



Speech given by the Minister for Infrastructures and Housing at

## **Launch of the European Rail Safety and Climate Survey**

**16 June 2021**

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are almost at the end of the first semester of the European Year of Rail, a first semester in which I have had the privilege of presiding to the Transport Minister's Council.

The Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union has stated from the start that railways would be the focus of our political agenda for transport.

One of our priorities was to open a wide-ranging debate about the railway sector in Europe, a debate focused on assessing the efficiency of the sector as a whole, its environmental performance

and its ability to actually provide the services that are socially and economically relevant.

That debate has been opened and is ongoing, with contributions from European institutions, such as the European Economic and Social Council, the Commission and Council of Ministers itself. Of course, the industry, from workers and citizens have also been putting out their own opinions. The main outtake from the beginning of this debate is that there is controversy, and controversy is good, because it leads to new ideas and new solutions.

There are also new impulses to the development of the railways from outside the European Union, in the United States and the United Kingdom, for instance. We should not close ourselves down from good ideas that may come from outside, as well as from the diversity of experiences from within the EU.

I am sure that the next presidencies of the EU Council will keep giving this matter its due importance.

This survey that we are launching today is another important contribution for a better knowledge of how the railway system is

effectively working and whether or not it is meeting its objectives. This time, we will be listening to those how work every day on the railways: engineers, conductors, maintenance technicians, traffic managers and a myriad of other functions, all essential to keep our trains running clean, on-schedule and with an ever-higher service and safety standard.

This is the first Europe-wide survey that will assess the perception of railway professionals on how safe the whole system is. We must keep in mind that the railways are the workplace for hundreds of thousands of workers across Europe.

The human factor is and will always be essential to rail transport.

It will remain essential to ensure that the safety reputation of the railways remains grounded in a very rigorous safety culture. A culture that is a feature of the rail system itself, recognized by passengers and citizens in general.

Allow me to give just a quick word to all the railway workers and professionals in Portugal.

It is well known that we have been carrying out a policy towards the improvement of service levels in our rail network, recovering from the decades of disinvestment that it has endured.

This would not be possible without the hard work and enthusiasm of the Portuguese railway workers and professionals. They are the ones truly putting our country back on a path towards the improvement and expansion of our network. They are the ones that allow us to have a medium and long-term vision for a rail network that can gain modal share from road and air travel.

I know that Portuguese railway sector companies have already participated in the first phase of this study. I am sure the people involved with the railways in Portugal will go on contributing in this second phase, with the expectation that they will be helping to build a better knowledge of this very complex system.

The railways are, indeed, a very complex and sophisticated system that plays a key role in our societies providing mobility and

accessibility. The railways provide a service that is unquestionably a public good.

We must care for it and cherish it, always aiming for the best possible service, without fear of upsetting the *status quo*.

I invite all rail professionals across Europe to express their views in enhancing European rail safety, but also to keep making their voices heard and sharing their enthusiasm, as they historically have done.

I am looking forward to meeting with you here in Portugal, in the city of Porto, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> of November, for the European Rail Safety Days.

Thank you for inviting me to address this event.