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Global leaders in railway technology have confirmed their commitment to the European Commission's recently announced Shift2Rail initiative. On 19 February 2014, major European companies attended a conference in Athens to discuss how they can contribute to the ambitious objectives of Shift2Rail. This €920 million public-private partnership aims to accelerate the market take up of innovative solutions in the rail sector, making passenger and freight rail transport more attractive to users and slashing costs to the benefit of public purses.

The conference was hosted by the Greek Minister of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks and comes as the Commission has announced its intention to triple funding for rail research and innovation to €450 million (2014-2020), compared to €155 million in the previous period, as part of the Shift2Rail initiative.

Eight companies have individually pledged to contribute at least €30 million of own funds to Shift2Rail. Apart from Alstom, Bombardier and Siemens, these companies include rail equipment manufacturers Ansaldo STS, Thales and CAF, as well as infrastructure managers Trafikverket and Network Rail.

Alongside these companies, many smaller and medium sized companies, but also research institutes and academics, as well as railway undertakings and infrastructure managers were present in Athens to voice their support for the initiative and discuss how they can contribute to Shift2Rail.

The first projects under Shift2Rail are expected to be launched in 2015.

What is Shift2 Rail?

"Shift2Rail" is an ambitious public-private partnership which will manage a 7-year work programme of targeted research and innovation to drastically improve the quality and efficiency of rail services in Europe. It will develop and accelerate the bringing to market of technological breakthroughs critical to delivering the Single European Railway Area and to supporting the competitiveness of the rail sector as a whole, creating jobs and boosting exports.

Shift2Rail aims to deliver: a reduction, by up to 50%, in the life-cycle cost of railway transport (i.e. costs of building, operating, maintaining and renewing infrastructure and rolling stock); an overall increase in capacity of up to 100%; and an overall increase in reliability of up to 50% in the different rail market segments.

The research and innovation will focus on five key areas:

1. To improve the quality of services – it will focus on developing a new generation of high capacity trains which are cost-efficient and reliable;
2. To increase capacity and get more trains running on the same lines – it will develop better intelligent traffic management and control systems;
3. To provide reliable, high quality, infrastructure, including reducing track noise, cutting costs and developing intelligent maintenance;
4. To provide integrated ticketing and journey planners – it will develop innovative IT solutions and services;
5. To allow rail to compete effectively in more markets – it will develop better logistics and inter-modal freight solutions, so rail can connect better with other forms of transport.