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16TH FLORENCE RAIL FORUM - IMPROVING EUROPEAN RAIL FREIGHT

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Sala del Consiglio

Villa Salviati, Via Bolognese 156 - Florence

7 MAY 2018 8:45 - 17:00

■ INTRODUCTION

Improving the conditions for rail freight is a top priority of the European Union. Rail freight has a crucial role to play in both reaching the EU's climate goals and supporting economic growth and competitiveness. The 2016 [Rotterdam declaration](#) clearly stated a political commitment to addressing the most important obstacles for rail freight in Europe. Above all, rail freight needs to gain market shares.

The European Commission is strongly committed to make rail freight more attractive. EU legislation and policies provide a sound basis, in particular with the 4th Railway Package, the long-standing policy towards achieving interoperability, the ambitious infrastructure development policy through TEN-T and the EU budget financial support, especially the CEF, and the R&I Shift2Rail program. On top of this, the Rail Freight Corridors are a key element to boost rail freight. An interoperable European infrastructure based on the TEN-T corridors is crucial, but so is the sector's commitment to improving reliability, punctuality and service orientation. Only an ambitious implementation of these different complementary policies, by all the stakeholders concerned, can deliver the expected results.

Nine of the European Rail Freight Corridors are now fully operational and starting to show results. However, the pace of progress within the corridors needs to increase. Their governance is most crucial for their effectiveness. This includes a better coordination among the relevant actors in the sector, such as infrastructure managers, railway undertakings and terminal operators, but also a firm commitment by the concerned stakeholders to take ownership and use the corridors as a key tool to support rail freight.

Against the background of the discussions around the next MFF, rail needs to focus on removing bottlenecks especially at border crossing points and intermodal nodes, and embracing interoperability, digitalization, customer orientation and improvement of quality.

The 16th Florence Rail Forum will assess the state of play of rail freight in Europe, focusing on the development and the governance of the Rail Freight Corridors within the wider context of rail freight policy:

- 1. Which way forward for European Rail Freight - what are the political priorities and what are the sector priorities?**
- 2. RFCs as tool to develop and offer more customer-oriented services - how to meet expectations?**
- 3. Solving of technical cross-border issues and bringing about seamless interoperability - what are the most urgent needs?**
- 4. Concluding Session**