



FRANS TIMMERMANS
Executive Vice-President

Brussels, 02/07/2021

Honourable Member,

I would like to thank you and your co-signatories for your letter concerning the Lyon-Turin high-speed link and its relevance for the European Green Deal.

The European TEN-T policy will substantially contribute to achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal. By promoting multimodality and investments, in particular, in the most environmentally friendly modes of transport, the TEN-T policy supports modern, clean, sustainable and safe infrastructure, paying special attention to cross-border investments that increase cohesion and further integrate the European continent.

The Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy¹, which was adopted by the Commission in December 2020, sets the ambitious milestone of doubling high-speed rail traffic in the EU by 2030 and aims to make— freight transport greener. Projects such as the Lyon-Turin project will remain relevant in achieving this.

The current tunnel and access routes do not offer adequate capacity. The rail mode is only able to catch a minor part of cargo — around 92% of freight is currently transported by road — with severe consequences on pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. The current infrastructure is neither competitive nor energy efficient and is not adapted technically to modern requirements for cargo and passenger traffic.

As already expressed by Commissioner Adina Vălean, the European Commission supports the Lyon-Turin project because ultimately it will bring benefits in terms of connectivity and multimodality while contributing to addressing congestion and reducing the environmental impact of transport in a region that is characterised by important transit flows. In particular, it will contribute to the European Green Deal by curbing greenhouse gas emissions, as well as pollution and noise in the Alpine valleys. It will also improve safety on roads.

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¹ COM/2020/789 final.

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Obviously, the ongoing construction must respect the applicable environmental legislation. All the works that are part of the project must be assessed by the competent bodies, through environmental impact studies. EU funding has been granted for this project after assessments on environment and habitats had been carried out in France and Italy.

With regard to the Court of Auditors' report, any construction of new large transport infrastructure will at first produce CO2 emissions. However, the base tunnel linking Lyon with Turin will be in operation for generations and will contribute to a substantial shift of traffic from road transport to rail. The tunnel will serve Europe for much longer than the period of 50 years referred to in the report of the Court of Auditors.

A recent study conducted by the Observatory for the Turin-Lyon railway² provides a simulation of the emissions produced during the design and construction phases and the avoided emissions during the operation phase. The study concludes that the impacts of the construction phase should be amortised 15 years after the commissioning of the infrastructure, thanks to the modal shift from road to rail.

Finally, a recent survey conducted by BVA opinion³, according to which populations on both sides of the Alps have a positive opinion on the project. This survey took into consideration national, regional and local perspectives. The fact that French and Italian citizens, in all territories involved, support the project is clear evidence that the Lyon-Turin base tunnel fulfils the expectations of the public.

In line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Commission will strengthen its biodiversity proofing framework to ensure that EU funding supports biodiversity-friendly investments. This includes operationalising the 'do no harm' principle of the European Green Deal in support of NextGenerationEU implementation, and developing sustainability proofing guidelines in the context of InvestEU.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Frans Timmermans', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Frans Timmermans

² The "Quaderno 15 -Transizione ecologica del sistema dei trasporti - Il contributo della ferrovia e della nuova Linea Torino-Lione" published by the Observatory for the Turin-Lyon railway axis provides an updated (2019), http://presidenza.governo.it/osservatorio_torino_lione/quaderni/Quaderno15.pdf

³ <https://www.bva-group.com/sondages/perception-projet-de-ligne-tgv-lyon-turin-resultats-deuxieme-vague/>