Best Ph.D. and M.Sc. Thesis Award

Academics4Rail is an stable and durable scientific community that in an organized way can share and exchange scientific knowledge with ERJU and ERRAC.

This knowledge is shared at different levels (strategic to concrete technical areas) and for different purposes. When it comes to the strategic level the scientific community intends to share knowledge with ERRAC and ERJU with the purpose of optimise the program for railway research providing insights of fund use, existing themes for research and scientific necessities for the future of European railways. It also supports the methodology of program assessment using KPIs and impact estimation towards the objectives set out in the ERJU masterplan. Finally, the scientific community shares its knowledge about necessities of future PhD funding with a relevant European and scientific weight.

In a more concrete technological domain, the scientific community engages in specific themes creating 6 PhD positions that will enlarge the knowledge in 6 specific areas and will enable the cooperation of academia with industry.

1. Purpose of the Award

The **Academics4Rail Thesis Award** aims to recognize outstanding Master's and PhD research in final phase that contribute to the advancement of railway research, innovation, and education in Europe.

The award seeks to:

- Promote excellence in railway-related academic research.
- Increase the visibility of young researchers within the European railway community.
- Facilitate interactions between academia, industry, infrastructure managers, railway undertakings, and research organizations.
- Encourage the dissemination of innovative ideas supporting the future of rail transport.

2. Eligibility

The competition is open to doctoral and master candidates in a railway-related field whose research is advanced but not yet completed, and who are in the final phase of their PhD or Master Thesis.

The following are not eligible:

- Candidates who have already defended their thesis.
- Candidates at an early or intermediate stage, whose research questions, methodology or results are not yet established. Ideas, proposals and work-in-progress without substantial results will not be considered.

Assessment

Eligible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Railway operations and management
- Traffic management and control
- Railway engineering
- Rolling stock
- Infrastructure
- Digitalization and automation
- Artificial intelligence and data analytics
- Safety and security
- Human factors
- Sustainability and energy efficiency
- Economics, policy and transport planning
- Intermodal and multimodal transport

3. Submission Requirements

Applicants shall submit:

1. A short curriculum vitae (maximum 2 pages)
2. An extended abstract of the thesis (maximum 4 pages) including: a table of contents, the chapters written so far (at least those presenting the core methodology and main results), and a short statement of the remaining work with a realistic timetable towards submission and defence.
3. Scientific output: peer-reviewed publications, or accepted or submitted manuscripts, directly connected to the thesis.
4. Statement of the chair M.Sc. or Ph. D. board about admission to the final exam, and the relevant timing

All submissions must be in English.

The extended abstract should include:

- Title
- Author name and affiliation
- Keywords (3-5)

- Objectives of the work
- Methodology
- Main scientific contributions
- Key results
- Conclusions and future developments
- List of publications derived from the thesis (if any) – mandatory for the Ph.D. track

Applications must be submitted via email to the address: **prizes@eurnex.eu**

4. Evaluation Process

The jury will assess whether the evidence demonstrates genuine maturity. Applications that rely mainly on plans or intentions may be rejected. The jury's decision on eligibility is final.

Each submission will be independently reviewed by members of the Scientific Committee according to Scientific quality, Originality and innovation, Relevance to the railway sector, Methodological rigour, Impact and applicability

Winners will be invited to present their work during the Academics4Rail Annual Event.

Presentations may be delivered either in person, online, or via sending a short video (3 min).

5. Awards

Two categories are foreseen:

- Best Master's Thesis Award
- Best PhD Thesis Award

The Committee reserves the right not to assign an award if the submitted works do not reach the required quality standards.

The prize will consist of 500 € for the winning PhD candidate and 250 € for the winning MSc candidate. All finalists will receive an honourable mention.

6. Scientific Committee

The Scientific Committee shall be composed of one representative from each university member of the Academics4Rail network.

Committee members shall:

- Review submitted abstracts
- Participate in the selection of finalists
- Contribute to the final ranking of candidates
- Declare any conflict of interest

A committee member shall not evaluate submissions originating from their own institution.

Chair of the Committee:

Nicola Sacco: University of Genoa

Committee (Project partners Academics4Rail)

Nebojsa Bojobic: University of Belgrade
Otto Plasek: Brno University of Technology
Annie Kortsari: Centre for Research and Technology Hellas
James Bell: Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt
Ernesto García Vadillo, Nekane Correa, Javier Santamaría: Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea
Joao Pombo: University of Huddersfield
Renata Barcikowska: Instytut Kolejnictwa (Railway Research Institute, Poland)
Sebastian Stichel: KTH Royal Institute of Technology
Armando Carrillo Zanuy: EUropean rail Research Network of EXcellence
Andrew Smith: University of Leeds
Veronica Jägare: Luleå University of Technology
Tatiana Molkova: University of Pardubice
Stefano Bruni: Polytechnic of Milan
Hanane Krim: Railenium
Stefano Ricci: Sapienza University of Rome
Francesco Flammini: University of Florence
Beate Bender: Technische Universität Berlin
Marion Berbineau: Université Gustave Eiffel
Frédéric Vanderhaegen: Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France
Maria Luisa Martínez: Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
Gintautas Bureika: Vilnius Gediminas Technical University
Stanislav Lenart: Slovenian National Building and Civil Engineering Institute
Borna Abramovic: University of Zagreb
Peter Márton: University of Žilina

7. Timeline for the 2027 Edition

Milestone	**Date**
Call for applications opens	1 December 2026
Submission deadline for abstracts	15 January 2027
Notification of finalists	15 February 2027
Award ceremony	During the Academics4Rail Annual Event 2027 (23 February 2027)

8. Publication and Dissemination

By submitting their application, candidates authorize Academics4Rail to:

- Publish the title and abstract of their work;
- Announce the winners through its communication channels;
- Include summaries of the awarded theses in reports, newsletters, or proceedings.

Intellectual property rights remain with the authors.

9. Final Provisions

Participation in the competition implies full acceptance of the present regulation.

The Scientific Committee shall have final authority in the interpretation of the rules and in resolving any matter not expressly covered by this regulation.