

Rail research: Shift2Rail being set in motion

By Isabelle Smets

An executive director is named. The Commission is preparing to adopt a master plan and drafting the first calls for tender

Shift2Rail, the new public-private partnership for research and innovation in the rail sector, in which the European Commission will inject €450 million from 2014 to 2020 and the private sector around €470 million, is being set in motion. A few days ago, the European Commission named Christos Economou, from DG MOVE, executive director of the joint undertaking in charge of the initiative. He is an interim director. The call for candidates for the executive director is expected to be issued soon, but an appointment is not likely before the first quarter of 2015.

According to a source, the executive is also expected to approve within days

the master plan that describes the key priorities and objectives of the research to be carried out under Shift2Rail. The

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document was drafted with the initiative's founding members, which include Alstom, Bombardier, Thales and Siemens. Among the focus areas of its research, Shift2Rail will help develop a new generation of large-capacity and high-speed trains that are lighter, quieter and less energy-intensive. It will also improve rail traffic management systems. The master plan will confirm the importance attached to demonstration activities, the final pre-commercial stage of projects that includes the develop-

ment of prototypes tested in operational situations. This focus on nearly finished products also distinguishes Shift2Rail – apart from the amounts invested – from traditional research based more on the preliminary stages.

But it will take a few more months to learn who is interested in what and who will do what: the first call for tenders will be issued to associate members in September or October, enabling them to position themselves on one or more areas of research. It will then become clear which companies or consortiums are ready to move from words to action, ie to dip into their pockets. To participate, a rail company will have to spend at least €12 million unless it is part of a consortium, for which the financial contribution is a total of €15 million.

According to an informed source, several non-EU countries may also express an interest, including the United States, Turkey and Morocco. ■