Transport policy: proposals and action programme for 2010. White Paper

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In a Communication adressed to the Council and the European Parliament, the European Commission has proposed a new package of measures to revitalise the railways by rapidly building an integrated European railway area. The five measures are based on the guidelines set out in the recent White Paper on transport and aim at greater safety, interoperability and opening of the rail freight market. This package of measures is designeded to supplement the rules governing Europe's railways, without waiting any longer. Five new proposals will build on the foundation laid by the existing Community legislation. They are accompanied by thoughts on future action to make the railway market more dynamic and improve quality. The five measures proposed and announced earlier in the White Paper are: - Developing a common approach to rail safety. A proposal for a directive aims at guaranteeing rail safety by publishing rules which everyone can understand. It lays down a clear procedure for granting the safety certificates which every railway company must obtain before it can run trains on the European network. The objective is gradually to integrate the national safety systems. - Bolstering the fundamental principles of interoperability. After four years' work the experts have come up with solutions providing the technical interoperability needed in order to operate transfrontier services and cut rolling stock costs on the high-speed network. The Commission proposes drawing on this experience and changing working methods so that faster progress can be made on interoperability on the conventional network. Geographically, interoperability must be extended to the entire open network. - Setting up an effective steering body: the European Railway Agency. This Agency, with around 100 staff, will coordinate the groups of technical experts seeking common solutions on safety and interoperability. It will submit proposals for decisions on these subjects to the Commission, which will adopt them once they have been endorsed by the committees of representatives of the Member States. The Agency will also play a liaison role between the different competent national authorities. It could be in operation by 2004-2005. - Extending and speeding up opening of the rail freight market. After the first railway package opened up the market for just international freight services, today the Commission proposed opening up the national freight markets as well. To this end, the Commission proposes opening up the entire network sooner, by 2006, allowing for the time which it will take to adopt and implement its proposal. - Joining the Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF). This organisation drafts regulations on, for example, the carriage of dangerous goods by rail or technical standards applicable to railway material. It is therefore essential for the Community to accede to the OTIF Convention so that it can exercise its powers on rail transport within OTIF. These measures are indispensable to create the climate needed for revitalising the railways. However, they will not be enough by themselves. Today the Commission wishes to open a debate with all concerned on a series of further steps. In particular, the Commission is thinking of the following measures already announced in the White Paper: - ensure high-quality rail services: open the rail network to new operators, set quality criteria and give users financial compensation in case of non-compliance with contractual service obligations; - remove barriers to entry to the rail freight market: deploy the ERTMS control and command system, give the regulators stronger powers and simplify customs procedures; - improve the environmental performance of rail freight services; - gradually set up a dedicated rail freight network; - progressively open the market in passenger services by rail; - improve rail passengers' rights.