

BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL nr 12

WELCOME to the spring 2020 issue of the bulletin aiming to help European citizens campaigning for better rail travel and the spread of good practice. It is compiled by Trevor Garrod who thanks contributors from many countries.

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BACK-ON-TRACK IN BRUSSELS

Twelve Back-on-Track supporters from five countries gathered in Brussels on January 28th for two days of meetings with parliamentarians, EU officials and rail and environmental lobbyists.

The theme was “European Night Trains and a Green Deal” and the message given to all the decision-makers and influential bodies was:

Trains are efficient and with a high proportion of green power. Only 0.4% of the transport sector’s climate contribution comes

from trains. Again and again, the European Commission and the European Environment Agency have stated that the railways must play a much greater role. But a number of problems stand in the way of European railways.

The European network Back-on-Track works for increased use of railways in Europe, not least increased use of night trains. The network believes that night trains are the most low-hanging fruit for rapid transformation of the transport sector. But it's not just so easy. Back-on-Track has some good advice on where to focus and where it has quick and immediate effect.

We say: for the sake of the climate, Europe must start work in these fields –

1. ACHIEVING A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD – An overall problem. Work must be started now and solutions should be phased in.
2. SIMPLIFYING FARES AND TICKETING IN THE SINGLE EUROPEAN RAILWAY AREA. It is more difficult than it needs to be to buy cross-border tickets in Europe.
3. BOOSTING INTERNATIONAL TRAIN SERVICES. Both countries and operators unilaterally focus on national trains – not across borders. Contracts must be made so that the most important routes can get started.
4. NEW ROLLING STOCK. There is an urgent need for more sleeping coaches and couchette coaches. A pool of new stock must be established.
5. MARGINAL INFRASTRUCTURE COSTS FOR INTERNATIONAL SERVICES. Access charges for the rails must be eased to match better the conditions on the roads.

You can read more, including a full report of the two days of meetings, on <https://back-on-track.eu>

The Back-on-Track network will continue this dialogue during the summer and members will gather again in Brussels on October 15th – 17th for a three-day set of conferences aimed at political decision makers, transport professionals and academics and the travelling public.

2. NIGHT TRAIN DEVELOPMENTS AND SURVEYS

On January 20th a new sleeper service was started by OeBB (Austrian Federal Railways) between Vienna and Brussels. It will run as an experiment two nights per week until June, when it will then be assessed. The evaluation will look at the usage and the operating lessons. It is important that this new night service is well promoted – and not just in the cities of Brussels and Vienna. After all, the Belgian capital is only two hours from London.

A group of German MEPs has launched a petition calling for a night train between Berlin and Brussels – and why not? There was one, ten years ago, and it also connected with a Eurostar to and from London.

The European Passengers' Federation has drafted a position paper on night trains, prompted by its Swedish affiliate Resenarsforum, and this will be presented at its Annual General Meeting on March 14th in Dusseldorf.

Meanwhile, two other EPF affiliates FNAUT in France and PTP in Catalonia, have launched their own surveys into the demand for new or revived night trains.

The FNAUT survey is called “Vos attentes sur les trains de nuit” (“Your expectations of night trains”) and the 9-page questionnaire covers questions on the level of comfort desired, fare that one

would be prepared to pay and optimum departure and arrival time.

The PTP survey is shorter and within the first ten days already had attracted 440 replies. It is planned to run till March 6th.

The initial 440 respondents showed that more than 9 out of 10 supported the idea of reinstating night trains and 59% said they would “most likely” and 30% “fairly likely” use night trains if a convenient service was provided. Interestingly 90% of replies were from males.

3. EUROPEAN PASSENGERS’ FEDERATION CONFERENCE IN STRASBOURG

Log on to www.epf.eu for more details of the 2020 EPF annual conference and how to book. It will take place on June 5th and 6th and focus on institutions, operators and regional solutions.

Members of EPF-affiliates pay a reduced fee.

There will also be two site visits.

Meanwhile, the working group on international journeys for members of EPF affiliates is due to meet again on April 4th in Ghent. On its agenda will be issues including progress in reinstating missing links, night trains, COP26 and standards on conventional international trains.

The working group will also consider Eurostar and Thalys.

Here, the good news is that through Eurostar trains from Amsterdam still start on April 30th and from May 18th they will also serve Rotterdam.

The more mixed news concerns connections with Eurostar in London, Paris, Lille and Brussels.

Have YOU in recent months travelled by Eurostar and missed a connection because the train was late? If so, how well was the situation handled?

For example, a Railfuture member had to pay for a taxi home from Ebbsfleet International on October 16th because his Eurostar from Brussels arrived 3 hours late. It took him three months to receive compensation.

On the other hand, some customers have received better treatment – such as those who arrived late in Paris (through no fault of their own), missed their train to London but were promptly issued with reservations for the next Eurostar.

The Association of European Rail Agents is collecting examples of good and bad practice. Please email brief details to info@aera.co.uk by March 23rd, after which a report will be compiled.

4. EUROPEAN RAIL CAMPAIGN(UK)

In our last issue we reported on the formation of this new association. Its membership has grown steadily and you can read more about it on <https://eurorailcampaignuk.org>.

The Campaign's approach to train companies to encourage delegates to take the train to Madrid for last autumn's UN Climate Change Conference did not bear fruit – but it was done at very short notice.

For COP26 in Glasgow on November 9th – 20th there is more time to lobby, and this time ERC(UK) has contacted Eurostar, two key

British train operating companies and Interrail. The message is also being sent to the conference organisers, who should urge delegates and lobbyists, where practicable, to “go by train to Glasgow and tell your local or national news media that you are doing so.”

ERC(UK) has also reacted to an article in the *Financial Times* on January 18th in which a journalist explained why he and a Dutch colleague flew from London and Amsterdam respectively to Berlin rather than go by train. Two members of the association wrote letters to the editor. One was published on February 13th and the other, while acknowledged, was not published but an editorial shortly afterwards made points very similar to those in the ERC(UK) letter.

Another ERC(UK) member has had a letter on night trains published in *The New European* on February 13th.

To join this new campaign, send £10 as minimum subscription to the Membership Secretary, 69 Dudley Road, Tipton, West Midlands, DY4 8EE, UK.

5. DUTCH POSITION PAPER ON INTERNATIONAL TRAINS

On November 15th the Dutch Transport Minister convened a high level expert meeting at which the European Passengers' Federation was represented, to consider the potential of international rail passenger services.

As a result, a 10-page position paper has been sent to European Commissioners Valean and Timmermans.

Given that “rail can effectively substitute air transport at a distance of up to 800 km”, the paper estimates that up to

2 million additional potential rail passengers in the Netherlands could be gained annually by 2025.

It suggests work to define the conditions for the development of a “consistent network of international rail passenger services”; continued work on missing links or bottlenecks; and more cross-border Public Service Obligation contracts based on competitive tenders where no attractive commercial service can be operated.

Action at EU level should include ensuring data availability and interoperability, ensuring that existing technical and marketing legislation is fully implemented and “designing an EC agenda for international high-speed services, combining where needed both high-speed and conventional infrastructure.” This means interoperability between TEN-T core routes and the rest of the network.

Pilot schemes could be considered in the corridors Berlin – Amsterdam and Prague – Bratislava / Vienna / Budapest.

Member States and their infrastructure managers must work together across borders, undertaking market analysis. This would involve the connections between cities of over 250,000 population, up to 600km apart from each other, with frequencies of some 8 trains a day. A market monitoring report could be published every 2 years.

It is planned to present the initiative at the next TEN-T days on May 13th – 15th in Croatia. At the moment it is not clear in what way passengers will be involved in this project.

Log on to www.epf.eu for further information.

6. OLD RAILWAY – NEW LIFE

Trevor Garrod writes: In the 1840s a railway was built to link Manchester to the Humber and in due course a new port on the east coast was built at Immingham. In 1953 the section from Manchester to Sheffield and Wath was electrified with a new tunnel under the Pennines at Woodhead; in 1970 this was closed to passengers and in 1981 also to freight.

At one stage this railway, generally known as the Woodhead Line, also carried the Harwich – Manchester boat train, connecting with the night ferry to and from Hoek van Holland.

The western end of the line is still there and served by modern electric trains every half hour to Glossop and Hadfield.

With four hours to spare in Manchester in late January, I used it for a ride out to Glossop. This stretch of the original 1845 railway survives as a busy commuter line, with two additional stations opened and a Community Rail Partnership to promote leisure usage.

People from Greater Manchester like to get out into the Pennine hills which surround the small town of Glossop, itself on a short branch off the original main line. The active Friends of Glossop Station have provided historical information displays in the entrance and waiting room. There is also the *twig* coffee shop welcoming visitors. The redundant goods shed has been converted into a post office and supermarket.

The station also contains an interpretation board marking the arrival in June 1940 of 600 children evacuated from what is now my home town of Lowestoft. Links between the two towns, on

opposite sides of England, are kept alive by voluntary groups right to this day.

Glossop and its neighbourhood show how local communities can encourage visitors to come by train and explore the area. The local voluntary group Friends of Glossop Station (www.friends-of-glossop-station.co.uk) is a good example, as is the Hope Valley & High Peak Community Rail Partnership (<https://peakdistrictbytrain.org/about-high-peak-hope-valley-community-rail-partnership/>) which is funded by local councils and the train operating company.

7. INTERRAIL – AND COP 26

Erland Egefors reports from Denmark:

In 2019 DSB sold 13,000 Interrail tickets. Compared with 2018 the number had increased by 35% and even 2018 had been a record year.

Two more countries have been added to the list this year: Estonia and Latvia. Because Poland and Lithuania are already on the list it will now be possible to take a round trip through the Baltic countries.

There are several ferry routes between Sweden and Finland. Direct Ferries and Viking Line sails via Mariehamn on the Åland islands or direct Stockholm to Åbo in Finland. Wasalinie has a ferry service from Umeå in Sweden to Vaasa in Finland.

Trevor Garrod adds:

Interrail was originally intended to encourage young people to explore Europe by rail (including certain ferry routes) but it is now available for all ages. It is also handy for short trips, of just five

days, and several of us have argued that it has more potential in this respect.

For example, a visit from western Europe to Glasgow for COP26?

8. AND FINALLY...

In Great Britain you cannot simply buy an Interrail ticket, or indeed most international tickets, at a railway station.

You can, of course, use a number of websites. But if you want to speak to someone and discuss your needs, we do have travel agents who specialise in rail. They belong to the Association of European Rail Agents and you can find them via www.aera.co.uk

The *Dutch Flyer* rail/sea/rail ticket can also be purchased on line via www.greateranglia.co.uk/railandsail and it is more attractive now that the RET metro links Hoek van Holland to central Rotterdam and beyond every 20 minutes.

Do you need timetable information? The *European Rail Timetable* continues to appear every month and can be bought at a number of outlets, not just in the UK, but can also be ordered via the website www.europeanrailtimetable.eu

Regular subscribers also receive, every Friday by e-mail a handy update on services.

Trevor Garrod made every effort to include helpful information in this bulletin, but cannot be held responsible for any changes or errors. Deadline for the summer issue will be May 25th

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