

BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL 14

WELCOME to the autumn 2020 edition of this bulletin, compiled by Trevor Garrod with input from several other colleagues. We hope it will help you in your campaigning work.

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RAIL TRAVEL AND COVID 19

In the last issue of this bulletin, at the beginning of June, we reported on the reduction of rail and other public transport services, but also on innovative thinking and measures taken by Governments in, for example, Austria, the UK and Switzerland.

Three months later, many services have resumed, and the European Rail Timetable has resumed publication, but challenges remain.

Quarantine is just such a challenge. If international rail travellers are told that they will have to self-isolate for 7, 10 or 14 days on arrival at their destination, or on arrival home, they are less likely to travel – whether by train or any other means.

When the British government announced a 2-week quarantine measure for almost all passengers at the beginning of June, it naturally hit travel between the UK and Continental Europe. The European Rail Campaign UK wrote to the Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Transport on June 14 to express concern about the measure, how realistic it was and how difficult to enforce.

As an alternative ERCUK suggested immediate custody for any passenger with a temperature or other relevant conditions for medical testing and if necessary hospitalisation. The letter concluded with the hope “that all European countries will lift their border restrictions once it is deemed safe to do so, and that rail travel will become the dominant mode for many former air passengers.”

Fortunately the British Government modified this policy in July by allowing passengers to travel to and from a large number of European and other countries without to need to quarantine, though it has since added and subtracted certain countries from this list.

Obviously the risk of spreading the virus must be closely controlled, but is this the best way to do it? Such moves also do not help people to plan their international journeys. A targeted approach, rather than a blanket approach, would see an improved testing and tracing system at borders. When can this be expected in the UK? ERCUK has again written to relevant British Ministers.

For more information on ERCUK’s campaigning, log on to www.eurorailcampaignuk.org

The autumn issue of [Rail Report Europe](#), due to be published mid September, will contain a more detailed article on this Europe-wide issue. It will also be posted on the Back-on-Track website. You can also receive it direct from back-on-track-report@catch-up-pr.com

Meanwhile, the question of face masks or other coverings for travellers by train or other public transport has been debated in many countries and the rules have varied. The European Passengers’ Federation has produced a summary of the practices in many countries, and this can be found on the website www.epf.eu. The summary currently covers France, Germany, the UK, Italy, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands. Information from other countries will also be welcome.

NIGHT TRAINS PROGRESS REPORT

French President Emmanuel Macron in July announced plans to enhance the depleted night train network, including by bringing back services to Tarbes and Nice in 2022. This is part of a wider plan which also includes expansion of rail freight in France and revival of local services as well.

The association Objectif Train de Nuit is continuing dialogue with decision-makers on the project for a Barcelona – Frankfurt night train via Berne. Its President Eric Boisseau has been corresponding especially with the region of Occitanie and the Land of Baden-Wuerttemberg.

Meanwhile, OeBB introduced a new seasonal night train, with couchettes, three times a week from June 4th, between Salzburg and the Frisian island of Sylt. It is marketed as Alpen-Sylt-Express..

Regiojet is also catering for the seasonal market with an overnight service between Prague and Rijeka, also calling at Ljubljana.

The German association PRO BAHN has set up a working party, which has been holding zoom meetings during the summer, to look at how train services can be improved to and from each of the countries with which Germany has a border. This includes night trains.

The Swedish train operator Snälltåget considers that an overnight train from Stockholm to Berlin via Malmo, Hoje-Taastrup (for Copenhagen) and Hamburg will be viable and is planning to operate every night in June, July and August 2021 and at weekends in April, May and September. Studies are also under way to introduce an overnight train from Malmo to Brussels.

The European Commission has invited bids from organisations to undertake a study entitled “Pilot Project on the Revitalisation of cross-border Night Trains.”

Meanwhile, in Switzerland a new air ticket levy is intended partly to finance new night trains – including one from Zurich to Amsterdam due to start in December 2021. It is planned to follow the route of DB’s former City Night Line between Zurich and Amsterdam withdrawn in 2016.

In Great Britain, the idea of a night train through the Channel Tunnel has been raised in the House of Lords by Green member Natalie Bennett, and the Department of Transport has expressed an open mind on the matter. Perhaps a demonstration train could be run at the start of the COP26 climate

conference in Glasgow November 1st- 14th 2021. ERCUK has been in correspondence with Lady Bennett.

SEAMLESS TRAVEL – GOOD AND NOT SO GOOD NEWS

Long-distance and international rail travel becomes more user-friendly if the customer can purchase a ticket which takes him or her to their final destination in the city to which the train is taking them.

In the UK this generally means a Plus Bus ticket. In Germany it means a City Ticket.

The City Ticket enables long-distance passengers to use urban transport within many German cities. In Berlin it has been extended to cover not just the central area (Zone A), but also all of Zone B, from Spandau and Wannsee in the west to Kopenick and Marzahn in the east. German passenger association PRO BAHN welcomed this move, for which they had started campaigning in 2017.

The Association of European Rail Agents has on its website www.aera.co.uk a section on Rail Passes in most European countries. It covers add-ons such as this, but also in some cases zonal or regional tickets which will be helpful to visitors to major cities. AERA brings together travel agents in the UK who specialise in selling international rail tickets and sometimes also in railtours.

AERA has, however, also had to update its website to report on the Dutch Flyer which, since January, has become slightly less seamless. The facility was introduced to give rail/sea/rail travel between any station in the English region of East Anglia and any station in the Netherlands. A through ticket was issued to customers in England before they started their journey and they then received two Combi Tickets on presenting this document at the check-in at Harwich. The Combi Ticket was valid on RET (the Rotterdam transport operator) and NS (the Dutch Railways).

Holders of a Dutch Flyer ticket are now handed a piece of paper with two codes on it and the NS website, when they check in at Harwich, and told to visit the website and print off their own tickets using these codes.

The writer of this report was in fact able to persuade the receptionist on board the ferry to print an outward Combi-Ticket from her computer and on the return journey the ticket clerk at Hengelo station to do likewise. But why do

customers now have to jump over this extra hurdle? Is it just to save a tiny amount of money or card for Greater Anglia, Stena Line, RET or NS?

FLIGHT SHAME OR RAIL PRIDE?

Back-on-Track colleague Dr Bernhard Knierim has had a detailed article published in the German weekly Der Freitag. In it he puts the case for passenger trains (daytime or night) as an alternative for many short and medium distance air trips.

The original article in German has been translated into English, French and Danish by members of Back-on-Track and can be read on the website <https://back-on-track.eu>

Another useful website is that of Flightfree UK: <https://flightfree.co.uk> and its associated facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/flightfreeUK> giving advice to travellers who want to avoid air travel.

BACK-ON-TRACK IN BRUSSELS

The Back-on-Track conference planned for mid October in Brussels has had to be postponed because of the ongoing restrictions resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.

However, Back-on-Track Belgium has instead organised three webinars.

On Friday October 16th there will be a webinar between 11.00 and 12.30 for Back-on-Track members and invited experts. DGMOVE, CER and ALLRAIL have also been invited, to talk on how they see dialogue being developed with the politicians in favour of night trains.

On Saturday October 17th, a webinar will be held from 11.00 to 13.00 for Back-on-Track members only, focussing on further planning of activities.

The third webinar, on Thursday October 22nd will be part of the European Week of Regions & Cities. It will be organised by Back-on-Track Belgium and aimed at a wider audience. The key theme will be how Brussels can become a hub for European night trains. Evelien Marlier of the European Passengers' Federation will be one of the contributors. For more information log on to https://europa.eu/regions-and-cities/programme/sessions/1152_en

We advise readers to look regularly on <http://back-on-track.eu> for further updates and information on how to take part.

EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

Back-on-Track has expanded and reissued its position paper on the European New Green Deal. It can be found on the website <https://back-on-track.eu> and is summarised thus:

There is huge potential for modal shift from road and air to rail. To unlock his potential, measures are required at EU level, of which the most urgent are:

- *Achieving a level playing field, on which the taxation on energy used by rail must be no higher than that used by road transport or aviation.*
- *Kerosene tax on all flights to, from and within the EU*
- *0% VAT on international train tickets.*
- *Internalisation of external costs in taxation of all modes.*
- *Road use to be charged on the basis of “user pays and polluter pays” comparable to rail access charges; or the abolition of track access charging and replacement with rail infrastructure funding through general taxation.*
- *Simplifying fares and ticketing within the Single European Railway Area and full interoperability of booking systems.*
- *Easier booking of international journeys – support for a European Train Union to build such a strategy.*
- *New rolling stock – establish a European night train vehicle pool.*
- *Marginal infrastructure usage costs for international services.*
- The full position paper is also available, on the website, in English, French and Danish.

Linked to this topic is the letter from the Dutch Government to the EU Transport Commissioner on June 2nd, stating “climate change has become a key policy priority and its is vital that international railway passenger transport is part of this agenda.”

The Transport Ministers of 23 EU countries have signed the letter, as did those of Norway and Switzerland. The British Secretary of State for Transport has also been invited to sign.

It is intended to establish a platform of Member State governments, the European Commission, railway sector and European Passengers' Federation to monitor progress towards improved cross-border conditions, easier booking, user-friendly and effective multimodal trips.

TRAVELLERS' TALES

Progress in the Grafschaft Bentheim

This region of Germany sits on the east/west route from Amsterdam to Berlin and was once served by boat trains from Hoek van Holland to Berlin, Hamburg and further afield.

Its capital is Nordhorn, a town of 54,000 which lost its rail passenger services in the 1970s and was said to be the largest German town without passenger trains.

The situation was put right in July 2019 when the independent Bentheimer Eisenbahn, working with the Land of Niedersachsen, reintroduced a service from Bad Bentheim (on the main line) to Nordhorn and Neuenhaus also serving three other small stations on this 28-km line.

I spent three days in historic Bad Bentheim (itself well worth a visit) at the end of July and included a trip on the new service. It is provided by modern LINT diesel multiple units every hour, marketing as Regiopa Express, from platform 3. The service which closed in the 1970s had its own station, just north of the main line one, and that building is now a hotel, the Bentheimer Hof.

There were only 6 of us on the 10.09 that July morning, but more joined en route and the two trains which I caught back were much better loaded. Each unit had flexispace for up to 12 bicycles.

Not all the closed stations had been reopened and the trains ran fast across the flat farmland, while there were also feeder buses run by the same multimodal company. Indeed, to obtain a good overview, also of the freight side, log on to www.bentheimer-eisenbahn.de

The passenger trains terminate at a brand new station in Neuenhaus, with a café and travel agency, while about 30 bicycles were parked there, a cycle

shop is conveniently opposite and the seasonal Fietsenbus connects with the Regiopa Express. A trailer on this bus can accommodate 15 bicycles. It operates on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays from May to October plus during school holidays.

The imposing station building at Nordhorn is currently out of use, but work is due to start later this year on a 4 million euro revitalisation programme, which will see it transformed with a new travel centre and agency, better waiting facilities (those on the platform are a bit basic), car hire, catering, ticket machine, cash machine and toilets – as well as offices for the Bentheimer Eisenbahn. This work is due to be completed in early 2022 when the station will then form an attractive entrance to this busy town.

Usage of this new rail service had exceeded predictions by some 2,500 passengers a day before the corona pandemic, and is now on the increase again. It is worth a visit to see how a rural railway, linking into an important international route, can be revived.

Trevor Garrod

FUTURE EVENTS

The European Passengers' Federation will hold its next General Meeting by zoom on September 26th; and then plans to hold a General Meeting in Brussels on January 16th 2021. Its Annual General Meeting is due to take place on March 13th and its Annual Conference (postponed from this year) on June 25th/26th in Strasbourg.

Meanwhile the popular European Rail Timetable has resumed publication. Find out all about it on www.europeanrailtimetable.eu

The next issue of this bulletin is due on December 1st. Material for possible inclusion should reach trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk by November 25th.

Trevor Garrod has made every effort to check the information in this bulletin but cannot be held responsible for any errors or changes.

TG 1st September 2020