

BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL nr 13

WELCOME to the summer 2020 issue of this bulletin which aims to help European citizens campaigning for better rail travel and the spread of good practice. It is compiled by Trevor Garrod who thanks colleagues from many countries for their contributions.

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EUROPEAN YEAR OF RAIL

In January it was announced by the European Commission that they were planning to make next year the Year of Rail, following a suggestion by a Belgian association and with support from MEPs.

The specific aim will be to support delivery of the EU Green Deal objectives in the transport field.

A series of events, campaigns and initiatives will promote rail as a sustainable, innovative and safe mode of transport. 2021 has also been chosen because it will be the first full year that the rules agreed under the 4th Railway Package will be implemented throughout the EU.

Details are being finalised during the coming weeks and we hope to report more in our next issue, due out at the start of September.

EFFECTS OF COVID19

The coronavirus pandemic from February onwards led to cutbacks in rail services, especially across borders, as people were discouraged from travelling. It affected air, ferry and bus travel as well Eurostar services were reduced to three a day and some open access operators, such as Hull Trains, suspended services.

On the other hand, the lockdowns in many countries also led to a reduction in air pollution in mid April, average air pollution in London was at its lowest since recordings began on 2000. At the same time, a Swiss bank predicted strong growth for European rail - 10 % per year - after the pandemic.

Some innovative thinking also emerged. For example, the Austrian Government introduced a temporary Public Service Obligation on the main line between Vienna and Salzburg, whereby from April 20th it supported trains of both the state operator, OeBB and the open access operator WESTbahn. It was able to do this under the European Commission's Temporary Framework rules. The arrangement was that for three months each operator would run a train alternately every two hours between Vienna and Salzburg and accept each other's tickets.

In Switzerland, a campaign was launched to advise people how to behave on public transport journeys, following SBB's reinstatement of many suspended services on May 11th. Details can be found on <https://news.ch/artikel96331/coronavirus-protection-measures-to-make-travel-as-safe-as-possible>

For example, the advice states that if 2-meter-distancing cannot be maintained, face masks are recommended and can be obtained at station shops. Other advice includes to purchase tickets online if possible, avoid peak hours and not to treat stations as meeting places. The increased hygiene measures being undertaken by SBB are also described.

The British government suspended all rail franchises, initially for a period of six months and all revenue and cost risk was transferred to the taxpayer. The train operators are still running the services, but for a predetermined management fee.

In the Netherlands, usage of public transport fell in some cases to 10% of 2019 figures but is now slowly growing again. 2019 levels may not be reached again till 2025. Services were maintained on all rail lines and most bus routes, as were cross-border train services to Germany.

There have been many discussions about the long-term future of train services, especially those carrying commuters to work, and these have been reflected, among other places, in e-mail discussions between members of the European Passengers' Federation.

A survey reported in Transport Times in April stated that 20% of the 1500 British adults questioned said they might travel less with public transport until a vaccine is found. Does this mean that more people may work from home in the future? It may also mean that the traditional monthly or annual season ticket is replaced by a more flexible ticketing system that reflects the fact that not everyone works full time, at least not in an office or other workplace. Will the traditional peaks be flattened out with more people working shifts instead of a traditional 09.00 to 17.00?

Some longer distance business journeys may be replaced by video-conferencing, and that could affect air as well as rail travel. On the other hand, personal interaction is still likely to play a key role in business relationships.

The design of public transport vehicles is a further topic that has featured in discussions, if social distancing becomes more normal.

Some of these issues will be considered at the EPF General Meeting, conducted by videoconference, on June 6th.

BACK-ON-TRACK OCTOBER EVENT IN BRUSSELS

Plans are going ahead for this 3-day event from Thursday October 15th to Saturday October 17th. Already speakers have been confirmed from the

European Commission (DGMOVE), Community of European Railways, ALLRAIL and the European Passengers' Federation.

The programme is evolving and it is likely that the Thursday and Friday sessions will feature presentations and panel discussions on the past, present and future of night trains; how a night train network should be managed; economic challenges (value chain and local economic development) and revival of night train hubs.

The Saturday session will then discuss Back-on-Track internal matters and action but also be open to a wider audience.

A crowd-funding page has been launched to help pay for the event: <https://www.okpal.com/back-on-track-belgium-night-train-conference-202/#/>

You can find out more on <https://back-on-track.eu> - and we shall have more details in the next issue of Bulletin of European Rail Travel.

It is not expected that everyone will be able to attend on each day, but the more who can, the better..

NIGHT TRAIN PROGRESS AND CAMPAIGNS

SWEDEN The Swedish Transport Administration released a report in early May recommending a night train Malmo – Cologne – Brussels as a first step towards improving links from Scandinavia to Germany and beyond. Accepting that it was difficult to make sleeper services profitable under current conditions, the report calculated a shortfall of 4.7 million Euro per year. However, a poll showed that 21% of Swedes considered a possible night train connection to the Continent as attractive, which suggests it is likely that the service would soon become commercially viable.

Currently only 1% of the travel market between Sweden and the rest of Europe is by rail, but market research shows that more people would do so if there was a better supply of services. It was also found that 12 hours was the maximum time that business travellers were likely to spend on an overnight service whereas for leisure travellers the maximum was 17 hours.

2022 would be the earliest that such a service could be running.

FRANCE

1. Oui-au-train-de nuit has set out 9 actions necessary to relaunch night trains and has sent these to the Minister of Transport, whom its representatives were due to meet on May 20th.

These actions are detailed as part of a 48-page document and have been supported by other organisations including Objectif Train de Nuit and the Federation Nationale des Associations des Usagers des Transports.

They are:

- i. Maximise the availability and effectiveness of the rail network.
- ii. Enable SNCF Réseau to work on a more level playing field.
- iii. Form a modernised fleet of rolling stock.
- iv. Motivate mobility operators, with open data and support for open access.
- v. Improve the French rail model in comparison to those of other European countries.
- vi. Construct a framework of intermodal competition.
- vii. Encourage a move to more energy-efficient modes.
- viii. Encourage local communities to place rail at the heart of land-use.
- ix. Encourage changes in behaviour towards low carbon activity.

Objectif Train de Nuit The association was very encouraged by the vote of the Grand-Est region, on April 27th, to support a feasibility study into a Barcelona – Frankfurt overnight service.

Support has also been shown by infrastructure managers including SNCF Réseau, DN Netz and LFP Perthus.

NEWS FROM PASSENGER ASSOCIATIONS

AUSTRIA Probahn Österreich has held a workshop with OeBB managers and as a result the association sent a resolution to the Federal Government.

The resolution welcomes the intention of the Austrian Government to work towards an increasingly sustainable transport system, in order to meet the challenges of climate change and protection of the environment.

It makes 7 specific proposals:

- I. As well as continued improvements to the western and southern main lines, journey times overall must be improved to provide a competitive alternative to the motor car.
- II. Financing of regional and local services must be adequate and guaranteed over a longer term.
- III. Minimum service frequencies throughout the country – hourly or two-hourly on Sundays and public holidays and at the beginning and end of the day.
- IV. Tax reform to take into account the true costs of public and private transport.
- V. Eliminate tax disadvantages for rail, especially in comparison to air travel.
- VI. Change of emphasis in infrastructure spending from road building to rail.
- VII. Project of Austria Ticket 1-2-3 to be taken forward. Fares throughout the country must be simplified and tickets made easier to understand.

GERMANY

Deutscher Bahnkundenverband has issued a statement on how public transport should adapt to the pro-COVID19 circumstances. The association recommends at least 1.5 meters distance between passengers, with or without masks, a doubling of places in carriages and where necessary additional building measures on platforms. Initially at least, cordoning off every second seat in a train should be sufficient.

In a further statement it urged clear and easily understandable instructions about the wearing of masks. DBV and other passenger and environmental

associations were, however, opposed to making the wearing of face masks and seat reservations compulsory. Such measures would “considerably restrict the customer community who have to be mobile.”

Pro Bahn This national rail passengers’ association has just published a new leaflet “Mobilitaet im Urlaub” (“Getting about on holiday”) by Joerg Bruchertseifer.

It shows that there are alternatives to flying and driving on holiday.

The leaflet is in German at www.pro-bahn.de/disk/pdf/2020_flyer_urlaub.pdf
You can obtain the paper version by writing to Pro Bahn at Agnes-Bernauer-Platz 8, D80687 Munich.

GREAT BRITAIN: The East Suffolk Travel Association – one of many local bodies affiliated to Railfuture- has also just published three leaflets promoting exploration of its area by train and bus – ideal for summer days out. The leaflets are available on www.eastsuffolktravel.org.uk or by post from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd Sth, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ

NETHERLANDS

The public transport users’ association ROVER has been active in lobbying the Dutch Government and train and bus operators to keep services going. They were concerned that among some people public transport had the image of being unsafe.

EUROPEAN RAIL CAMPAIGN (UK)

In its Spring Update ERC(UK) reports that it joined with 250 other organisations Europe-wide, including environmental groups and trade unions, to issue a joint press release requesting that state aid be directed away from short-haul air towards rail, which has a much lower carbon footprint. The press release received good coverage from the BBC’s Environment Correspondent on April 6th. Visit the website <https://eurorailcampaig-nuk.org>

ERC(UK) was formed in November last year and continues to grow. To join, send £10 as minimum subscription to the Membership Secretary, 69 Dudley Rd., Tipton, West Midlands, DY4 8EE.

TRAVELLERS' TALES - MONTPELLIER

My first visit to this French city (apart from passing through it on the train) was in early March, partly to prepare for a visit by a British group of pro-rail campaigners.

The city of 280,000 dates from Roman times and became an important centre of learning from the Middle Ages. Interestingly it is twinned with Heidelberg. Nowadays the university institutions are not only in the historic centre but also in the rapidly expanding eastern suburbs.

In the 1990s Montpellier started to develop a modern tram network which now comprises 4 lines stretching for 60 kilometers (37.6 miles). A 24-hour ticket gives you unlimited access to all the trams and city buses.

Most trains serve the historic St Roch station, just a few minutes' walk from the large central square and also very convenient for the urban transport.

However, Montpellier now has a second station, called Sud-de-France, on the recently opened high speed line parallel to a motorway along the southern edge of the built-up area. To reach it you catch the no.1 tram out to the penultimate stop (Place de France) in the eastern suburbs and wait for a shuttle bus to a dome-like building to which you then complete your last 50 meters on foot. One fellow passenger told me it was "la gare fantome" ("the ghost station") while a local campaigner called it "la gare des pampas" ("The pampas grass station"). I mentioned that the name "la gare des betteraves" ("beetroot station") had been coined in northern France when Haute Picardie had been built in the fields between Lille and Paris, but was advised that it is too warm to grow beetroot in the South!

My journey to Montpellier St Roch from the east coast of England had taken just over 12 hours by three British trains, then Eurostar then two French high speed trains, with changes at Lille and Lyon. My journey back was on a direct train from the pampas station to Brussels via Lille taking just over 6 hours.

Looking ahead, however, it is planned to extend the tram line to Montpellier Sud-de-France as a new quarter is built on the fields.

Our group visit to Montpellier has had to be postponed till spring 2021, but it will be worth the wait!

Trevor Garrod

EUROPEAN RAIL TIMETABLE; RAIL REPORT EUROPE

The European Rail Timetable suspended publication in April in its paper format, but plans to reappear in its summer edition in July.

Meanwhile, it has continued to produce electronic Friday Flyers for regular subscribers – which have also been useful in the preparation of this bulletin.

You can order this unique international timetable via the website www.europeanrailtimetable.eu

RAIL REPORT EUROPE Jochen Reitstaetter and Trevor Garrod have launched a quarterly series of illustrated reports on international rail travel topics. The first appeared in late April and focussed on international night trains and the work of Back-on-Track. The next is due to appear in July. To join the electronic mailing list, just e-mail trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk or reitstaetter@catchup-pr.com

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MORE ELECTRIFICATION IN POLAND

A project has been announced to electrify what was once the Royal Prussian Eastern Railway from Kostrzyn (on the German – Polish border) to Krzyz and then on to Pila. Work will begin in 2023 at the earliest and will then be completed as quickly as possible.

The city of Gorzow Wielkopolski and neighbouring authorities have been campaigning for years for this scheme. The region will then be able to get more trains from central Poland, at speeds of up to 160 kph; and the line onwards to Bydgoszcz will also be modernised to allow speeds of up to 200 kph

More capacity will be created for freight trains and station improvements will include real-time information and better platform surfaces.

AND ELSEWHERE...?

The Austrian newsletter [inmotionme](#) also sets out its campaign priorities, which include a north-south underground extension of the Salzburger Lokalbahn and its continuation over the trackbed of the former tram line towards Königssee across the German border. It also argues for electrification of the narrow-gauge Pinzgaubahn in the southern part of the Land of Salzburg.

DATES

The [European Passengers' Federation conference](#) has had to be postponed. It is now due to take place on the first weekend of June 2021, in Strasbourg.

For this and other EPF action, log on to www.epf.eu Via this website you can also find the websites of over 30 national and regional public transport users' bodies.

The [Salzburger Verkehrstage](#) are due to take place October 12th – 14th. The event is in German and this year's will be the 18th occasion that it has been held.

The theme for this year is "Mobilität gestalten – klimaneutral und sozial verträglich". (Designing mobility – climate-neutral and socially viable)

It is intended to look at successful projects in cities throughout the world, including digital visions which also function.

Details are on the website www.forum-mobil.at/salzbuerger-verkehrstage .

[Stay Grounded](#), the worldwide network campaigning for the alternatives to airport expansion, is due to hold its next network meeting November 5th – 8th.

The next edition of this bulletin is due to appear on September 1st. _

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