FRANCO – SPANISH RAIL LINK

A new railway section linking the Spanish and French networks opened at the end of January today thanks to about €70 million in European Union funding.

The 44.4 km Perpignan-Figueras railway section is suitable for both high-speed rail and freight transport and is expected to significantly cut journey times. The official opening was attended by the Spanish Minister of Development, Jose Blanco López, the French Secretary of State for Transport, M. Thierry Mariani, and the European co-ordinator Carlo Secchi, on behalf of the European Commission.

Mr Secchi, who is responsible on behalf of the Commission for co-ordinating high-speed rail links in south-west Europe, including the Madrid-Barcelona-Lyon line, commented, “This link between the two main high-speed rail European networks overcomes an historical natural barrier. The new cross-border section represents a major achievement for the internal market and for the mobility of citizens. I am proud the European Union played such an essential role in making this possible.”

The cross-border section, ensuring the first interoperable connection between the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of the European Union, was completed in 2009, and its implementation was made possible by Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) co-financing of €69.75 million, which represents 25% of the costs of establishment.

Works for its connection to the Spanish network were completed in December 2010. Consequently, trains in standard (“European”) gauge can now travel across, linking the two largest European high-speed networks. The Spanish high-speed network is in standard gauge, while the conventional lines, including the old border crossing, are in the wider Iberian gauge. This section overcomes this problem which so far had been limiting cross-border flows. The line passes through the new 8 km Pertus tunnel. High-speed trains can run on it at 350km/h. To ensure safe and intensive use, it is equipped with the interoperable European signalling and control system – European Rail Traffic Monitoring System (ERTMS) – that constantly monitors traffic flows and provides feedback to the trains.

The new international services reduce journey time from Barcelona to the French network by about one hour, and their launch has already proved to be a commercial success. The full completion of the high-speed line between Barcelona and the cross-border section, expected for 2012, will bring Barcelona to just 50 minutes
from Perpignan – instead of more than 3h30 today – and will considerably enhance rail flows both for passengers and freight, efficiently connecting two of the most important cities and Mediterranean ports (Barcelona and Valencia) to the rest of the EU rail network.

Thanks to the continuing efforts made, the full Mediterranean arc from Valencia to Lyon is expected to be operational in 2020. By that time, travelling from Barcelona to Paris will take only 4h30 instead of eight hours. The journey from Barcelona to Lyon will take only 2h40.