Federal Ministry of Transport

Promulgation of the Guidelines on Grants to Promote the Installation and Trialling of Digital Automatic Coupling in Pioneer Rail Freight Trains (PioDAK)

of 14 August 2026

A climate-friendly, energy-efficient and already largely electric rail transport system is an indispensable part of a sustainable and high-performing transport system that incorporates ecological, social and economic aspects. As a low-emission mode of transport, rail, and rail freight in particular, already makes an essential contribution to meeting national and European climate targets. In order to ensure that rail freight will continue to contribute significantly to meeting these targets in the future, action is urgently needed to modernize rail freight technology.

The Federal Ministry of Transport and the rail sector are pursuing the common goal of complete and consistent digitalization of rail freight. Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC) is a key element in these efforts. It is to replace the manual-only screw couplings that were introduced over one hundred years ago and are still in use today. Deploying DAC is intended to make rail freight more attractive and modern, increase productivity and counteract the consequences of demographic change, and therefore also increase competitiveness compared with road haulage.

As the rail-freight network is EU-wide, conversion only makes sense in a pan-European context and can only be implemented in that way. Germany plays a special role As by far the largest individual market in European rail freight and an important transit country. Accordingly, preparation for migration to DAC can only succeed if EU-wide and national activities dovetail. At a European level, the European Commission has already provided funding from the Connecting Europe Facility programme for DAC pioneer trains, which lead the way forward in field trials.

These Guidelines support and supplement the European efforts at national level, while also going above and beyond them by considering additional use cases, potential and questions.

1 Funding objective, purpose and lines; legal basis

1.1 Funding objective

The objective of these Funding Guidelines is holistic assessment of DAC for rail freight with a view to EU-wide rollout (migration). To this end, the economic benefit for railway undertakings and the technical functionality, up to and including operations, are to be studied. By leveraging the associated potential, mitigating risks and providing comparable foundations, evaluation aspects for the future use of DAC are to be determined on a broad base. Combined with European and non-European DAC activities, they not only assess the type and extent of an area-wide rollout, they also determine outstanding activities and costs. The aim is therefore comprehensive provision of the results, data and work on the network at national and superordinate levels.

The Funding Guidelines address the following objectives with three funding lines:

Objective 1 – Preparation of migration via:

a) Determining whether and under which future technical and economic conditions DAC migration (national/EU-wide) is likely to achieve results;

b) Evaluating whether and in which form the previous efforts to develop and introduce DAC on the German market and in the European area have been expedient and financially viable;

c) Cataloguing activities and instruments that may also be necessary before migration;

d) Developing a roadmap to DAC migration;

e) Combining national findings with parallel activities of EU Member States, the European Union and third parties.

Objective 2 – Leveraging the potential of DAC and mitigating risks by:

a) Trialling DAC in rail freight;

b) Evolving DAC functions;

c) Investigating further digitalization options for rail freight;

d) Comparing with other sectors and countries;

e) Considering superordinate questions.

Objective 3 - Provision of comparable bases of assessment via:

a) Uniformly cataloguing, documenting and delivering data, experience, problems and DAC improvement requests;

b) Comprehensibly and transparently evaluating and assessing the DAC findings via grant recipients, funding providers and third parties;

c) Exchange and networking on the DAC activities at national and European level.

1.2 Purpose of funding

The purpose of the funding is to support the grant recipients in their activities for direct and indirect trialling and development in the DAC area, as well as studying DAC and preparing possible migration in rail freight.

The Guidelines address nine main purposes via three funding lines:

1. Equipment and conversion of individual pioneer trains with the basic DAC package.
2. Trialling of the functionality of DAC up to and in commercial operation.
3. Findings from the use of DAC in rail freight operation, in particular on:
   a) reliefs and challenges arising during and in relation to installation
   b) influence of DAC on operational rail freight structures
   c) technical functionality
   d) reliability of DAC technology
   e) experience with and from the use of DAC (use cases)
   f) (potential) impact on the migration process
   g) operation of DAC
   h) approval and permitting procedure.
4. Provision of the collected and documented data of the above-mentioned findings in a comparable form and as open data with regard to experience, problems and improvement requests arising from
   a) practical experience
   b) installation
   c) approval and permitting (in particular on first of class/type approval/interoperable components) and
   d) operation in rail freight
   .
5. Research on technical and economic questions:
   a) Functions, developments, safety
   b) Standardization, harmonization, approval, permitting
   c) Maintenance and operation
   d) Testing procedures and equipment
   e) Compatibility and interfaces to other technologies, such as the European Train Control System or the Future Rail Mobile Communication System
   f) Accelerating procedures, simplifying processes, reducing costs, scaling, simulation, miscellaneous
   g) DAC migration
   h) Coordination.
6. Research on direct and indirect potential and obstacles (especially wiring, on-board unit, communication, digitalization, electrification) by implementing DAC on trains and in the event of a European rollout.
7. Promotion and publication of the findings (for example in publications, communication, networking, addressing target groups).
8. Provision of the project data (open data/open source/open code).
9. Studies on other topics:
   a) Benchmarking, transfer of findings from other countries and sectors, lessons learned
   b) Superordinate questions on DAC migration
   c) Macroeconomic level, financial instruments, leasing and rental
   d) Cost reduction, cost avoidance, economies of scale, risk management
   e) Deployment
   f) Changed general conditions
   g) Preparation of migration for stakeholders, processes, resources, miscellaneous.

1.3 Funding lines

1.3.1 General

The institutions, public and sector are to be informed of the respective work and results by the grant recipients. Projects can be implemented individually or in consortia, build on one another and/or cooperate across funding lines[1].

1.3.2 Funding line 1 – DAC pioneer trains

The purpose of funding line 1 is to trial the functionality of DAC in rail freight operations and identify the resulting reliefs and

[1] Each outline is evaluated on its own merit for each call for applications for funding and funding line.

challenges for operational structures in this sector. Investigating, surveying, transferring and resolving irregularities and problems arising from procurement, installation, trialling and operation of DAC also form part of the work.

Specifically, this means that as part of this financial assistance programme, rail freight trains are equipped with the basic DAC package defined by the European DAC Delivery Programme (pioneer trains). The aim is to test and trial this technology under operational and/or commercial conditions and thus to demonstrate the reliability, availability, safety as well as maintenance workload required in day-to-day operations.

The funding recipients are then to collect, document and share the experience and findings they gain on problems, improvement requests and practical experience, for example in procurement, installation, approval and operation.

At the end of the funding project, contributions must have been made to funding purposes 1 to 4 mentioned in 1.2 above.

1.3.3 Funding line 2 – Research, development and innovation

Funding line 2 supports projects that address direct and indirect questions on DAC with a solution-driven approach. The research, development and innovation projects generally comprise either technical and experimental or operational development work with a corresponding high complexity of implementation. The line also addresses activities and superordinate work on DAC. This involves both the phases from approval and maintenance to evolution, as well as further potential and risks that must be taken into consideration for a successful rollout.

This also includes work on communication, standardization, harmonization, interoperability and compatibility, as well as on upstream and downstream activities in the value chain, such as repair, replacement, service, standardization, updates, upgrades and downgrades, safety, transfers and networking.

Specifically, this means that the associated topics and work can continue to take place both on and off the rails, for example in laboratories, committees, workshops etc. The outcomes are then to be made available for further use.

At the end of the funding project, contributions must have been made to funding purposes 5 to 8 mentioned in 1.2 above. Exception for DAC pioneer trains for research and development (funding line 2[2]):

If a DAC pioneer train project contains significant proportions of research and development, the application can be submitted in funding line 2 instead of funding line 1, under the conditions for funding line 2. At the end of the funding project, contributions must have been made to funding purposes 1 to 8 mentioned in 1.2 above.

1.3.4 Funding line 3 – Studies

Funding line 3 is primarily intended for analytical or conceptual studies to develop, document and publish studies. They are to investigate with a broad, overarching perspective where action is needed strategically with regard to DAC, where experience is available, where there is a potential benefit, where risks and resource questions occur and where implementation instruments appear expedient. This knowledge is also to be made available for further use.

Transfer activities to and from other sectors and countries are expressly encouraged, as is benchmarking. Moreover, the studies can address technical, regulatory, legal, financial, micro- or macroeconomic questions and cover superordinate topics such as migration, deployment or funding of the rollout. Studies can also investigate new business models, services and requirements, as well as changed providers, stakeholders and customers.

To this end, they are also to address the framework conditions in rail freight and potential changes due to DAC and the benefits, the synergies and any competing effects from the use of DAC. Studies on changes that rail freight stakeholders could have to make in a broader context due to the use and application of DAC, for example in the work of workshops, handling facilities, premises, training, manufacturing, IT, hardware and software etc., are also desirable.

Studies under funding line 3 can also encompass scientific support work for trains covered by funding line 1.

At the end of the funding projects, contributions must have been made to funding purposes 7 to 9 mentioned in 1.2 above.

1.4 Legal basis

The Federal Government provides the grants in accordance with these Guidelines, sections 23 and 44 of the Federal Budget Code (BHO) and the General Administrative Regulations adopted pursuant thereto. There is no automatic entitlement to a grant. On the contrary, the grant-awarding authority takes its grant decisions according to its own best judgement within the limits of the available appropriations. For example, if the funds available are insufficient, the grant-awarding authority reserves the right to make cuts in the outline or application procedure (for example to the project contents, funding rate or term). The fact that grants have been awarded in the past cannot lead to a conclusion that funding will be granted in the future.

In this respect, funding projects involving state aid within the meaning of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) are also subject to Article 16 of the Transport Block Exemption Regulation (TBER)[3] and Article 25 of the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)[4] as further legal bases. If the respective requirements stipulated in the abovementioned provisions and below are met, the funding is exempt from the information obligation pursuant to Article 108 (3) of the TFEU and is compatible with the internal market within the meaning of Articles 93 and 107 of the TFEU. Funding is provided in compliance with the common provisions laid down in Chapter I of the GBER/TBER, in

[2] The TBER is primarily focused on investment, while the GBER addresses research and development. Any more significant research and development activities planned in the DAC pioneer train are not covered by the TBER. Accordingly, research and development projects must be submitted fully in funding line 2. Combinations/partial funding from line 1 and line 2 or the TBER/GBER are not possible.

[3] Commission Regulation (EU) No 2026/562 of 16 March 2026 declaring certain categories of aid in the rail, inland waterways and multimodal transport sector compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 93, 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (OJ L 2026/562, 30.3.2026).

[4] Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty (OJ L 187, 26.6.2014, p.1), as amended by Commission Regulation (EU) No 2023/1315 of 23 June 2023 (OJ L 167 of 30.6.2023, p. 1).

particular taking into consideration the definitions listed in Article 2 of the GBER/TBER[5].

2 Subject of the funding

Under these Guidelines, funding is provided for projects to trial DAC and DAC-related research, development and innovation, including studies.

2.1 Funding line 1 – DAC pioneer trains

Funding line 1 addresses the following subjects:

- Preparation, procurement, conversion and approval of pioneer trains with DAC and their trialling in operation and the evaluation of the data collected on this;
- Studying associated challenges and identifying solutions.

Activities eligible for funding include in particular those required to fulfil and ensure funding purposes 1 to 4 listed in 1.2 above.

2.2 Funding line 2 – Research, development and innovation

Funding line 2 addresses research and development activities and innovation in accordance with Article 25 of the GBER in relation to the introduction, development, improvement and further use of DAC, in particular at operational and technical levels.

Activities eligible for funding include in particular those required to fulfil and ensure funding purposes 5 to 8 listed in 1.2.

Exception for DAC pioneer trains for research and development: Activities eligible for funding include in particular those required to fulfil and ensure funding purposes 1 to 8 listed in 1.2 above.

2.3 Funding line 3 – Studies

Funding line 3 addresses feasibility studies within the meaning of Article 2 (87) of the GBER in accordance with the provisions of Article 25 of the GBER on topics related directly and indirectly to DAC.

Activities eligible for funding include in particular those required to fulfil and ensure funding purposes 7 to 9 listed in 1.2 above.

3 Grant recipients

3.1 General

Legal entities that have the required qualifications (technical, administrative, financial) as well as capacities to successfully process and implement the tasks described in the project, and can substantiate this, are eligible to apply.

They must have an operating centre or subsidiary office in Germany when the grant is paid. If the grant recipient is subject to special circumstances that prevent it maintaining an operating centre/a permanent establishment or subsidiary office in Germany, the grant-awarding authority may examine on a case-by-case basis whether a deviation favouring the grant recipient is possible.

In any case, the project must be of significant national interest to Germany within the meaning of section 23 of the Federal Budget Code (BHO).

3.2 Special requirements to be met for funding line 1 – DAC pioneer trains

Furthermore, grant recipients under funding line 1 must cumulatively meet the following requirements:

- The aid must be granted to rolling stock owners, railway undertakings or transport service organizers to enable them to invest in sustainable land transport as set out in Article 16 (3) of the TBER.
- Rolling stock with DAC investments for which funding was received must retain a valid registration in the European Vehicle Register for at least five years after the investment was made (Code 00 in accordance with Appendix 3 of the Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2018/1614 of 25 October 2018[6]). The DAC is fully depreciated over the project duration and becomes part of the grant recipient's operating assets. There is no obligation to continue using the DAC after the end of the project, however, the requirements of the TBER must be met. The grant recipient may only decide to disassemble the built-in DAC (dismantling) if the five-year period requirement within the meaning of Article 16 (9) of the TBER has been met in a verifiable manner. If this is not the case, the grant must be repaid pro rata (repayment of 20% of the material costs eligible for grants of the funded DAC). The repayment obligation will be waived entirely even before the above-mentioned five-year period has elapsed, if the retrofitted DAC trains cannot be used in commercial operations due to missing administrative permits/approvals.

3.3 Special requirements to be met for funding line 1 – DAC pioneer trains as well as specific cases of funding line 2 – DAC pioneer trains with a research and development character

All recipients of grants for DAC pioneer trains, whether for investment (funding line 1) or exceptions for research and development (funding line 2), must cumulatively meet the following requirements:

They are prepared to invest in equipping rolling stock in an individual or consortium project with the basic DAC package[7],

[5] Additional definitions specifically relevant to the funding may be found under 'Begriffsbestimmungen' (Definitions) on the website of the Federal Logistics and Mobility Office on the PioDAK financial assistance programme (German only).

[6] Commission Implementing Commission (EU) 2018/1614 of 25 October 2018 laying down specifications for the vehicle registers referred to in Article 47 of Directive (EU) 2016/797 of the European Parliament and of the Council and amending and repealing Commission Decision 2007/756/EC, C/2018/6929 (OJ L 268 of 26.10.2018, p. 53).

[7] An overview of the DAC, the basic DAC package as well as related functionalities can be found on the Federal Logistics and Mobility Office website on the PioDAK funding programme (German only).

to document and transfer relevant lessons learned and data as well as implement any resulting DAC development work.

The basic package includes hardware (coupling including the corresponding electrical and electronic components), as well as the following DAC functions:

a) automatic detection of the order of the wagons;

b) train integrity check;

c) detection of the safe train length; and

d) automatic decoupling and automatic brake test.

- If the DAC does not allow digital functions at the beginning of the project, a coherent work plan on how to retrofit, activate and use digital functions by the end of the project must be presented. This may be based on current assumptions on the performance and availability of DAC and can become more specific over the course of the project.
- The funded pioneer trains must demonstrably travel at least one third of their route kilometres in Germany.
- Upon request of the funding authority/coordinating authority:

  The funding recipients strengthen

  a) the use of interoperable components by providing their rolling stock for comprehensive interoperability tests or active involvement in these; and

  b) the activities as well as tests of the hardware and software of other funding recipients of the programme, also across funding lines.

3.4 Non-eligibility grounds

The following applicants are not eligible for funding:

- applicants who have not complied with a recovery order following a previous Commission decision declaring an aid illegal and incompatible with the internal market;
- applicants against whom insolvency proceedings have been requested or opened;
- applicants who are obliged to disclose or have disclosed their assets under section 802c of the Code of Civil Procedure (ZPO) or section 284 of the Fiscal Code (AO). If the applicant is a legal entity represented by a legal representative, this applies if the legal representative is, on the basis of

  their engagement as the legal representative of the legal entity, subject to corresponding obligations arising from section 802c of the Code of Civil Procedure (ZPO) or section 284 of the Fiscal Code (AO);
- if their undertaking is in difficulty (Article 1 (2) (d) in conjunction with Article 2 (w) of the TBER and/or Article 1 (4) (c) in conjunction with Article 2 (18) of the GBER).

4 Special conditions for the provision of grants

4.1 General

Funding is provided to projects that cumulatively meet the following conditions:

- They verifiably serve to meet the funding objectives listed under 1.1 above and the funding purposes listed under 1.2 above.
- The implementation prospects are generally assessed as positive.
- Data and findings are provided.
- Provision of input for the reporting obligation, performance monitoring, evaluation, enquiries, supporting research and coordination is guaranteed.
- There is active exchange with other DAC projects of the funding authority as well as other European states.
- All project documents are submitted in German.

4.2 State of the art in science and research

The state of science, research and technology of the applicant as well as the sector must be determined and presented in advance. Preparatory work in relation to funding projects that has been completed, is ongoing or planned must be disclosed, irrespective of whether this work has been undertaken by the applicants themselves or by third parties. Possible redundancies must be limited and the added value must be determined.

4.3 Consortium lead, cooperation agreement

In addition, the following applies for projects with more than one direct project partner:

- The partners are to name a coordinating person when they submit the outline; this person serves as a contact point for the grant-awarding authority in all organizational matters (consortium lead).
- The partners organize their cooperation in a written cooperation agreement, which they provide when they submit the application.

This agreement must govern how the work packages are distributed and priced, and how the continuation of the project is organized and ensured in the event of changes, such as a partner leaving the cooperation. In addition, it must define that, if this is the case, the experience and data obtained by that time must be provided to the remaining partners of the consortium free of charge. If a partner leaves the project, the grant-awarding authority examines whether this at least jeopardizes the continuation of the (overall) project in the form for which the grant was awarded, and whether it results in the revocation of the grant and (complete) repayment of the funding amount. The project partners are proactively called upon to substitute or adapt the work.

4.4 Restriction on commencing the project before the award of grant has been notified.

Grants may be provided only if work on the project has not commenced before they are awarded. As a rule, the conclusion of a contract for the supply of goods or services relating to the implementation of the project for which a grant application has been submitted shall be deemed an inadmissible start to the project, provided that such a contract is concluded before notification of the award of grant.

Notwithstanding the above, proof must be provided in advance for necessary preparatory work/qualifications that may have been carried out before submission of the outline and application. They are not eligible for grants and are not deemed to start the project if they do not constitute the start of work on the project for which the application is submitted.

4.5 Creditworthiness

4.5.1 General

The review of the application comprises a plausibility check of the detailed funding schedule and/or preliminary costing, a credit risk assessment of the applicant and a review of the project's eligibility under grant-related laws.

Grants may only be provided if overall funding of the project is guaranteed and the applicant can prove this including their own contribution before the notification of award of grant is issued. Financial standing is only to be assumed if the overall funding is ensured, and potential recovery claims by the Federal Government in relation to the funding are guaranteed.

If overall funding does not seem sufficiently reliable and is therefore not to be deemed guaranteed, the grant-awarding authority reserves the right to require provision of securities (such as bank sureties, sureties, comfort letters or attested documents).

If the required proof of creditworthiness is not provided in full within two weeks of the request, the grant-awarding authority may reject the application.

4.5.2 Consortia

The following applies for projects with more than one project partner:

If one of the consortium partners to a consortium project for which an application is submitted fails to provide the required proof of creditworthiness within two weeks of the request, the grant-awarding authority may reject all applications for the collaborative project. Therefore, in consortium projects, all partners are encouraged to clarify the creditworthiness situation before they submit project outlines or applications and, if required, to make use of the application advisory service provided by the grant-awarding authority in advance.

4.5.3 Simplification rules and reduction of bureaucracy

The following simplifications apply:

a) Greatly simplified credit risk assessment:

If the application

- is 100% funded by the Federal Government (full funding), or
- the applicant's own contribution is less than EUR 25,000, or
- the share provided by the Federal Government is less than EUR 50,000,

the requirements to be met for the credit risk assessment are reduced considerably. In these cases, the grant recipient must declare that both the own contribution as well as possible repayment obligations are guaranteed.

b) Simplified credit risk assessment:

If the application

- is funded at a funding rate of between 90% and 100%, or
- is filed by an undertaking within the first three years of its establishment[8], or
- the own contribution does not exceed EUR 150,000, or
- the share provided by the Federal Government does not exceed EUR 300,000,

the requirements to be met for the credit risk assessment are reduced. In this case, the following is sufficient as proof of creditworthiness:

- a declaration by the grant recipient that both the own contribution as well as potential repayment obligations are guaranteed, as well as
- submission of account statements, a credit line or comparable documents showing that the required own resources are available.

5 Type and level of grants, aid intensity

5.1 Type of funding

5.1.1 Funding line 1 – DAC pioneer trains

Grants are awarded in the form of project funding as a conditionally repayable subsidy and as pro rata funding.

5.1.2 Funding line 2 – Research, development and innovation and Funding line 3 – Studies

The grant is awarded for project funding as a non-repayable subsidy in the form of pro rata funding or full funding (only possible for universities as well as research and scientific institutions).

5.2 Level of funding

[8] Newly created within the meaning of the Communication from the Commission Guidelines on State aid for rescuing and restructuring non-financial undertakings in difficulty (OJ C 249 of 31.7.2014, p. 6).

The grant (share provided by the Federal Government) is limited to a maximum amount.

5.2.1 Funding line 1 – DAC pioneer trains

Costs eligible for grants to a maximum of EUR 5 million per project, including all project partners and sub-projects, qualify for funding.

5.2.2 Funding line 2 – Research, development and innovation

Expenditures/costs eligible for grants to a maximum of EUR 3 million per project, including all project partners and sub-projects, qualify for funding.

5.2.3 Exception for DAC pioneer trains for research and development (see 2.2):

Expenditures/costs eligible for grants to a maximum of EUR 5 million per project, including all project partners and sub-projects, qualify for funding.

5.2.4 Funding line 3 – Studies

Expenditures/costs eligible for grants to a maximum of EUR 1 million per project, including all project partners and sub-projects, qualify for funding.

5.3 Aid intensity, input tax

Please refer to the factsheet (German only) on the PioDAK funding programme for an overview of aid intensity/funding rates.

The input tax deductible in accordance with section 15 of the Value Added Tax Act (UStG) is not eligible for grants.

5.3.1 Funding line 1 – DAC pioneer trains

The amounts before the deduction of taxes and other charges are used to calculate the aid intensity and the costs eligible for grants. In accordance with Article 7 (1) of the TBER, the eligible costs are supported by documentary evidence, which must be clear, specific and contemporary.

Under these Guidelines, investment projects are subsidised to up to 80% of the costs eligible for grants for the DAC pioneer trains (Article 16 (5) (a) of the TBER).

The grant may not be cumulated with other state aid types, including aid in accordance with the de minimis Regulation[9] unless the other aid relates to different identifiable eligible costs or the aid intensity does not exceed the maximum applicable amount for this aid in accordance with the TBER and/or the maximum applicable amount for this aid in accordance with the GBER.

5.3.2 Funding line 2 – Research, development and innovation and Funding line 3 – Studies

5.3.2.1 Aid intensity/funding rates on a cost basis

In general, the calculation of the grant is based on the project-related costs that are eligible for grants.

The amounts before deduction of tax and other charges are used to calculate the eligible costs and the aid intensity. In accordance with Article 7 (1) of the TBER, the eligible costs are supported by documentary evidence, which must be clear, specific and contemporary.

In accordance with Article 25 (5) of the GBER, up to 50% of the costs eligible for grants may be funded for research, development and innovation projects that can be classified as industrial research, whilst up to 25% of the costs eligible for grants of research, development and innovation projects classified as experimental development may be funded. In accordance with Article 25 (6) of the GBER, aid intensity may be increased up to a maximum of 80% of the eligible costs, provided that the conditions set out therein are met. This includes, for example, an increase of up to 20 percentage points for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and an increase of up to 15 percentage points if the results of the project are widely disseminated through conferences, publication, open access repositories, or free or open source software.

In accordance with Article 25 (5) of the GBER, up to 50% of the costs eligible for grants of research, development and innovation projects that are part of feasibility studies can be funded. In accordance with Article 25 (7) of the GBER, the eligible costs can be increased by up to 20 percentage points for SMEs.

5.3.2.2 Funding rates on an expenditure basis

By derogation from the principles set out in 5.3.2.1, the basis of calculation for regional or local authorities, universities, research and scientific institutions and similar bodies, as well as public authorities, is generally based on the project-related expenditure eligible for grants.

If the grant recipient is entitled to deduct input tax in accordance with section 15a of the Value Added Tax Act (UStG) (see 5.3), the eligible expenditure excluding tax is taken into account.

5.3.2.2.1 Universities, research and scientific institutions

Research institutions that receive core funding from the Federal Government and/or the federal states may, in addition to their institutional funding, only be granted project funding for their additional project-related expenditure or costs under certain conditions[10].

On the basis of 2.1.1 of the RDI Framework, universities, research and scientific institutions can be exempt from the application of European aid law.

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[9] Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid (OJ L 352, 24.12.2013, p. 1)

[10] As regards the conditions under which aid does or does not exist, and the extent to which funding may be provided without constituting aid, reference is made to the Communication from the Commission on the Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation of 19 October 2022 (RDI Framework; C(2022)7388 final, in particular point 2, marginals 17 et seqq.).

If they carry out both economic and non-economic activities, they must be able to clearly distinguish between the non-economic and economic activities, as well as their costs, financing and revenues. Evidence of the correct allocation of costs, financing and revenues must be provided when the application is submitted.

Provided that the funding does not constitute aid, the projects can be subsidized up to

- 100% on an expenditure basis for universities, research and scientific institutions and similar institutions by way of exemption;
- 100% on an expenditure basis for Helmholtz Centers and the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft by way of exemption, provided that the purpose of the project can only be achieved to the extent necessary if the Federal Government covers all expenditure or costs eligible for grants. To the extent that the institution has a vested interest, it must make a contribution.

This applies provided that the level of significant national interest to Germany justifies it and provided that the project could not be carried out without the Federal Government providing additional funding, and that it would therefore not be possible to fulfil the purpose of the grant to the necessary extent.

5.3.2.2.2 Regional or local authorities

Provided that the funding does not constitute aid, the projects of regional or local authorities or legally equivalent institutions with legal personality can be subsidized in the form of pro rata funding of up to 80% on an expenditure basis. However, where the institution has a vested interest, it must make a higher contribution. This applies provided that the level of significant national interest to Germany justifies it and provided that the project could not be carried out without the Federal Government providing additional funding, and that it would therefore not be possible to fulfil the purpose of the grant to the necessary extent.

5.3.2.2.3 Authorities

Authorities can receive funding of up to 100% of the expenditure eligible for grants within the framework of allocations. Where own funds and third-party funds are available, for example, from research funding, co-funding, core funding, etc., these must be contributed.

5.4 Costs and expenditure eligible for grants

5.4.1 General information

The necessary project-related additional costs/expenditure required to achieve the funding purpose set out in 1 above and the funding objectives in accordance with these Guidelines and the relevant calls for applications for funding are eligible for funding. The subject of funding must be taken into account.

5.4.2 Horizontal activities

In individual cases, additional costs or expenditure directly related to the project may also be eligible for funding if they relate to the following items:

- Accompanying activities, networking and committee work at national and higher levels;
- Standardization activities, approval;
- Performance monitoring, evaluation, input to third parties/interviews/surveys;
- Collection, processing and provision of data; provision of interfaces/open data/open source; integration with platforms (in particular Mobilithek[11]);
- Development of a data management strategy, data security measures;
- Publications, translations into the languages of the European Union;
- Transfer of results/widespread dissemination;
- Trade fairs, events organized by the grant recipient;
- Input for studies, accompanying research, evaluation, reporting, performance monitoring and coordination;
- Participation in interoperability tests.

5.4.3 Funding line 1 – DAC pioneer trains

For funding line 1, all costs required for the investment project are eligible for grants in accordance with Article 16 (4) of the TBER. These costs include, amongst other things, the purchase and implementation of the relevant technology, project management, additional staff costs, adapter wagons and delivery costs. Provided that the rolling stock is not used for commercial operations, this may also include hire and leasing costs for locomotives and wagons. Costs relating to testing and approval as well as pilot and prototype facilities for the implementation of the relevant technology in line with Technology Readiness Level 9[12] are also eligible for grants. Maintenance costs excluded under Article 16 (4) of the TBER are not eligible for grants.

5.4.4 Funding line 2 – Research, development and innovation

In the context of industrial research and experimental development for funding line 2, staff costs, additional overhead costs arising directly from the project and attributable to it, as well as other operating costs, including costs for materials, supplies, travel costs and the like, are eligible for funding in accordance with Article 25 (3) of the GBER.

5.4.5 Funding line 3 – Studies

As part of the feasibility studies for funding line 3, the costs of the study are eligible for funding in accordance with

[11] https://mobilithek.info/

[12] Communication from the Commission 'Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation' (OJ C 414 of 28.10.2022, p. 1), footnote 60. See also Communication from the Commission 'A European strategy for Key Enabling Technologies – A bridge to growth and jobs' (COM(2012) 341 final of 26 June 2012).

Article 25 (4) of the GBER.

6 Other conditions for the award of grants

6.1 Ancillary conditions

6.1.1 General

The following General Ancillary Conditions, specified for the respective funding line, and the Special Ancillary Conditions for the Drawdown of Grants (BNBest-Abruf), in the version in force at the time of approval, form part of the grant award notice for all grant recipients, in the form of ancillary conditions within the meaning of section 36 of the Administrative Procedures Act (VwVfG).

In addition to the General Ancillary Conditions set out below, the grant-awarding authority may include further ancillary conditions in the grant notification, such as extended obligations regarding the provision of evidence, reporting or cooperation, or stricter rules governing the implementation of the project.

6.1.2 Funding line 1 – DAC pioneer trains

For the grant recipients of funding line 1, the General Ancillary Conditions for Grants for the Promotion of Projects on a Cost Basis (ANBest-P-Kosten) are a component of the grant notification.

6.1.3 Funding line 2 – Research, development and innovation; and funding line 3 – Studies

As a rule, for the grant recipients of funding lines 2 and 3, the General Ancillary Conditions for Grants for the Promotion of Projects on a Cost Basis (ANBest-P-Kosten) are a component of the grant notification.

In derogation of this,

- in the case of grants provided to regional or local authorities as well as associations of regional or local authorities, the General Ancillary Conditions for Grants to Fund Projects Provided to Regional or Local Authorities and Associations of Regional or Local Authorities (ANBest-Gk) are a component of the grant notification.
- as a rule, in the case of universities, research and scientific institutions as well as comparable institutions, the General Ancillary Conditions for Grants for the Promotion of Projects (ANBest-P) are a component of the grant notification.

6.2 Reporting obligations

The grant recipient is obliged to notify the grant-awarding authority without delay of any change in circumstances, in particular regarding the project's content, funding and utilization, which could lead to the grant being withdrawn or amended, particularly with regard to its amount.

6.3 Retention obligations

Grant recipients must retain the supporting documents and contracts relating to the contract award, as well as all other documents associated with the grant that have been submitted as part of the application or interim reports or expenditure reports, for at least ten years beyond the end of the grant period (for example, logbooks, employment contracts, salary records, bank transfers and similar documents).

Should tax legislation or other regulations stipulate a longer retention period, this must be observed. The grant recipient must ensure that the grant-awarding body can inspect all documents at all times.

As a rule, the records must be stored in an audit-proof manner as electronic documents. They may also be kept in paper form. In the case of scanned documents, it must be ensured that the scanned document matches the original and that the coherence of the individual documents is maintained. More extensive duties pursuant to other provisions remain unaffected.

6.4 Facts relevant to the granting of a subsidy

Grants provided within the framework of these Guidelines may constitute a subsidy within the meaning of section 264 of the Criminal Code (StGB). Some of the information to be provided during the application procedure and in the course of the project is therefore subsidy-relevant within the meaning of section 264 of the StGB in conjunction with section 2 of the Subsidies Act (SubvG). In this case, before the grant is approved, the applicant is informed of the facts relevant to the granting of a subsidy and made aware that subsidy fraud is a criminal offence. For this purpose, applicants must submit a mandatory written declaration that they have been informed of this.

The subsidy recipient is obliged to inform the subsidy provider without delay of any facts preventing the approval, award, renewal, drawdown or continuation of the subsidy or of the subsidy advantage or which are essential for the recovery of the subsidy or of the subsidy advantage. Particular existing disclosure obligations remain unaffected.

6.5 Evaluation, performance monitoring, accompanying research, collaboration, coordination

The funded projects are continuously reviewed and monitored by the grant-awarding authority to ensure that the funding objectives are met and that the obligations and conditions are complied with.

These Guidelines are subject to ongoing performance monitoring in accordance with Administrative Regulation No 11a relating to section 44 of the Federal Budget Code (BHO) in conjunction with Administrative Regulation No 2.2 relating to section 7 of the BHO, and are evaluated upon expiry of their period of validity (see 8) to review whether the funding objectives and purposes have been achieved (see 1). In addition, an accompanying research and coordination framework is being established, designed to strengthen networking, knowledge transfer and coordination between the projects and third parties.

The grant recipients are thus obliged to provide to the grant-awarding authority and the third parties commissioned by it with all data required for this purpose upon request and in a timely manner, with due regard to data protection provisions. This includes proactive participation in surveys, interviews and other data collection measures and the provision of any other information required, even before or after the project duration. Appropriate resources for collaboration must be budgeted. This applies in particular to all information required under the Administrative Regulation relating to section 7 of the BHO. A breach of this provision may result in revocation.

The information is treated confidentially. Any publications intended for release by the Federal Ministry of Transport or third

parties are published in an anonymized way, so that it is not possible to deduce any trade secrets or personal data relating to the grant recipients. In accordance with the Funding Guidelines, all grant recipients are required to support the widest possible dissemination of results, networking and transparency regarding projects and the programme.

6.6 Open data, open source, open code, data management

If data is collected as part of the funding programme, the grant recipient must be willing to make this data available as open data; this is a mandatory condition for receiving the grant. The Federal Ministry of Transport is committed to making as much publicly funded data as possible available for re-use, in accordance with section 12a of the E-Government Act (EGovG)[13], the Data Use Act[14] and the Open Data Position[15] of the Ministry.

If there are grounds for not to publish data, the data must be processed to such an extent that publication becomes possible. If publication is foreseeably impossible even following processing (for example, anonymization), for instance, for reasons of data protection or other conflicting intellectual property rights (see Guidelines)[16], this must be explained in the project application or project outline, stating the reasons, provided it is already foreseeable. At the latest in the interim reports and expenditure reports, a clear justification must be provided for any data that has not been published.

The amount of data that cannot be published must be kept to a minimum. Where possible, the data must be made available immediately after collection, but no later than when the project on which the data collection was based has been completed and the research objective has been fulfilled (as in section 12a (4), sentence 3, of the EGovG). The data must be described by metadata.

Wherever possible, open source and open code should be made available for relevant works. The development of a data management strategy is welcomed.

6.7 Call for applications for funding, additional information

Details and specific requirements regarding the submission of project outlines and applications can be found in the relevant call for applications for funding. Further details regarding selection criteria, submission deadlines and other specific procedural requirements are also set out there.

6.8 Publication and review of aid and grants

If the grant constitutes aid within the meaning of Article 107 (1) of the TFEU, the European Commission is entitled to examine it in accordance with Article 21 of the TBER and Article 12 of the GBER. Aid exceeding EUR 100,000 is published in accordance with Article 9 of the GBER and Article 9 of the TBER. The information and documents required for this purpose must be provided by the grant recipients upon request.

Information on all grants is published in summary form, for example via the ‘profi’ software, on the funding body’s funding map and through public relations activities.

6.9 Project start following receipt of the grant notification

Once the grant notification has been received, work on the project must begin within three months of the approved start date (condition subsequent). Otherwise, the grant-awarding authority will assess whether this will result in the revocation of the grant and the (full) repayment of the grant amount.

7 Procedure

7.1 Project promoter

The Federal Ministry of Transport commissioned the

Federal Logistics and Mobility Office (BALM), Werderstraße 34 in 50672 Cologne

as the grant-awarding authority.

The Federal Logistics and Mobility Office is the point of contact for all administrative and funding-specific questions and can be contacted by phone (+49 221/5776 2799) or email (PioDAK@balm.bund.de).

Detailed information, fact sheets and contact details for the funding programme can be found on the https://www.balm.bund.de/DE/Themen/Foerderprogramme/PioDAK/PioDAK_node.html website and via the call for applications for funding.

7.2 Project outline and application procedures

The application procedure consists of two phases: the project outline and, upon request, the formal application.

Additional documents required must be submitted within two weeks. Late submission may result in the project outline being excluded or the application being rejected.

Where a consortium is involved, failure to submit information on consortium partners by the deadline may result in the exclusion or rejection of all consortium partners.

7.2.1 Phase 1: Project outline procedure, assessment, ranking

In the first phase of the procedure, the project outline (one outline per consortium) is evaluated and ranked in terms of content (competitive tendering procedure). The evaluation is based on the Funding Guidelines, together with the annexes, the call for applications for funding, the outline template and the evaluation matrix. The templates are available online on the website of the Federal Logistics and Mobility Office, together with the relevant call for applications for funding (German

[13] E-Government Act of 25 July 2013 (Federal Law Gazette I, p. 2749), as last amended by Article 2 of the Act of 19 July 2024 (Federal Law Gazette 2024 I, no. 245).
[14] Data Use Act of 16 July 2021 (Federal Law Gazette I, pp. 2941, 2942, 4114)
[15] https://www.bmv.de/SharedDocs/DE/Anlage/G/positionierung-des-bmvi.pdf?blob=publicationFile
[16] https://www.bmv.de/SharedDocs/DE/Anlage/G/leitfaden-bestandsdatenpruefung.html

only). Details must be provided for each partner in the consortium using the template provided.

The project outlines and supporting documents must be submitted to the Federal Logistics and Mobility Office by the deadlines specified in each call for applications for funding. Incomplete project outlines will not be considered.

7.2.2 Phase 2: Application procedure

If the project outline receives a positive evaluation, the applicant is invited to submit its application.

In the second phase of the procedure, the application is assessed in full from a formal, administrative and technical perspective (one application per consortium partner). A decision on the application is made following a formal and technical review.

Applications for funding must be submitted via the Federal Government's 'easy-Online' funding portal: https://foerderportal.bund.de/

7.3 Approval procedure

The grant-awarding authority decides on the application and, provided the conditions are met and subject to the availability of budgetary funds, approves the grants in accordance with these Guidelines by means of a grant notification.

Approval and project management are handled via the Federal Government's 'profi' funding IT system.

Where possible, the procedure is conducted entirely electronically.

7.4 Payment of funds

The drawdown procedure applies.

The funds can be drawn down in accordance with the Ancillary Conditions set out above, but not until the grant decision has become final.

The grant recipient may only draw down Federal Government funds to the extent that they are required to meet payments due. Immediate use of the grant means that the drawdown is made on the day the funds are required. If the amounts paid out cannot be used on the same day they are drawn down, the grant recipient is obliged, without prejudice to any other notification requirements, to inform the grant-awarding authority of this without delay.

7.5 Speeding up of procedures

Anyone interested in funding is free to contact the grant-awarding authority in advance and independently of any calls for applications to obtain information on, for example, costs and expenditure eligible for funding, the scope of funding, project content, financing, creditworthiness or conditions.

The grant-awarding authority is free to implement appropriate simplification measures for the processing of incoming project outlines and applications, provided that this appears to be in the best interests of the Federal Government, is supported by well-prepared documentation, appropriate evidence or third-party certifications, results in significant acceleration of the process or is achieved through comparable measures, and does not constitute a deviation from the Administrative Regulations relating to section 44 of the BHO.

In particular, for items that cannot yet be validated at the time of application, such as the costs of procuring and approving the DAC, approximate figures may be used, which are to be validated at a later date (hold).

There is no legal entitlement to simplifications.

7.6 Provisions to be observed

Approval, disbursement and settlement of the grant, proof and verification of its use, withdrawal of the grant notification (if necessary) and recovery of the grants provided are governed by sections 48 to 49a of the VwVfG, sections 23 and 44 of the BHO and the General Administrative Regulations adopted pursuant thereto, unless the present Funding Guidelines already allow derogations from them.

The Federal Audit Office is authorized to conduct audits under sections 91 and 100 of the BHO. The Federal Ministry of Transport reserves the right to commission further audits by third parties.

8 Period of validity

These Funding Guidelines enter into force on the day following their publication in the Federal Gazette and expire at midnight on 31 December 2030. With regard to funding line 2 and funding line 3, the Guidelines are valid until the GBER expires, plus a transitional period of six months, i.e. until 30 June 2027. Should the period of application of the GBER be extended without any relevant substantive changes to the aid scheme, the period of validity of funding line 2 and funding line 3 will also be extended until 31 December 2030.

Berlin, 14 August 2026

Federal Ministry of Transport

For the Federal Ministry of Transport
Oliver Vornbäumen