

# BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL 17

WELCOME to the summer 2021 issue of the bulletin compiled by Trevor Garrod. Thank you to all colleagues who have provided information. We hope you will find it helpful in your campaigning work.

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## RESCUE FOR EUROSTAR

In our last bulletin, three months ago, we had to report an uncertain future for Eurostar, which since 1994 has been connecting London with Paris and Brussels and thus expanding rail’s share of the international market.

Thanks to the pandemic, passenger numbers had dropped dramatically, the company was only running two return trains a day, and had severe financial problems. The British government was refusing to help.

On May 17<sup>th</sup> it was announced that the French, Belgians and Canadians had put together a financial package of £250,000,000. Eurostar began to promote its services again and since the end of May has increased them to

two a day between London and Paris with the promise of a third towards the end of June.

Meanwhile Thalys, which had also been running a fairly restricted service, started to increase its frequencies between Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam, plus one return trip to Dortmund.

What are the prospects now for the merger of Eurostar and Thalys into “Greenspeed”, as had been announced before the pandemic?

### PROGRESS TOWARDS THE 24/7 RAILWAY

It is encouraging that the Paris - Nice night train has been reinstated.

On May 20<sup>th</sup> the first train left Paris Austerlitz for Marseille Blancarde, Toulon, Les Arcs Draguignan, St Raphael Valescure, Cannes, Antibes and Nice. It took just over 12 hours and was composed of first and second class couchettes plus a coach with reclining seats. It was possible because of a relaunch plan announced by the French government in September 2020 with 100 million euro earmarked for the development of French night trains.

A few days later, on May 24<sup>th</sup>, OeBB started its Vienna – Amsterdam night service, with the Austrian Environment Minister and the CEO of OeBB on board. Sections left Vienna and Innsbruck at 20.12 and 20.14 respectively and arrived at 09.58 in Amsterdam. The southbound train leaves Amsterdam at 18.30 to reach the two Austrian cities at 09/14 / 09/19.

OeBB stated that a single night train saved 100,000kg of CO2 emissions in comparison to an aeroplane.

On May 26<sup>th</sup> the first Nightjet returned to Brussels after the COVID 19 break, with a compulsory ant-COVID test for passengers available at Vienna’s main station.

Meanwhile, the seasonal Snalltoget is due to leave Stockholm for Berlin on June 26<sup>th</sup> and another open access operator, OVOE is planning overnight ski trains for Belgian customers to resorts between Salzburg and Innsbruck, and to Milan, next season.

Colleagues in Back-on-Track Belgium are working on a dossier entitled “Brussels as a night train hub” and we hope to report more on this project in a future bulletin.

### NIGHT TRAIN POSTER CONTEST

“The Renaissance of the Night Train” is the theme of an imaginative post contest just launched by Back-on-Track Belgium.

Such posters were produced in the past to advertise night trains, such as the “Ostend-Vienna Express”. Is it not time to use graphic art again for today’s services?

Back-on-Track Belgium invites all persons living in the European Economic Area plus other states including Switzerland and the UK to design a poster in A1 format highlighting the benefits of night time travel for passengers and for society in general. A jury will make a selection from all entries, to be displayed in Brussels in the autumn and the winners will be announced the start of December.

Prizes will include complimentary tickets or passes donated by Interrail/Eurail, European Sleeper and Ostend – Vienna Orient Experience, plus an Ice Watch run on solar energy. There will also be prizes specially for students.

The entries may be submitted from now until October 31<sup>st</sup>. For rules (in French, English and Dutch) and information on how to enter, please log on to <https://www.backontrackbelgium.be/poster-contest>.

Rail users’ and environmental organisations in European countries are urged to publicise this contest to their members.

### CAMPAIGN NEWS

In our last issue we reported on the Iberian night train petition launched on Change.org. It had 4,453 signatures at the start of June and the organisers need to reach 5000 to proceed to the next stage.

The petition is a key part of the campaign to reinstate night trains between Spanish and Portugal and the rest of the Continent. It is available in English,

French, Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan and German and you can access it via the Back-on-Track website <https://back-on-track.eu>

On May 27<sup>th</sup> the German passenger association PRO BAHN issued a position paper on European Night Train Development, following discussions reported in earlier issues of this bulletin.

The paper calls upon the European Commission to "tender development and Europe-wide approval of vehicles for high speed trains and conventional night trains."

At the moment there is a lack of vehicles that can be used freely throughout the European railway area. Even the Siemens Vectron MS locomotive currently lacks homologisation in French and Spain.

The PRO BAHN paper stresses that the vehicles developed must be made available to all European transport operators and public authorities.

It then goes into technical detail for a conventional night train (multiple unit or locomotive-based) that can be used on all electrified standard gauge lines in the EU and immediately neighbouring countries; and for each European country with less than 80% of its network electrified provision must be made for a change to a locomotive not needing a catenary.

High-speed night trains should be multiple-based, with the ability to couple and uncouple sets to enable travel to different destinations. Approval for the Channel Tunnel must also be ensured.

The European Rail Campaign (UK) continues to grow and is now also an associate member of the European Passengers' Federation. It is currently upgrading its website <https://eurorailcampaignuk.org>, with more useful links and will shortly also include a blog.

### "CONNECTING EUROPE EXPRESS"

This important player of European Year of Rail is due to depart from Lisbon on 2nd September, and will actually be three separate trains which between them are due to call at cities throughout continental Europe.

This includes every capital of an EU state plus three capitals of non-EU states (Berne, Belgrade and Skopje) and some major cities such as Bordeaux, Verona and Frankfurt(Main).

The Connecting Europe Express is due to terminate in Paris on October 7<sup>th</sup>.

We understand that there are planned to be events at each stop. Could this be an opportunity for local rail users' organisations to become involved? You are advised to check regularly on the website <https://connectingeuropexpress.eu/resources/>.

### BY RAIL TO THE COP IN NOVEMBER

The UN climate change conference, COP26, is due to go ahead in Glasgow in the first half of November. The European Rail Campaign (UK) has been actively pressing politicians and operators to encourage people travelling to the conference from the Near Continent to come to Glasgow by train. Of course we hope that there will be a more frequent Eurostar service well before then.

Meanwhile, ERC(UK) has had further contact with the Netherlands-based group By Rail to the COP, who aim to charter a special train from Amsterdam and Brussels to London and another from London to Glasgow for the event.

You can find out more by logging on to <https://railtothecop.com> or by e-mailing [info@railtothecop.com](mailto:info@railtothecop.com)

Those who plan to travel to scheduled trains to Glasgow may like to visit the website of the Association of European Rail Agents ([www.aera.co.uk](http://www.aera.co.uk)) which lists UK travel agents who specialise in rail travel.

### SHARES IN EUROPEAN SLEEPER

On 12<sup>th</sup> May the new company European Sleeper invited investors to register for shares. You can receive information from them in English or Dutch.

Shares will be available from 350 Euro (Fans), 5000 Euro (Ambassador) or 100,000 (Founder). Holders of Ambassador or Founder shares will be able

to vote at company meetings. Log on to the website <https://europeansleeper.eu>

The company is seeking to raise 500,000 Euro initial capital, allowing it to set up sales, marketing, customer service and operations and help overcome the initial stage.

European Sleeper calculates that its initial Brussels – Prague service will reduce CO2 emissions by 75 tonnes. It is planned to leave Brussels at 19.30, reach Berlin at 06.00 and Prague at 10.00. The westbound train should leave Prague at 19.00 call in Berlin at 23.00 and arrive in Brussels at 09.00. Further options could be an extension to Ghent, Bruges and Ostend.

With its partner Regiojet, the company has applied for train paths and expects to receive an allocation in August.

#### EUROPEAN PASSENGERS' FEDERATION

The EPF annual conference this year is on June 26<sup>th</sup> and is listed in the programme for European Year of Rail. It will be a virtual event between 10.00 and 15.00 (CEST) and you can register for it on [www.epf.eu](http://www.epf.eu).

Speakers will include Anna Deparney-Grunenberg MEP on how the Year of Rail is a positive sign for passengers, Anja Schmotz of kolej/depl on cross-border links between Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic, Hans Leister on expansion of the Deutschlandtakt into a pan-European approach and Kristian Schmidt of DGMOVE on EU policy. There will also be a workshop on Shift2Rail.

#### PROMOTING RAIL TRAVEL

As vaccination progresses against COVID, operators are beginning to increase their services and more people are thinking about travel – within their own country or further. In this bulletin we have given some examples.

The message needs to be constantly repeated that rail is a safe way to travel, and studies from several countries over the past 12 months have shown that. The message is well summarised on the website of the Association of European Rail Agents [www.aera.co.uk](http://www.aera.co.uk) .

On that website you can also find details of those British travel agents who specialise in domestic and international rail. Advice and easy booking are key components in promoting international rail travel.

Also recommended are two agencies in Germany: Gleisnost in Freiburg-im Breisgau ([www.gleisnost.de](http://www.gleisnost.de)) and Bahnagentur Schoeneberg in Berlin (<https://bahnagentur-schoeneberg.de>).

At Thisted in Denmark is a further agency called Togrejse (meaning “Train Journey”) which works with partners in a number of other countries. Their website is [www.togrejse.dk](http://www.togrejse.dk) and you can contact them on [booking@togrejse.dk](mailto:booking@togrejse.dk)

The European Rail Timetable, available in either digital or paper format, is a great source of helpful information when you are planning a journey. Find out more about it, and order it, via [www.europeanrailtimetable.eu](http://www.europeanrailtimetable.eu). The summer 2021 edition is due to be published on June 9<sup>th</sup> and should contain updated times valid till December 11<sup>th</sup>.

John Potter, who compiles this timetable, also issues a very useful Friday Flyer every week, giving short updates.

### PLANE OR TRAIN?

Robin Whittaker reports the results of a survey published in The Times newspaper on May 28<sup>th</sup>. Asked about planning to make international journeys, 80% said the cost would make them consider rail rather than flying.

The climate charity Possible stated that two thirds of people were willing to consider travelling without flying “at least some of the time but cost is a key factor.”

The report noted that aviation was responsible for 10% of UK carbon emissions, but that the British government indirectly subsidised air travel by £70 billion a year.

Meanwhile, in April French lawmakers moved to ban short-haul internal flights where a rail alternative exists – essentially where the same journey can be done by train in less than 2 hours 30 minutes.

In 2020, Austrian Airlines replaced their Vienna – Salzburg flights by extra trains after receiving a government bail-out with provisions to cut their carbon footprint.

Next Bulletin of European Rail Travel is due to appear at the beginning of September

Please send items to Trevor Garrod by August 25<sup>th</sup>.

[bulletin@eurorailcampaiguk.org](mailto:bulletin@eurorailcampaiguk.org)

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