HOW TO WORK WITH THE FRENCH NATIONAL RAILWAY SYSTEM SNCF

The SNCF (Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français) has a strong international presence and is an unavoidable actor in France for rail passenger and freight activities. In 2017, the SNCF represented the European second largest railway network (length of the railway network) after Deutsch Bahn in Germany. SNCF is owned by the French state and works in tight collaboration with regional and national bodies. In 1983, the company was granted the status of EPIC: a public enterprise with industrial and commercial goals. SNCF operates, 2,032 electric locomotives, 1,756 diesel locomotives, and 365 TGVs (high speed trains).

The company benefits from French government’s spending in transports: 386 billion in 2017, roughly 17.3 percent of GDP. The total SNCF turnover reached 33.5 billion euros in 2017 (1/3 being from international activities). The group works with 270,000 partners and has 149,500. It runs 32,000 kilometers (19,884 miles) of railway in France; including 2,600 kilometers/1,615 miles of high-speed lines. France has the second European high-speed network after Spain. With the average age of railways reaching 33 years old, the company invested 8.8 billion euros in transport solutions and infrastructure during the last couple years. 1.2 billion individuals travelled by train in 2017 (approximately 3.2 million per day). SNCF owns the world’s second fastest operating train: TGV (top speed: 575km/h; 357 mph) behind Japanese SCMaglev: (top speed: 603 km/h; 375 mph).

Various rules/certificates/norms must be enforced to be able to work with such a large company. Even if the company has a comprehensive website providing extensive information in English about how SMEs can work with the SNCF, all the forms are in French and information must be translated to French. Applicants should have a European SIRET/SIREN number and are advised to have some form of representation in France or Europe to develop a relationship. Open calls are various and go from the creation of new railway stations, the purchase of new infrastructure equipment, signaling systems, rolling stock equipment, to renovation and maintenance of existing equipment.

To be able to supply the SNCF, a U.S. manufacturer must have a foot in Europe either via a distributor, a rep or a subsidiary. European rail regulations are different from the United States. Product adaptability to the regulations and a deep knowledge of what is required in rail OEMs and Tier 1 supplier’s specifications are useful.

For more information, contact U.S. Embassy France: Office.Paris@Trade.Gov