

# BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL number 15

WELCOME to the winter 2020/21 edition of this bulletin, compiled by Trevor Garrod with input from several other colleagues. We hope you will find it helpful in your campaigning work.

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### 1. RAIL 24/7: CAMPAIGNS AND PROGRESS

The Back-on-Track network had hoped to hold a Brussels conference in October, but the ongoing pandemic meant that three webinars were held instead, involving a large number of participants from many European countries.

The first took place on October 16<sup>th</sup> and focussed on the work of the European Commission and its Green Deal, with Mr Nino Zambara of DGMOVE explaining its relevance to rail. The European Parliament had proposed a new study on Cross Border Long Distance Passenger Trains, including Night Trains Work on this would last 9 months and should start before the end of 2020.

Mr Zambara's presentation provoked wide-ranging discussion, and a report on this webinar plus a shortened version of the powerpoint presentation can be found on the website <http://back-on-track.eu>

Then on October 17<sup>th</sup> the second webinar assessed the previous day's discussion, considered proposals and developments from different countries and how Back-on-Track should campaign on these during the coming year. It was agreed to set up four ad hoc working groups to pursue issues by zoom and email.

A report of this webinar has already been sent to Back-on-Track's internal list and the issues are regularly reviewed in Back-on-Track's monthly zoom meetings.

The third webinar, on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, was part of the EU's 18<sup>th</sup> European Week of Regions & Cities. With the title Night Trains – Linking European Regions it featured presentations by Alexander Gomme of Back-on-Track Belgium, Melissa Hanus of the Transport Committee of the Belgian Federal Parliament and Emil Frodlund of the European Passengers' Federation. A key issue in the presentations and discussion was the potential for Brussels to be a night-train hub; while other priorities included an international Public Service Obligation, a central pool of stock, initial financial support to establish new night train routes and co-operation between operators.

A summary of this webinar is on the Back-on-Track website together with a video recording of the proceedings; while a 4-page report is also available from [trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk).

Since the webinars, Back-on-Track has been told that a contract is expected to be signed by the middle of December with the consultancy which has been chosen to undertake the night train study. We are also assured that the tender specification for the study states that "input shall be sought from a broad range of stakeholders including passenger representatives and all railway undertakings."

Meanwhile, there is further progress in Scandinavia:

Snälltoget has opened ticket sales for its Stockholm – Copenhagen – Hamburg – Berlin service, due to start on March 27<sup>th</sup> 2021. It will contain seating and couchette coaches, with a restaurant car in Sweden and drinks and snack service for the rest of the route. In Norway the National Railway Directorate

has recommended an expansion of the sleeping car fleet to meet the expected demand over the next 20 years. In Sweden Trafikverket has published a tender or a contract to run international overnight trains from Stockholm and Malmo to the Danish/German border, initially for 4 years from 2022. The ultimate aim of such a service in Brussels, assuming that an extension beyond the Danish/German border can be negotiated.

## 2. “TRAINS INSTEAD OF PLANES”

The Swiss association UmverkehR held a conference on this topic in Zurich on November 26<sup>th</sup>. 15 people took part in the conference room and a further 70 – including 4 representatives of Back-on-Track joined on ZOOM. The UmverkehR association was founded in 1992 to campaign for sustainable mobility. You can find out more by logging on to its website <https://www.umverkehr.ch> and it also has a French equivalent called actif-traffic .

The first section of the conference set out the extent of the climate crisis and how to tackle it, pointing out that transport accounted for 32% of carbon emissions in Switzerland, of which 73% was caused by cars.

It was said that when Swiss people fly, they are mostly going to destinations which they cannot easily reach by train. People also fly because it is cheap. The Swiss air ticket tax (which will not apply to transit and transfer journeys) will partly address this issue but will also provide money for research into sustainable alternatives.

There was a call from one participant for a 90% reduction in air travel; and others stressed the necessity and potential for replacing short-haul flights by rail travel and indeed also by long-distance coaches.

In the second part of the conference representatives of SBB and Swiss (the national train operator and airline) set out their positions and pointed out that “every journey has an effect on the climate.” It was stated that 65% of the business at Swiss airports was international and 35% domestic. Yet in a country the size of Switzerland rail provided a good alternative for domestic travel. More research was needed into the effects of night trains. There was also a possible role for the Night ICE. 2019 had seen a 7% rise in international rail travel to and from Switzerland, and SBB was now co-operating in the night train market with its Austrian counterpart.

For rail to compete more effectively with air it was necessary to have, for example, more than just two trains a day between Paris and Geneva; and to accept that, for some customers, flexibility was also important. They may find it most convenient to travel by train in one direction and plane in the other; or to catch a high speed train to Frankfurt Flughafen and then fly to their ultimate destination.

It was widely accepted that international rail information and booking systems needed to be improved and it was stated that SBB, DB and OeBB had been working together on a new standard booking system.

This perceptive observation was made by one speaker: “We must overcome the division of people into “Trains passenger/ Air passenger / motorist”. We can be all three. There must be better co-operation between operators in different modes.

The final session was described as a “political panel discussion”, in which some participants pointed out, “air travel is heavily subsidised -for example because kerosene is not taxed. Many governments had also bailed out their airlines during the corona crisis.

One speaker found it very effective to do a day’s work in one city, travel on a night train and be ready next morning for a day’s work in another city. Another had great confidence in the ability of the airline industry to innovate and regain its pre-COVID position in the market.

There were mixed views about the future and the extent to which transport could be left to competition, while the point was made that competition must take place on a level playing field.

The event was recorded, together with the many comments made on the chat” function and a fuller report should in due course appear on the Umverkehr website.

### Meanwhile, on the same subject...

Redundancies – There is an old saying, “When one door closes, another door opens” and this can be the case in public transport, where some skills are transferable. For example, the airline Swiss does not expect to return to its normal level of services before 2024 at the earliest – but there could well be

opportunities for pilots to retrain and locomotive drivers with SBB. Indeed, the airline Germanwings has advised staff threatened with redundancy to apply for jobs with Deutsche Bahn.

Public opinion - a new poll indicates nearly two thirds of people asked support a ban (and not just higher taxes) on short-haul flights, with an interesting definition of “short.” (to destinations that can be reached within 12 hours by train), to help combat climate change.

58% think that governments should only give public funds to national airlines if these decrease their environmental impact.

The poll was conducted by the EUPinions institute, an independent platform for European public opinion, founded by the Bertelsmann Foundation.

### 3. EUROPEAN YEAR OF RAIL

As mentioned in issue no. 13, the European Commission, following a suggestion by the European Parliament, has designated 2021 as European Year of Rail. It is intended to “help step up the pace of rail modernisation, which is needed to make it a more popular alternative to less sustainable transport modes.” Indeed, we are told that “trains will be the transport of choice.”

A series of events is proposed to promote rail as sustainable, innovative and safe, highlighting the benefits it brings for people, the economy, and climate, while focussing on the remaining challenges on the way to creating a Single European Rail Area without borders.

A core group has been set up by DGMOVE, the European Commission body responsible for transport, and that group includes a representative of the European Passengers’ Federation. That is welcome, because when rail is being promoted, consumer input is essential. Indeed, note should be taken of a key point in the Dutch Government’s Position Paper on International Rail Passenger Transport of February 28<sup>th</sup> (reported in our issue number 12), that people choose their mode of travel based on five factors:

- (i) availability
- (ii) punctuality
- (iii) quality
- (iv) accessibility
- (v) price.

Let us hope that the Year of Rail will showcase all these aspects and where necessary stimulate improvements. At present we await a decision on the budget for this Europe-wide project. |It is planned to have more information in the January issue of Rail Report Europe.

#### 2021 is also the Year of COP 26

The first two weeks of November will see the next global climate conference, to be hosted by the city of Glasgow. The European Rail Campaign (UK) is among bodies pressing for delegates, journalists and lobbyists to be encouraged to travel to Glasgow by train – which is, or should be, an option from a considerable number of European countries.

#### 4. EUROSTAR AND THALYS

These two international high-speed operators have been hit by the effects of the pandemic, with currently only two return Eurostars: one between London and Paris and the other between London, Brussels and Amsterdam. Thalys expects only 6% of its normal December loadings. In November it has been running one Paris – Amsterdam return and one Paris – Brussels, with the option of strengthening this basic service as and when required.

The European Rail Campaign (UK) (<https://eurorailcampaignuk.org>) has continued correspondence with politicians and the operator over lack of UK government support and the suspension of stops at Ebbsfleet and Ashford International. The campaign's efforts have been reported issue 914 of the magazine Rail.

Eurostar has been asked whether they will resume calls at Ashford and Ebbsfleet by the end of 2021 if the virus has subsided by then; and what plans they have for the old trains (from 1994) currently in storage.

EPF holds an annual meeting with senior managers of Thalys, and this year's took place, by videolink, on November 9<sup>th</sup>. The EPF members were advised that services to Marne-le-Vallee were suspended till March 13<sup>th</sup>; that Bordeaux would not be served in 2021 and that Marseille was still being considered. Holiday bookings for Bourg St Maurice were being taken, assuming that governments would allow travel. Brussels Airport would not be served in 2021. It had however been decided to continue operating the low-cost IZY service "to retain price-sensitive customers."

Satisfaction surveys had been suspended from March but resumed in October. The RUBY programme to refurbish trains had been affected by strikes and the lockdown, but the first unit was now expected to be in service by June 2021 at the latest.

Meanwhile, progress had been made with Thalys' Travellers' Information project, and since July it had been possible to publish "expected disruptions" on the website. Thanks to a new app, since October regular customers had been able to obtain compensation proactively in the case of a delay of more than 30 minutes. EPF welcomed this as a step forward for all customers.

#### Meanwhile, when Eurostar again calls at Ashford International...

At present, passengers from the Continent wanting to visit Kent, the "Garden of England" and neighbouring counties have to travel in and out of London, taking them longer and costing them more.

Once a reasonable number of trains from France, Belgium and the Netherlands are again calling at Ashford, the potential of this major junction can again be exploited – for tourists as well as business travellers.

For example, Ashford has frequent trains, including fast Javelins, taking 15-18 minutes, to historic Canterbury, which is also a university city. Furthermore, once an hour a modern diesel train enters platform 1C at Ashford International from Marshlink – the line which heads south across Romney Marsh, to Rye, Hastings and Eastbourne.

The ancient town of Rye has been important since Norman times and its station is ideally sited. Hastings is known to all English people where William Duke of Normandy, having landed nearby, set up his headquarters in 1066 and then defeated the English King Harold in battle – actually a few miles north where the small town of Battle now stands, also easily accessible by at least two trains an hour from Hastings.

The website of the Sussex Community Rail Partnership, which promotes these local services, will give you more information. Log on to [www.southeastcrp.org.uk](http://www.southeastcrp.org.uk)

#### 5.. SEAMLESS TRAVEL – ANOTHER STEP FORWARD

In previous issues of this bulletin we have featured examples of seamless travel. For example, in number 14 we reported that the Berlin City Ticket will

now take travellers arriving at the Hauptbahnhof (main station) all the way to the city limits.

On December 4<sup>th</sup> a gap in the city's U-bahn (underground) network is filled with the opening of the new line between Brandenburger Tor and Alexanderplatz. It includes three new stations : Unter den Linden, Museumsinsel and Rotes Rathaus. Thus visitors by train to Berlin now have a direct link to the historic city centre and onwards through the eastern suburbs of the capital to Honow on its eastern edge. The whole line is now called U5.

## 6, CROSS-BORDER LINKS – GERMANY/FRANCE

Wolfgang Klapdor reports that Rheinland-Pfalz and Grand-Est have published preliminary information for potential franchisees on seven regional cross-border services, to operate from December 2024. These are:

Neustadt – Wissembourg - Strasbourg; Karlsruhe – Lauterbourg – Strasbourg; Trier – Perl – Metz; Saarbrücken – Forbach – Metz; Saarbrücken – Strasbourg; Offenburg – Strasbourg; and Mullheim – Mulhouse.

30 new Coradia Polyvalent bimode multiple units have been ordered from Alstom compatible with the German and French systems, have been ordered. Under the Interreg A programme the EU has agreed to support a common fares system.

Meanwhile, the international long-distance travel working group of the German passengers' association PRO BAHN held a series of zoom meetings during the summer, looking at how cross-border links could be improved with each of the countries bordering on Germany.

We are told that 5 of the 9 position papers have now been completed. We look forward to announcing the full report of the project next year.

## 7. CROSS-BORDER LINKS – GERMANY/POLAND

The associations PRO BAHN and Kolej-depl issued a statement on November 2nd concerning the recent launch of a franchise for the Berlin – Kostrzyn service. This is the most western part of the historic Ostbahn, which originally ran from Berlin to what are now Gdansk and Kaliningrad and which has the potential to link to Riga and Tallinn through the Rail Baltica project. It is described by the two associations as “a project which is important for all of Europe.”



The section from Berlin-Lichtenberg to Kostrzyn is very busy and has capacity problems, with long stretches of single track. It needs extra track capacity and electrification. Yet the franchise plans up to 2036 do not mention either of these improvements and suggested that diesel trains could still be running till 2048. There is also no mention of the trains currently running beyond Kostrzyn to Gorzow Wielkopolski.

More encouraging is the news that the “Wawel” EuroCity train between Berlin and Krakow via Frankfurt-an-der-Oder – a 7-hour journey – is to be reintroduced on December 13<sup>th</sup>. The “culture train” from Berlin to Wroclaw has been suspended for what is called its “Winterschlaf” (“hibernation”) but is expected to resume in the spring.

Also encouraging was the formation in September of an Interessengemeinschaft Ostbahn to continue the campaign for the route through Kostrzyn and Gorzow.

## 8. EPF DIGITAL SEMINAR

Nigel Perkins attended this event on November 19<sup>th</sup> and reports: The European Passengers’ Federation held two focus groups on how a “Travel Companion” or “App” could be provided to facilitate seamless multi-modal travel across Europe using public transport. Discussions took place over what kind of journey planner should be developed travel modes and ancillary services that could be included. Should the app offer lower or higher prices than those of the individual operators and should it “nudge” users towards more environmentally friendly modes on offer?

We look forward to reading more in due course on the website [www.epf.eu](http://www.epf.eu)

## 9. EUROPEAN RAIL TIMETABLE AND OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF

The winter issues of the European Rail Timetable will be published in paper format on January 20<sup>th</sup> and will also be available digitally. You can order it via [www.europeanrailtimetable.eu](http://www.europeanrailtimetable.eu)

The Alpen-Sylt night train is operated by the private company, RDC Deutschland, and not as stated in our previous issue.

The British open access operators, Hull Trains and Grand Central had suspended service during the November lockdown and are due to resume on December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The Austrian 1-2-3 ticket, intended as a multimodal public transport pass, has been the subject of further meetings in the past autumn; and Vienna, Tirol and Vorarlberg are definitely committed to introducing it in 2021. (see also issue number 13)

The association Objectif train de nuit was due to hold its General Meeting on November 28<sup>th</sup>. We hope to report more on its work in our next issue. In the meantime you can find out more by logging on to [www.lunatrain.eu](http://www.lunatrain.eu) . This website has versions in French, German, English, Spanish and Italian.

Deadline for the next issue of this bulletin is February 25<sup>th</sup>. Send items to [trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk)

December 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 \_