



Introductory remarks by M. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the Republic, at the lunch given to mark the inauguration of the East European high-speed Line - excerpts -

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(...)

The TGV-Est line is the result of model cooperation: indeed, never before have so many public-sector partners pooled their resources and efforts to build a railway track. The State of course, with, at its side, Réseau ferré de France and the SNCF, but also the European Union, the Luxembourg government and I extend a friendly greeting to the minister representing the Grand Duchy and the local authorities: all together, we have believed in this project, we have mobilized to make it a reality.

The inauguration of this high-speed line is excellent news for all the communes, departments and regions involved, in Champagne-Ardenne, Lorraine and Alsace.

By shrinking distances, attracting businesses, speeding up exchanges, it is going to be a veritable catalyst of economic activity, bringing with it over 16,000 jobs. I'm thinking particularly of some areas of our country which have themselves taken up the challenges presented by substantial and often painful industrial restructurings. By bringing towns and areas closer together, the TGV is going to vastly increase the results of all your efforts and offer you new prospects.

The TGV-Est will bring Paris within 45 minutes of Reims, 90 minutes of Metz and Nancy, and 2... hours of Luxembourg. It's going to almost halve the journey time from Paris to Strasbourg. And the next stage of high-speed train track laying will improve things still further. The State has committed itself to this: the works will begin before 2010.

The TGV-Est line symbolizes France's town and country planning policy, one I personally have sought for France, with a state-of-the-art transport system,



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

broadband everywhere by the end of 2007, innovative public services easily accessible to our fellow citizens and ambitious competitive clusters throughout France. A town and country planning policy for France designed to take up the challenges of the future.

The TGV-Est line is also a major industrial success. It's an admirable demonstration of French research, development and innovation. It's a magnificent achievement for Alstom, one of the world high-speed rail champions. Thanks to the innovative projects the company has presented in the framework of the competitive clusters and Industrial Innovation Agency, such as AGV (1), France is reinforcing her lead. And the forthcoming attempt to break the speed record on the TGV-Est line will be a further demonstration of our great expertise in the field.

Finally, with this new line, France is showing that she is and wants to remain the world leader for high-speed rail.

It's the commitment we made to high-speed rail which has allowed us, since 1976, to make the train a means of transport perfectly tailored to the needs of the French and the national economy.

But that's not all. Thanks to high-speed rail, not only is the train faster than road transport and cheaper than flying competitive with the other modes of transport, but it also emits far less greenhouse gases. The creation of a countrywide high-speed rail network is essential in order to take up the environmental challenges.

With this new line and the three others currently being developed, with 75% of new transport investment allocated to alternatives to road transport, France is equipping herself with all the tools of a genuine sustainable transport policy. A transport policy serving our citizens, mindful of companies' needs and environmentally friendly. Thank you.

(1) Automotrice à grande vitesse (literally, high-speed self-propelled carriage) with this system, which Alstom is developing, the motive power is not concentrated in power cars, but spread all along the train.