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On track for more competitive rail freight in Europe

The European Commission has just taken a decisive step in promoting the international transport of goods by rail. Today it adopted a proposal for a regulation that would involve working with Member States to designate international rail corridors providing operators with an efficient, high-quality freight transport infrastructure. This is central to Europe's rail revival and to creating a transport system in the Community that is both efficient and sustainable.

'The Commission, Member States, infrastructure operators and all other parties in the railway sector must get down to work together to make competitive goods transport happen. The Commission is acting here fully in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. Member States are – and will remain – free to suggest or sketch out these corridors themselves. Our proposal is intended to make the railway infrastructure a more attractive option for long-distance freight transport across Europe,' said Antonio Tajani, Commission Vice-President responsible for transport.

The development of rail freight is a key issue for transport in Europe. Rail transport creates little pollution and could be a competitive alternative to transport by road. The Commission's ambition is to increase the proportion of goods transported by rail by encouraging the creation of corridors along which conditions for freight transport can be significantly better than is the case currently. As a result, rail operators will be able to offer an efficient, high-quality service and be more competitive on the goods transport market.

In particular, the corridors linking the Member States will make it possible to:

- integrate national infrastructures on the basis of closer cooperation between infrastructure operators both on investment and actual operation;
- respond better to rail freight operators' requirements;
- manage effectively those infrastructures that are used by passenger and goods trains so that freight is no longer at a systematic disadvantage; and
- ensure better connections between the rail infrastructure and other modes of transport, which is essential to the development of co-modality.

The creation of international railway corridors for the transport of goods is not a new idea. Already in the 'logistics package' which it adopted in October 2007, the Commission signalled its intention to come up with specific proposals geared to establishing a railway network in Europe that put freight first. Coming after wide consultation of the sector and a detailed impact assessment, today's proposal is intended to put in place many of the measures required to ensure the sustainable development of rail freight.