

Madam State Secretary,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a great pleasure to welcome you in Ghent. In particular I want to thank my colleague, Wilma Mansveld, State Secretary for Infrastructure and the Environment in the Netherlands, for being present on this event.

Today we inaugurate the freight corridors 1 and 2, providing railway links between the Northsea and Italy and France.

Rail freight through our countries on corridors. Why is that so important ?

Even today many of us live with **clichés about rail freight** in our countries, clichés which are hard to shake off.

Transport by rail is complicated and not flexible, it is expensive and worst of all, you never know when your goods will be delivered.

Furthermore

- In France, your wagons might get lost*
- In Italy, you must limit your convoy to 550 meter*
- The short distance in Luxemburg is not worth the effort of passing an extra border*
- The German network is so congested*
- In Switzerland trains run like a clockwork*
- In the Netherlands, a rail freight highway takes you as far as the border*
- And do I have to mention Belgium combining 3 official languages with the insurmountable Ardennes... ?*

But, Ladies and Gentlemen, I suggest that we forget these clichés. After years of hard work my colleague and I present you the rail freight corridors 1 and 2. They are among the first corridors to be active and operational and will in the future be part of a network of a high quality rail network for international freight.

The corridors are meant to make life a lot easier for those among you that want to transport goods in Europe. Although your goods will still be passing different countries, you can deal with your transport from A to Z in a seamless way, without having to worry about borders.

This is possible by the way the Infrastructure managers approach and organise the corridors.

First of all, the infrastructure managers of the different countries offer **capacity** on the corridor with the guarantee that the train path will not be altered for freight trains that stick to their scheduled time¹. That means that you have this guarantee on a the total length of your train path from Antwerp to Lyon for example.

Next, the **Corridor One-Stop-Shop**, allows railway undertakings to order their train paths using a single web application. That means that ordering a train path from Zeebrugge to Genoa should not be more complicated than ordering a train path from Zeebrugge to Antwerp.

What is more, the One-Stop-Shops on all corridors use the **same telematics application**, the *Path Coordination System*, PCS. This tool has been developed by RailNetEurope for international passenger traffic and has to be the standard tool for requesting international freight paths.

This approach has lead already to some results. In 2014, the one-stop-shop of Corridor 2 has had its first reservation for capacity and I am confident that from now until mid-April, when the period for requesting train paths is closed, many reservations will follow.

The development of the European corridors for railway freight is therefore well on its way and I and my colleagues are greatly pleased with this evolution.

However, there remain several **challenges**, and I would like to talk about two challenges in particular that have a very close relationship with the future development of the corridors:

- ❖ First of all, there is the challenge of offering enough **capacity on each corridor**;
- ❖ Secondly we should avoid that we replace barriers between countries by **barriers between corridors**.

¹ In accordance with Article 17 section 3 of the Regulation 913/2010, the train path allocated by the C-OSS to freight trains that stick to their time slot foreseen in the working timetable cannot be altered, as far as is possible.

Concerning this **first challenge**, aiming to ensure a sufficient offer in capacity on the corridors, we look for a balance between harmonisation and standardisation on the one hand and the adaptation to special requirements of the client² on the other hand. The exercise is not an easy one.

Do I dare mention the following example?

Up until the first half of the 20th century, clothing was made by a tailor to order. You choose the style and the type of fabric, the tailor took your measurements and after some time your suit or dress was ready, made to your specifications. Today we buy most of our clothes straight off the rack, only the size changes: Small, Medium, Large, even Extra-Large.

As we have gone from "*made to measure*" to "*off the rack*" for our clothing, we could go from "*made to measure*" to "*pre-established corridor train paths*" for trains.

Standardising the train paths by creating types for each category of cargo could, certainly, have the advantage of a gain in capacity and in quality. However, the downside could be to lose the particular flexibility that "*made to measure*" offers.

It is a question of making a choice between, either a larger offer of more standard type train paths, or a more limited offer which is individually adapted.

It is not my intention to solve this question, but I would like to ask you to think about it, even to discuss it within the advisory groups of the corridors³.

The **second challenge** I mentioned to you already is that we must take care to avoid creating new barriers between our corridors. It is our task to guard that procedures we put in place are harmonised on a network level for the whole of Europe.

Although the corridors started off as rather independent structures, their growing number means they have more and more interconnections, and parts that are used in more than one corridor. The three corridors that will be put in place in 2015 - including Corridor 8 with several countries present here today - might add to this problem, as might do new extensions resulting from the recent European Regulation "*Connecting Europe Facility*". As Member

² Cfr production : Producing to order or for stock.

³ Today we offer capacity, however if we limited the taylor-made paths as far as is possible, we would gain in capacity. Railway Undertakings for freight tend to request very particular train paths, wanting to stop for 3 hours in a certain area, etc. This will facilitate the work of IMs but also allow more train paths on the corridor if we offer them as standard formats.

States are aware that several corridors will interconnect on their territory, every Member State aspires to apply the same approach for all the corridors they participate in. Multiplying this by the number of States which collaborate in 2, 3, maybe 5 other corridors, we can appreciate the scale of the task.

The conference that brings us together today shows that Corridors 1 and 2 work together in the best way possible. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank in particular the two Managing Directors, Stefan Wendel and Paul Mazataud for the work they have done these last few years with their teams. They have both had the wisdom and capacity to listen which is necessary to find a solution that works for everyone. Within the corridors for which they are responsible, we do not apply the rule of *simple majority* and even less that of *qualified majority*... Within these corridors we are constantly looking for *consensus*.

I would also like to thank every infrastructure manager and capacity allocation body involved in these two corridors. During the last years you worked together in a fresh and new way, that proved very productive and that resulted in two corridors that are active today. I thank you for your fruitful cooperation within RailNetEurope and I want to congratulate you with what you have achieved up until now.

May I draw the attention of the audience to the fact that the corridors indeed are a laboratory for new ways of collaborating in the railway sector, on a level that was not known before. That is yet another domain in which the corridors pave the way for a new era, in which national interests are gradually disappearing and European harmonisation will result in a **European corridor network**.

I therefore today invite the railway undertakings present here, as well as terminals and other direct and indirect railway clients, to seize this pivotal moment in the development of European railway freight and work with us for the rapid expansion of the corridors, without barriers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I talked to you about the new challenges for the corridors: offering enough capacity and avoiding new barriers.

However the railways in Europe are facing yet other challenges that have an impact on the development of the corridors. I think for example of certain aspects of technical interoperability and of information systems. The good news is that advancements have been made during the past years in these two areas, though a lot of work still needs to be done.

I first want to talk to you about **the European railway safety system ERTMS**. Several Member States have made considerable investments in the deployment of ERTMS. This system first of all brings a gain in safety and in capacity, but, very important for international corridors, it improves interoperability. We should not forget that **interoperability** will allow trains to operate without hindrance on the European railway network and will mean a benefit to the whole of the European transport network. The development of the necessary techniques for interoperability, to be boosted by Shift2Rail, will also allow our manufacturers who struggle every day in a very competitive environment, to benefit from commercial opportunities around the world. Next to those technical measures I also am in favour of adapting our legislation in order to facilitate the cross-border traffic.

Another aspect that is important for the railway sector is the active integration of **new information technologies**. Enormous progress has already been made in implementation, in particular in terms of data flows. The International Union of Railways has developed a code for numbering international trains. The introduction of the Train ID and the follow-up to the development of interfaces between the national systems in the context of the *TAP & TAF TSI* are essential.

When talking about providing and exchanging data, I would also like to address myself to those of you representing the ports, terminals and railway undertakings. I would like to draw the attention of ports and terminals to the opportunity that corridors represent and invite them to use it to their advantage. The two corridors are in favour of allowing ports and terminals to have access to the Train Information System. Indeed, this would be useful in facilitating the internal organisation of loading and unloading of freight. I support this initiative and kindly recommend it to the railway undertakings for consideration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although I talked to you a lot about challenges, let us not forget the main objective of the corridors, that is to be a reliable partner in the international transport of freight, so that a

modal transfer to rail is possible. By allowing the infrastructure managers to improve their services, they allow us to contribute to a modal transfer to rail.

My wish is that in several years' time, thanks to a major modal transfer: *"All European freight flows will run principally via corridors, and that the whole of the capacity dedicated to international freight transport will be organised using corridor One-Stop-Shops"*.

Finally, I will conclude with **multimodality and the large corridors of the Core Network** of the trans-European network for transport. We'll have the pleasure in a few moments to listen to three European coordinators, in charge of the multimodal corridors North Sea - Mediterranean and Rhine – Alpine and the corridor-wide deployment of ERTMS.

I thank them warmly for taking the time to speak to us today and I would like to use this occasion to draw their attention to the importance of aligning the working programmes of multimodal corridors, not only with those of the freight corridors, but also between themselves.

Madam State Secretary,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

By fully appreciating the long road that remains before us, but which is nothing less than fascinating, I would like to thank you for your attention and wish you fruitful discussions.

In my introduction I reminded you of the clichés about transport by rail. Perhaps I did not convince you to leave these clichés behind, but in my opinion, very soon the way the corridors operate will certainly convince you to do so.

Thank you for your attention.