact with national authorities, the European Commission and its stakeholders”*, says Josef Doppelbauer, Executive Director of ERA. *“In order to reach our climate goals and to avoid massive congestion problems when citizens continue to travel by car after the pandemic, it is essential to rebuild trust in railways and make rail the first choice.”* This is the reason why ERA proposes a joint Post-Pandemic Rail Recovery Campaign, to be developed together with the European Commission and European sector organisations. In the European Year of Rail, this initiative would help to restore trust and promote both rail passenger and freight transport as currently the most sustainable mode of transport.

**About the EU Agency for Railways**

The European Union Agency for Railways was established in Valenciennes (offices) and Lille (meeting facilities) in 2004. Its 170 employees represent more than 22 European Member States and speak multiple languages. ERA has been providing EU Member States and the European Commission with technical assistance in the development and implementation of the Single European Railway Area. This comprises enhancing technical interoperability and harmonising rules, promoting simplified access for customers, developing a common approach to safety and safety culture, advising on telematics applications and ERTMS (European Rail Traffic Management System), monitoring National Safety Authorities and Notified Bodies and facilitating the exchange of information between the railway actors in Europe. Since 16th June 2019 the EU Agency for Railways is mandated to issue single safety certificates and vehicle (type) authorisations valid in multiple European countries and to ensure an interoperable European Rail Traffic Management System. The purpose of these activities is expressed by the slogan “Making the railway system work better for society.”

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1. *Travel safety during COVID-19 for passengers travelling long distance by train and other modes* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)