

RAIL TRANSPORT

Shift2Rail to be operational in 2015

By Isabelle Smets

The European Parliament and Council confirmed in Athens, on 19 February, that they hope to complete work on the Shift2Rail proposal by the end of this half-year. Shift2Rail is a public-private research and innovation partnership in the rail sector, in which the European Commission will inject €450 million in 2014-2020 (Horizon 2020) and the private sector around €470 million. This is far more than the EU's €155 million contribution to rail research during the years 2007-2013.

In Athens, the Greek EU Presidency said it hoped to steer through an agreement at the 14 March Transport Council. Parliament, which is only consulted on this issue, is expected to adopt a positive position on 14 April. This too was confirmed in Athens by the Chair of the Committee on Transport (TRAN), Brian Simpson (S&D, UK). This green light will enable the Greeks to finalise the matter at the June Transport Council. The joint undertaking that will steer the initiative – to be comprised of the Commission and industrial partners – will then be ready to roll in 2015.

According to Philippe Citroën, director-general of UNIFE, the professional association for the railway supply industry, which championed the development of Shift2Rail, around 100 companies of

all sizes from across Europe have so far expressed an interest in participating in the initiative. The founding members

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of the joint undertaking include names like Alstom, Bombardier, Siemens and Thales.

THREE QUESTIONS TO PHILIPPE CITROËN*What will come out of the research conducted in the context of Shift2Rail?*

There are three key objectives assigned to Shift2Rail: 1. to increase the capacities of the rail system and trains – we are going to develop a new generation of large-capacity trains; 2. to improve reliability, because this is one of the key subjects that users see as a problem; and 3. to reduce costs by 50%. To achieve them, we plan to work on rolling stock, traffic management systems, infrastructure, IT solutions and improvement of freight. The Commission asked the companies to choose the category and projects on which they wished to work, which they have done.

How will this research be different from the rail research carried out so far at EU level?

We used to engage in collaborative research. Companies worked together on research that very often ended with studies. The difference with Shift2Rail is that we are going to work on concrete matters, prototypes. The objective of this type of project is also to be as close to the market as possible. On a ranking of zero to six, research programmes have so far been at level three: studies on which industry could continue later; with Shift2Rail we will be at level six, the stage just before the market. The Commission wants to be sure that products resulting from this research will emerge close to the point of being marketable. That is also why the initiative has involved operators like Deutsche Bahn, SNCF, Trenitalia and infrastructure managers, to be sure that what results from the research will be placed on the market.

When will the first concrete results be ready?

If everything begins in 2015, I would say around 2018 or 2019. Not everything will be developed at the same time because it is a tremendous project. Some things will be easier than others. We will probably advance more quickly on tests on freight or on the new ERTMS than on things like rolling stock. ■