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Audience with the Directors and staff of the Italian State Railways Group (Gruppo Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane)

At 11:35 this morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the directors and staff of the Italian State Railways Group.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Mr. Chief Executive Officer,
Ladies and gentlemen executives,
I cordially greet all of you, and I thank Dr. Battisti for his kind words.

The State Railways are a fundamental means of transport and connection for the country, as well as representing a support and incentive for economic and social development. They constitute a capillary structure that unites the various areas of the country both from a practical and ideal point of view, encouraging the exchange of people and goods, of experience and knowledge, of culture and wealth.

As managers, you bear a great responsibility in the name of the community. First of all, towards the employees, whom you are called to lead and whose tasks you organise. May they always find in you models of dedication and impartiality, capable of combining the firmness, typical of those who must decide, with the understanding of those who care about the problems and the concrete needs of people. Your responsibility also extends to those who, occasionally or on a daily basis, use the train as a means of transport, to go to work or for tourism, or to reach their loved ones who live far away. In fact, the effort to make the rail service more efficient has a major impact on their quality of life, making their journeys faster and more comfortable. Your activity then extends to the whole of society, since the quality of rail transport affects many social dynamics and the economic prospects of the country itself.

You are entrusted with a wide range of issues, from safety in the workplace to the management of contracts, from environmental sustainability to regulatory aspects and interaction with the territory. This is why a great deal of effort is required of you, and I hope you will apply it with passion, to work with the extra care, availability and creativity that is typical of those who love the situations and the people they serve.

This year you are celebrating the first decade of High Speed, a public work of strategic importance, which provides an essential link along the main axes of the country and every day offers thousands of passengers a high quality service. The progress made and the innovations introduced in this short period of time are truly sensational, with an increase in travel speed, an increase in services and comfort for passengers, an increasingly strong interaction with territories and other means of transport, as well as a great development of the High Speed stations.

This rapid evolution is the result of careful and prudent planning, of which you, the directors, together with the top management of the company, are the interpreters and promoters. In a society in such rapid evolution as ours, it is essential to formulate a clear plan of action, inspired by a vision of the future that is being built, to be adapted gradually on the basis of new circumstances.

This vision is the result of in-depth study, requires collaboration with experts and a thorough knowledge of the dynamics of society, to whose needs it is intended to respond. Even more than in the past, it must be an overall view of reality and problems, because never before has it been necessary to recognise that individuals, groups, local communities and states are not realities in their own right: globalisation puts us in front of the urgent need to work and think together, because we are not islands, but rather points of connection.

We are, in different ways and each one according to his or her position, *junctions*. A junction connects, allows passage from one road to another, from one rail to another; those who act as junctions do not only think for themselves, but multiply relationships and shared projects, knowing that the good of individuals and communities, at every level, passes from the good of all, then from the good of each of the others.

I would like to express my wish for the Italian Railways with three qualities: that they may be increasingly *attractive*, *sustainable* and *supportive*.

They should be *attractive* inasmuch as they are capable of attracting investment, improving quality, encouraging trade and generating new business realities. May they be attractive because they are increasingly beautiful, places where you feel welcome and at ease, and where it becomes pleasant to return.

May rail transport become increasingly *sustainable*, both because it is economical for the business world and for individual citizens, and because it is respectful of the territory it passes through and of the environment. Sustainable also from an environmental point of view, an aspect to which you already dedicate a lot of effort, to ensure that the impact is as limited as possible, and that the carbon dioxide emissions, so harmful to the ecosystem and to its balance, are reduced as far as possible. I can only praise you for this effort, which you make through precise structural decisions, and which make the train the means of transport with by far the least impact, by comparison with automobiles or aircraft.

Finally, may the railways that you imagine for the near future become increasingly *supportive*: may they favour families and assist those who are most in difficulty due to advanced age, physical limitations, or reduced income. May they be supportive also, however, through their effective diffusion and through an equal quality of services they offer in the various zones and on the different types of train. Indeed, the railway network is responsible for connecting and in some way keeping alive the different areas of the country, even the most remote, just like veins and capillaries, which bring life to the members farthest from the heart. Thus, the Railways should ensure that no centre is excluded and is therefore marginalised and impoverished. Likewise, may those who travel on trains considered secondary not have to face the fatigue of overcrowding or difficult environmental conditions in the carriages every day.

This challenge certainly does not depend only on you, and requires the concomitance of many factors, including

the availability of large investments. However, may you be committed to ensuring that the service provided by the Railways does not lead to discrimination between more or less fortunate users, and those who are more or less able to afford a comfortable and dignified journey. This commitment, in which you are already active, complies with the principles of equality and non-discrimination, which are the main points of your Code of Ethics.

Dear friends, I thank you for your service to the common good and I invoke upon you God's blessing. And I also ask you, please, to pray for me.
