

BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL 18

WELCOME to the autumn 2021 issue of the bulletin compiled by Trevor Garrod. Thank you to everyone who has provided information. We hope you will find it helpful in your campaigning.

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LONG DISTANCE CROSS-BORDER PASSENGER RAIL SERVICES

Members of the campaign network Back-on-Track and the European Passengers' Federation were among the 96 people who took part in a 4-hour webinar on September 1st. The event was to launch the initial findings of the study funded by the European Commission and undertaken by the consultants Steer and KCW.

The study took place in view of the 70% decline in the number of night trains 2001-19 but doubling of international high speed services during the same period. There had been a 37% decline in seasonal services and some very long day train services had been split into two shorter links. Only 3% of services were currently operated by new entrants.

The strategy of the Commission was explained – to make all transport modes more sustainable; to make alternatives widely available in a multimodal system; and to put in place the right incentives to drive the transition.

As part of their studies the consultants looked at 96 airport-to-airport routes and identified 38 on which the traffic was dense enough to make rail a realistic alternative. Yet 14 of these had lost their night trains during the past 20 years.

The consultants looked at the obstacles to the development of long-distance international services, both day and overnight trains, and classified these into infrastructure charges, infrastructure capacity allocation, rolling stock issues, passenger rights of connecting passengers, ticketing, Public Service Obligations and “others” (which included taxation policy).

They then identified up to 31 measures that could be taken to tackle these problems. Some of the measures were already being undertaken, or could be introduced without new laws or regulations; but some would require new legislation or would benefit from guidance by the European Commission.

Participants were divided into five work groups for detailed discussion of the issues and recommendations, after which the group leaders reported to a full session, two polls were conducted and this all produced a wealth of views for the consultants. The following day Back-on-Track held a zoom call in which ten of its members from eight countries participated, and a letter was e-mailed to the consultants for their further consideration.

The consultants will now finalise their report to the European Commission and an Action Plan will be agreed before the end of the year.

“THE CLIMATE TRAIN” TO GLASGOW

Actually it will be two trains, with a short walk in between.

The first train will be a Eurostar leaving Amsterdam Centraal at 08.15 (local time) on Saturday October 30th and arriving in London St Pancras

International at 11.57 (local time), calling at Rotterdam Centraal and Brussels Zuid/Midi.

It has been chartered by the initiative Rail to the COP and full details, including how to book, are on their website <https://www.railtothecop.com>

A separate train will then take passengers from London Euston (10 minutes' walk from St Pancras) up to Glasgow where the UN climate summit will take place November 1st – 12th.

The organisers have invited politicians, civil servants and railway industry representatives, as well as the voluntary sector and youth activists to travel to Scotland. There will be many opportunities for dialogue with experts and for networking during the journey. Among those using the train will be Frans Timmermans, European Commissioner for Climate Action and First Vice President of the European Commission since 2014.

Bookings must be made by midnight on September 19th. Donations will also be welcome, towards youth tickets. This crowdfunding is being done via opencollective.com/rail-to-the-cop.

Participants must book their own journey back from Glasgow, as not all will be returning on the same date or at the same time.

STATIONS IN THE FIELDS

The growth of the French high-speed rail network over the past 4 decades has also produced a new phenomenon – new stations “in the middle of nowhere”, designed to cater for the Park & Ride market. French people refer to them as “les gares des betteraves” (beetroot stations) or “les gares des pampas”.

There are a few examples in other countries, such as Camp de Tarragona in Spain and Noorderkampen in Belgium, while Great Britain has South Midlands Parkway.

Some of these stations have good local transport connections. For example, TGV Champagne is also the terminus of the Rheims tram line and the city has expanded up to the high speed railway. It is also planned to

extend the Montpellier tram to the Sud de France station on the high speed line.

Others are less fortunate, and the French national public transport users' federation FNAUT has been supporting a petition for TGV Lorraine to be moved to Vandieres where it will enable high speed trains on the east/west line to connect with TER regional services on the north/south line. The petition also calls for the retention and development of the regional network in Lorraine. The petition has so far attracted 4777 signatures (and not just from French citizens, for this route is of international significance.)

See website: <https://www.mesopinions.com/petition/politique/lorrains-relations-chemins-fer-monde/40034>

FORTHCOMING WEBINAR ON EUROPEAN RAILPASS

On September 16th the EU Agency for Railways (ERA) is organising a 1-hour webinar "Towards a harmonised European Rail Pass." It will start at 16.00 (Central European Summer Time) and you can register for it on the website www.era.europa.eu . There will be speakers from the ERA itself, the European Passengers' Federation and ALLRail (which represents new entrants).

The ERA points out that 8 billion train journeys are made in the EU every year, which is 8 times more than the number of passenger journeys by air. Yet it is easier to book a flight between two European capitals than to book a journey by train. Now the EU is moving towards a really harmonised rail ticketing system.

PAPER ON PASSENGER SURVEYS

The European Rail Campaign (UK) has produced a paper at the end of July on passenger surveys, which are important in gaining evidence of good and bad aspects of train journeys and sometimes identifying trends.

The paper was compiled as part of a project of the European Passengers' Federation of which ERC(UK) is an associate member.

It looks at the role of national surveys by statutory bodies such as Transport Focus in Great Britain and reports on how in future local transport

authorities will be required to undertake regular customer satisfaction surveys on bus services.

ERC(UK) then looks at surveys by voluntary bodies, usually on very specific services or facilities; such as Railfuture's previous questionnaires on Eurostar and on station facilities.

The conclusions drawn are that the most important concerns for customers are reliability; ease of information, booking and travel; connections; and customer care if things go wrong.

NIGHT TRAIN POSTER COMPETITION

In the last issue of Bulletin of European Rail Travel we announced the poster contest just launched by Back-on-Track Belgium to advertise the benefits of night trains. (<https://www.backontrackbelgium.be/poster-contest>)

Entries have started to arrive. More are expected following further publicity at the start of the new academic year.

You do not have to be a student to enter the competition, however. Anyone living in the European Economic Area, plus other states including Switzerland and the UK, may enter. The deadline for entries is October 31st, there will be an exhibition in Brussels and the winners will be announced at the beginning of December.

EUROSTAR

In our last issue we reported that Eurostar had been saved thanks to help from the French, Belgians and Canadians and had slightly increased its previously very basic service. Extra trains are now being added to the timetable and by mid October there should be 5 return trips a day between London and Paris and 3 a day between London and Brussels.

Eurostar is also increasing its publicity, aimed at the leisure market.

The UK Government is still not giving to Eurostar the sort of support it has been giving to the airline industry, however, and a new petition was launched in mid August by "Together for Eurostar" – a grouping of the rail

trade unions and Friends of the Earth, with the message “ensure we have a green link to Europe.” Like many British petitions, it can be found under change.org.

On August 12th, Nigel Perkins, Chair of the European Rail Campaign (UK) had the lead letter in *The New European*, pointing out “There is no political commitment from the UK government to improve our rail links with Europe.”

His letter concludes, “In view of the climate emergency there is absolutely no reason not to develop better rail links between the UK and Europe. Rail could become our ‘green gateway’ to the rest of Europe.”

As part of its work, ERC(UK) is also investing in an upgrade of its website www.eurorailcampaig-nuk.org with maps and practical information to encourage more travel to and on the Continent by train.

NIGHT TRAIN STUDIES FROM FRANCE AND BELGIUM

France: the campaign group Ouiautraindenuit (“Yes to the night train”) has just issued results of a study on air, rail and modal shift.

It finds that 30% of air passengers from Europe fly on routes that could be done by train, in the 500 – 1500 km range, and with rail travel currently up to 3 hours, there is good potential here from night trains.

The study also finds that a further 20% of air passengers fly on routes in the 1500 to 3000km range that could be done by trains including two nights, similar to the Paris – Moscow service.

The estimated total number on these routes, all modes included, assuming a modal shift of 5% to night trains in the lower range and 1% in the higher range, results in a potential traffic of 100 million passengers per year in European night trains, corresponding to a requirement of about 10,000 night train carriages to run over 350 daily overnight services.

Belgium: The association Back-on-Track Belgium is due to issue its report “A Plea for a Night Train Renaissance” later in September. Finishing touches are being put to the draft.

Their study looks at the history of night trains and then the challenges and opportunities facing them today.

It will make recommendations for the policy makers and also for operators. The former will be urged to see the night train as a sustainable tool, strive for a level playing field between modes and develop a financially sustainable business model. The latter will be urged to address issues of digital ticketing and on-line experience, guarantee reliable schedules and offer a comfortable quality service.

The report will also address technical aspects and examine the case for Brussels as a major rail hub.

MORE CAMPAIGNS AND DEVELOPMENTS

The passenger working group of the German national passenger association PRO BAHN has been studying cross-border links with neighbouring countries, and reference to its zoom conferences (in which colleagues from some other countries have also participated) has been made in previous editions of this Bulletin. Issue 3/21 of PRO BAHN's journal, Der Fahrgast contains recommendations for the links (including one bus link) across the borders with the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France and Switzerland.

Issue number 7 of the quarterly e-bulletin Rail Report Europe is due to appear on September 15th. It will contain an interview with one of the founder members of Back-on-Track, a report of a journey by train from Great Britain to Lithuania and an assessment of the proposal for Great British Railways which is due to replace the current franchising system later this decade.

Shares in "The European Sleeper" attracted a lot of interest and the first issue raised the required sum. We hope to report more in our next Bulletin; but meanwhile note that this company has merged with "Moonlight Express" as both are targeting the night train market from the Benelux countries (and so also, indirectly, from the UK) to Germany and beyond.

The Association of European Rail Agents is upgrading its website and has added a new article on "European Year of Rail" – an initiative in which the

government in London has so far shown no interest. The travel agents and tour organisers in AERA will be pleased to advise and serve customers travelling to the Continent and indeed further afield. Look at their website www.aera.co.uk

The publisher of the European Rail Timetable is also a member of AERA. You can visit their website www.europeanrailtimetable.eu to order the September timetable. The digital edition is already available and the printed edition will be ready on September 8th. You can also subscribe to the very handy “Friday Flyer” which gives the very latest information.

The winter issue of this Bulletin is due to appear at the start of December. Feedback is welcome. Send it to tgarrod21@gmail.com

As always, Trevor Garrod has done his best to include accurate and up-to-date information but cannot be held responsible for any errors or last-minute changes.

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