

BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL 19

Welcome to the winter 2021/2 issue of the bulletin compiled by Trevor Garrod to help rail campaigns in European countries. Thank you to everyone who has provided information.

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EUROSTAR ON THE WAY TO NORMALITY?

As at the beginning of December there are now between 7 and 11 trains a day on the London – Paris service, 4 – 5 a day between London and Brussels and 2-4 of these each day running to / from Amsterdam. Details are available on the Eurostar website www.eurostar.com

That is an improvement on the situation at the height of the pandemic.

Rules for international travel to and from the UK eased in early October and it became possible for a group of ten people led by Trevor Garrod to make a visit to France which had been twice postponed since the spring of 2020.

It was necessary to provide proof of vaccination on leaving London and to take a covid test on return; and of course to observe French rules on mask

wearing in public transport and indoor spaces and, when requested, to show proof of vaccination.

The group enjoyed two days in Clermont Ferrand and five in Montpellier and were told by a fellow passenger on one of that city's trams how nice it was to hear English voices again.

Of course, there are still likely to be further problems on the way to normality, and precautions are still needed because the pandemic is not over.

Furthermore, Eurostar is not currently calling at Ebbsfleet or Ashford International stations between London and the Channel Tunnel. Eurostar's management say that the company's present financial position means that it must concentrate on capital-to-capital business, and that calls at these stations in Kent are not planned to resume before 2023.

Leading members of Kent County Council have voiced their concern about this and its likely effect on the economy of the county. The European Rail Campaign (UK) has been in correspondence with them and offered them support in lobbying for such improvements

FERRIES DOVER – CALAIS

An alternative to Eurostar is now available, since in October P&O reintroduced foot passenger bookings on the Dover – Calais crossing, on 5 of the daily sailings to Calais and 6 to Dover.

It is necessary to book on line (www.poferries.com) and the numbers of foot passengers allowed are "limited". There is also a 90-minute check-in time. The website also gives advice on how to get to and from the ferry terminals on either side of the Channel.

CROSSING PARIS

This part of a journey between England and much of France has always been a challenge, because it is necessary to spend time buying a separate ticket for RATP.

In the early 2000s, Eurostar responded to suggestions by passenger organisations and started to sell Paris metro tickets in the bar buffet (or Cafe metropole) of their trains.

In October RATP introduced a new stored value card, the Easy NAVIGO. However, the traditional carnet of metro tickets is still accepted and can still be purchased on board the Eurostar, as can the single metro ticket, in euro or in sterling.

For Continental visitors to London, Eurostar also sells the Visitor Oyster Card, which is a stored value ticket with £15 credit.

We are assured by Eurostar, “These products will be sold in our Cafes metropoles on a permanent basis for as long as the products exist.”

COP 26

In our last bulletin we reported on plans to run special trains from Amsterdam to London and from London to Glasgow, for the UN climate conference. These happened. Delegates going to Scotland by rail included EU Commissioner Timmermans and Austrian Minister for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation & Technology Leonore Gewessler. The British Prime Minister made two trips to Glasgow, the second of which was by train at least in one direction.

The train from Amsterdam on October 30th was met in London by members of the European Rail Campaign (UK), whose Secretary, Ian McDonald and his wife also proceeded by train to Glasgow.

He reports: “Shirley and I took part in COP demonstrations. On November 10th, Transport Day, I stood outside the Blue Zone turnstiles from 09.00, waving a placard and shouting relevant messages to the delegates going in.

The placard read: ‘RAIL AT THE COP. THE EUROPEAN RAIL CAMPAIGN (UK).’

‘We must reduce CO2/NO2 emissions from air, car and truck travel. Battery replacements for all road vehicles will be impossible. We urge the need for expanded railways, mostly electrified, for far more people and freight. Also, there should be NO flights allowed where the rail journey is under 6 hours’.

“After 15.00 until 17.00 I repeated this effort at the exit turnstiles. Many people took photos of me and the notice, and a few chatted to me , all clearly supporters... Most of them wanted to agree generally that more public transport and railway investment generally was a far better investment than battery electric road vehicles, making the point that it was impossible to replace the whole world’s road vehicles with electric ones. No one identified themselves to me as a rail operator, politician, transport consultant etc. Some delegates did note the e-mail address.

“I found it disappointing that I was the only individual outside the venue promoting these issues. There were others who were ‘anti’ an aspect of climate change demanding action but with no link to railways etc...

“I attended a couple of Green Party fringe meetings... being held in the Renfield Centre in Bath Street in central Glasgow... Scotrail had regular station announcements about what they were doing to meet COP26 objectives – not bad really.

“We stayed in an extremely comfy hotel room (2 minutes from Helensburgh station) with massive breakfast, all for the princely sum of £53 a night for 3 nights. Others we met staying in Glasgow paid much more than this or were sleeping on floors or in camper vans!”

Editor’s Note: It was good to see other players in the rail industry also stressing their environmental credentials: For example, on November 1st Vivarail named their battery operated train “Vivarail Venturer” and demonstrated to decision-makers its potential on a 47-mile journey from Glasgow across the world-famous Forth Bridge.

Two days earlier it was good to hear Greater Anglia’s Client & programme Director telling a meeting in Lowestoft “rail is central to the decarbonisation agenda and we can all make a massive difference.”

INTERNATIONAL DAY AND NIGHT TRAINS – LOOKING FORWARD TO THE REPORT

In Bulletin of European Rail Travel 18 we reported on the September webinar in which the British and German consultants Steer and KCW reported on the interim results of their studies into the scope for a shift to more international

day and night trains and measures that could be taken to meet the challenges.

The discussions by nearly a hundred people who took part in the webinar provided the consultants with further material which they have considered when finalising their report. The Back-on-Track network sent a further detailed letter to the consultants, who also received submissions from OUIAUTRAIN-DE-NUIT and from Belgian campaigners.

We are informed that the report is now to be published in the week commencing December 13th in time for a meeting of EU Transport Ministers before the Christmas break.

Meanwhile there is encouraging news from Spain where on November 9th the Government accepted a national budget amendment to invest 210,000,000 Euro in five night train services –

Madrid – Galicia (in the north west of the country)

Barcelona - Galicia

Madrid – Barcelona – Paris

Madrid – Lisbon

Algeciras (in the far south) to Cerbere (the French border station)

Further encouraging news is that The European Sleeper, now together with Moonlight Express, is due to start linking Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin and Prague three nights a week from April 2022. For more information log on to

<https://www.europeansleeper.eu>

BACK-ON-TRACK BELGIUM

During the autumn our Belgian colleagues have been putting an enormous amount of work into preparation for three days of events, December 2nd – 4th, to coincide with the anniversary of the founding of the sleeper operator Compagnie Internationale des Wagons Lits by Georges Nagelmackers in 1876.

This has included a poster competition which has attracted 89 entries. A shortlist of the best 15 entries was drawn up by a professional and a jury studied these to decide the winners.

Renewed covid restrictions have meant that the meetings and conference have had to be moved largely on line, and it is hoped to organise a face-to-face meeting in the spring.

On December 15th the next issue of Rail Report Europe is due to appear, and to include a report of the Brussels events. These will include updates on the night train and related campaigns and developments and winners of the poster competition.

USEFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACTS

The European Rail Timetable publishes its winter edition in mid December, on paper and on line. Order via the website www.europeanrailtimetable.eu All the Back-on-Track news in on www.back-on-track.eu including links to related organisations and publications.

The European Passengers' Federation is busy working on EU projects and will hold its next General Meeting, as a videoconference, on January 15th. You can subscribe to its newsletter via www.epf.eu

The European Rail Campaign (UK) is busy enhancing its website with maps and key information for travellers in Continental countries, travel tips and travelogues. It welcomes feedback. Visit www.eurorailcampaignuk.org

The Association of European Rail Agents brings together specialist travel agents and tour organisers in the UK. These agents will be pleased to serve and advise customers travelling to the Continent and indeed further afield. Find out about them via the website www.aera.co.uk

Last but by no means least. Mark Smith, the Man in Seat 61, is always an important source of information and advice on international rail travel. Visit <https://www.seat61.com>

Every effort has been made to include accurate and up-to-date information in this bulletin and Trevor Garrod cannot be held responsible for any errors of last-minute changes. Feedback is welcome to tgarrod21 @ gmail.com

