

BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL number 16

WELCOME to the spring 2021 edition of this bulletin, compiled by Trevor Garrod with input from several other colleagues. We hope you will find it helpful in your campaigning work.

CONTENTS

1. What future for Eurostar?
2. European Year of Rail
3. Progress towards a 24/7 railway
4. Iberia night train petition
5. Cross-border progress and campaigning
6. By Rail to the COP?
7. Innovations
8. EPF news
9. ERC(UK) and The Guardian

10. Other useful information

WHAT FUTURE FOR EUROSTAR?

Only two trains a day are running each way between London and Paris; London, Brussels and Amsterdam, because of the pandemic and in some cases government-imposed travel restrictions. International travel for British citizens, by air, sea, or train, is not generally to be allowed again until May 17th at the earliest. Will Eurostar still be running then?

Ian McDonald, Secretary of the European Rail Campaign (UK), issued a statement on February 19th:

“In December ERC(UK) wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps, seeking a Government pledge to support Eurostar during the Covid crisis, during which they have lost 95% of their passengers and are at risk of bankruptcy.

“The reply, while ‘supportive’ made no pledge to commit finance, in spite of some help given to airlines. In press statements, Mr Shapps declared it a French responsibility; but their ownership is only 55% of the operation. The UK Government sold off their 40% share in 2015 to financial institutions in Canada and the USA, who Mr Shapps thinks are the ones to rescue it.

“This is quite unsatisfactory and we shall continue our campaign, along with other groups. A reply has been sent to Mr Shapps and ERC(UK) members have supported two petitions to the Government organised by other bodies.”

EUROPEAN YEAR OF RAIL

At the end of 2020 the European Commission announced the award of the contract to undertake the study of international night trains to Steer Davies Gleave, an experienced and well-regarded British consultancy which will be assisted by a German partner. This work will

feature prominently in the Year of Rail, with a report to be launched at a conference in the autumn.

The European Passengers' Federation is expected to submit a paper based on discussions within its German member association PRO BAHN , whose long-distance passenger working party has made many thoughtful suggestions.

The network Back-on-Track has issued a statement strongly supporting the Year of Rail initiative because "accelerating climate change, unsustainable travel patterns and years of railway negligence and cutbacks require immediate action.

"Back-on-Track expects during 2021 a statement from the government of each EU Member State on which way they will support night trains and cross-border day trains, also taking into account neighbouring countries outside the EU.

"Back-on-Track demands both from the EU and from each Member State a statement on a binding goal for the share of train/road/plane passenger traffic in 2030, 2040 and 2050.

"Back-on-Track demands a common booking platform.

"Back-on-Track is glad that a revised passenger rights regulation has been put forward, but we call for significant improvements with regard to through ticketing for international journeys.

"Back-on-Track urges the Commission to develop mechanisms to provide a good quality rolling stock pool, accessible for companies providing night train services.

"We are looking forward to good co-operation of rail companies in all Member States as well as in neighbouring countries for developing night and cross-border services."

PROGRESS TOWARDS A 24/7 RAILWAY

Berlin and Stockholm are due to be linked by a new night train, operated by Snälltåget and Transdev, from May 8th. It will run twice weekly at first but then daily from June 11th to September 5th, then twice weekly again till October 2nd.

The train will serve ten stations, including Malmö, Høje-Tåsstrup (for Copenhagen) and Hamburg and it will be possible to purchase a Kombi-Ticket to 30 different DB stations. There will be seating and reclining seats, plus couchettes where, because of covid, only a complete compartment is bookable. Catering will be available in Sweden and Denmark.

Investigations have been underway in the Västergötland region , into the case for a night train between Oslo, Gothenburg, Copenhagen and Hamburg. 8 million people live along this corridor and a report has been produced on the benefits and opportunities of such a service.

Regiojet is to re-introduce a night train from Prague to Rijeka for the summer season; when a twice weekly car-carrying overnight service will link Bratislava and Vienna to Split.

The 2021 summer season will also see an overnight train from Basel to the resort of Binz, on the island of Rügen, operated by the company www.train4you.de .

Wolfgang Klapdor reports that on February 25th SNCF Voyageurs opened bookings for the new Paris – Nice night train, the first of which is due to leave Paris Austerlitz on April 16th. Tickets will be available from all the usual SNCF sources.

There will be a service every night, in each direction, until August 31st, with fares starting at 19 Euro. Sleeping compartments will be available for 4 instead of 6 passengers and couchettes will be available at 50% occupancy because of COVID restrictions.

By the end of the year, a night train service should also be linking Paris and Tarbes, and Paris and Vienna.

Meanwhile, the Swedish consultants RAMBOLL have been awarded a short contract for a study on “Berlin as a night train hub”. The city council considers that the German government’s TEE 2.0 proposals are too west-orientated and that there is also a possible case for overnight services to Oslo, the Adriatic, Barcelona and even Scotland.

IBERIA NIGHT TRAIN PETITION

Campaigners in Spain and Portugal have launched a petition, through Change.org, in six languages, with explanatory notes, aimed at the relevant politicians. You can also access it via the Back-on-Track website. By the end of February, over 3200 people had already signed. The petition reads: *“We ask the Spanish, Portuguese and French governments to consider not only resuming the recently stopped Portugal – France night train connection, but also extending it to a major train hub in Europe such as Paris (or potentially Brussels) instead of reaching just Hendaye on the French/Spanish border.*

“We urge the Spanish and Portuguese governments to order their national rail companies to join the declaration of December 8th made by SNCF, DB, OeBB and SBB in favour of building a new European night train network.

“Additionally we urge the Spanish government to study new night train links between the Iberian Peninsula and central/eastern Europe such as Barcelona - Frankfurt – Berlin and Barcelona - Milan – Rome.”

CROSS BORDER PROGRESS AND CAMPAIGNING

On February 24th, several Back-on-Track activists were among just over 100 participants in a webinar on cross-border rail services organised by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. Speakers included parliamentarians, campaigners, European Commission and trade union officials.

There was particular focus on the borders between Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic – for example, where different electrification systems were used on each side of the border; but much of the event dealt with general issues relating to all border regions, such as depopulation and concentration of rail investment in large urban areas.

Useful advice was given by the European Commission speaker – such as that cross-border Public Service Obligation grants were possible if regions and states were persuaded to work together to their mutual advantage; the TEN-T and Connecting Europe Facility schemes were available to help; and the Recovery & Resilience funds could also be used for rail projects.

There were calls for cross-border services to be given the same priority as domestic ones and for ticketing to be easier and more attractive.

We were promised a full report of the webinar in due course.

Meanwhile Dr Karl Schambureck, who has been active for several years in pressing for better connections between Austria and Italy, reports that from May 3rd the EMONA Eurocity train will no longer end in Ljubljana but continue to Trieste Centrale. After a gap of 58 years, there will again be a direct connection by train from Vienna to Trieste.

It is also reported that the Culture Train between Berlin and Wroclaw is due to resume on March 19th.

PRO BAHN's passenger working group has also had further discussion on cross-border services between Germany and Belgium. Its meeting on February 13th agreed that a local service to Stolberg Altstadt should be extended across the border to Eupen; and that it should press for improvements to the Frankfurt – Brussels ICE service, which should ideally continue to London; or, if this is not possible, there should be guaranteed connections and through ticketing to and from England.

BY RAIL TO COP 26?

The next global climate conference will be in Glasgow between November 1st and 12th. Nigel Perkins, Chair of the European Rail Campaign (UK) has been in contact with British politicians to urge that rail travel to the event be encouraged.

On February 24th, ERC(UK) issued a press release saying that the Government should commit to *"instructing the conference organisers to encourage, support and facilitate the rail option for travel to and from the conference within the UK be delegates, journalists and lobbyists from the rest of Europe...and from outside Europe.*

"Arranging to charter special trains to/from Glasgow or block booking of carriages with Eurostar and Avanti West Coast.

"Instructing the conference organisers to invite specialist rail travel agents to offer tailor-made packages for those wishing to break their journey en route or combine their trip to Glasgow with other activities,

"Supporting (as an independent country) with Italy as co-host of the conference "The European Year of Rail."

He has also been in regular contact with Dr Caroline Lucas MP, (Green) who tabled a question to the Secretary of State for Transport. The reply, given on February 26th, stated:

"A multifaceted transport plan is being developed to support the delegate experience at COP26 with rail travel a key element of the plan...(which) will encourage delegates, media and civil society travelling from Europe to consider low-carbon travel options such as rail as a way of entering the UK.

“The Department of Transport is working closely with Rail Operators and Network Rail to ensure adequate provision of rail services on the key routes to Glasgow over the period the conference is taking place. Rail will be a key sustainable mode of travel to COP26 and will certainly be encouraged.”

Dr Lucas adds, “I am pleased to hear the Government is ... to encourage rail travel to COP26 and I will certainly hold ministers to account on this.”

At the same time Back-on-Track has also maintained contact with www.railtothecop.com, a campaign group of Youth for Sustainable Travel , based in the Netherlands, who also seek to maximise the use of rail to go to Glasgow. They can be contacted at info@railtothecop.com.

The Association of European Rail Agents, representing agents in the UK specialising in rail, is spreading a similar message on its website www.aera.co.uk . For details, email info@aera.co.uk

Two travel agencies in Germany will also be pleased to help. They are Gleisnost in Freiburg-in-Breisgau (www.gleisnost.de) and Bahnagentur Schoeneberg in Berlin (<https://bahnagentur-schoeneberg.de>)

INNOVATIONS

New ideas are welcome in the efforts to increase rail’s share of the market.

One such new idea is a combined night train for passengers and high-value goods. The night train between Barcelona and Frankfurt proposed by Objectif Train de Nuit, chaired by Eric Boisseau is such a possible innovation. The first stage of a feasibility study has been completed and was presented at a zoom press conference on February 17th, supported by politicians Franziska Brantner, Cem Ozdemir and Winfried Hermann from Baden-Wuerttemberg and Luc Gibelin from Occitanie.

M Boisseau showed calculations that 164,000 passengers a year would be attracted to such a service, but that its financial viability would be improved if high-value goods were also carried.

For more information about this and other projects, log on to <http://lunatrains.eu>

A second innovation could be a co-operative dedicated entirely to running overnight sleeper services. Elmer van Buuren and Chris Engelsman have launched The European Sleeper and plan to run their first service, from the Netherlands and Belgium, in April 2022. Anyone can purchase shares and these will hopefully be available from May this year. For more information log on to <https://europeansleeper.eu> or e-mail elmer.vanbuuren@europeansleeper.eu

Low-cost high speed trains are another significant innovation, as has already been shown by Ouigo in France and IZY, the “no frills” version of Thalys. From June 23rd they are due to be joined by AVIO running four times a day between Madrid and Barcelona.

EUROPEAN PASSENGERS’ FEDERATION NEWS

The annual EPF conference scheduled for the end of June in Strasbourg has had to be cancelled because of the pandemic, but the possibility of an on-line event is being investigated. Meanwhile, EPF's Annual General Meeting on March 13th will go ahead as a videoconference.

EPF's researcher Delphine Grandsart has had an article published in the online magazine Railtech.com (<https://www.railtech.com/policy/2021/2/24>) entitled "Adopting a passengers' perspective is essential for the shift to rail." She addresses four key points:

- Passenger needs are central
- Make booking easier
- Through ticketing is needed
- Create a level playing field.

ERC(UK) AND THE GUARDIAN

On February 4th the national daily, *The Guardian* published an editorial stating: "*A continent-wide rail renaissance can play a vital part in the battle to meet net zero climate targets.*"

"...Rock bottom short-haul air fares have turned continental rail travel into an eccentric and expensive pleasure... Even the possibilities provided by the Channel tunnel have been under-exploited for the same reason.

"...According to a recent study, 17 out of the 20 most frequently used air routes in Europe cover distances of less than 700km. Such travel habits are unsustainable... a recent survey found that almost three quarters of travellers planned to use trains more for short-haul travel in the future."

The editorial concluded by calling for measures such as more through services and easier ticketing to encourage more long-distance rail usage.

Two days later the newspaper published as its lead letter, one from ERC(UK) Chair Nigel Perkins highlighting the work of Back-on-Track, the importance of encouraging travel by train to Glasgow for COP26 and the need to the British government to "secure the future of Eurostar with similar or better financial support than that provided to the airlines."

FURTHER INFORMATION

Luxembourg – We have just learned that the new tramway has now reached the central station –so anyone arriving by train from four directions can now continue swiftly and smoothly into the old city or, over the spectacular Red Bridge, into the modern European quarter.

Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport The pre-pandemic plan for a massive Terminal 4 has, we understand, been abandoned in favour of a more reasonable project. This seems sensible as the airport already has very good rail links.

The European Rail Timetable is available again on paper and in digital format . You can order it via www.europeanrailtimetable.eu

Rail Report Europe Issue 5 of this on-line journal will be published towards the end of March. It will contain a detailed article about night trains in France and the campaigning of ouiautraindenuit, including the aspiration of the French Transport Minister to have ten routes by the end of this decade. Any time now we also expect the French government to publish the results of its night train study.

You can subscribe for free to Rail Report Europe by e-mailing rail-report-europe@catchup-pr.com

The summer issue of the Bulletin of European Rail Travel is due to appear on June 1st. Comments and updates can be sent by May 26th to trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk

TG 28/02/2021