

BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL 20

Welcome to the spring 2022 issue of the bulletin compiled by Trevor Garrod to support and help rail campaigners in European countries.

Thank you to everyone who has provided information.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY AND NIGHT TRAINS REPORT

In number 19 of this bulletin we reported on the consultation which took place leading up to the STEER/KCW report to the European Union on International Day and Night Trains, including input from the Back-on-Track network of campaigners and from extra submissions by Belgian and French campaigners.

This was published on December 14th followed promptly by a EU Action Plan for Long-distance and Cross-border Passenger Rail Services. Back-on-Track carefully studied the two documents and on January 20th issued a 10-point response reported later in this bulletin. But firstly a summary of the

Action Plan, for which we thank the Association européenne des cheminots from whose spring newsletter it is taken.

ACTION PLAN ANNOUNCED BY EUROPEAN COMMISSION

We want to boost long-distance and cross-border and passenger rail services with the aim of doubling high speed rail traffic and making scheduled public transport trips under 500km carbon neutral by 2030 and tripling high speed rail traffic by 2050.

The action plan focuses on 2 main pillars: full implementation of the existing EU regulatory framework, including the removal of any redundant national rules and the removal of obstacles to long-distance and cross-border passenger services. Amongst the measures are –

1. Revision of the TEN-T regulation to improve the passenger rail network and ensure better integration within the multimodal transport system.
2. Revision of Technical Specifications for Interoperability, including for “go anywhere” passenger rolling stock, improved processes for bringing in new technologies, paving the way for automated train operation, 5G communications and potentially satellite-based services.
3. A revised regulatory framework for train drivers.
4. Programmes to ensure future skills needs are met, including more apprenticeships.
5. Regulatory action to improve capacity allocation and traffic management processes and a possible EU-level entity overseeing the optimisation of cross-border rail traffic.
6. Guidelines for setting track access charges which support international passenger services.
7. Consider exempting the public financing of track access charge reductions from the notification obligation under state aid rules.
8. Proposed regulation on multimodal digital services to enhance data exchange between transport providers and help conclude fair commercial agreements with third-party ticket sellers, including protection in the case of missed connections for passengers travelling on combined separate tickets.

9. Monitoring compliance with the Rail Passenger Rights Regulation from June 2023.
10. Assess the need for an EU-wide VAT exemption for international train services.
11. Promote air/rail multimodal journeys on routes where the suitable infrastructure is in place and assessing regulatory options to facilitate such services.
12. Publish interpretive guidelines for applying the LAND PSO Regulation to long-distance and cross-border rail passenger services.
13. Proposal to amend ERASMUS reimbursement rules to promote the use of sustainable transport.
14. Ensure there is enough rolling stock.

Responding to the announcement, the ALLRAIL association of independent passenger operators said “It is clear that the European Commission understands that urgent action is necessary to increase rail’s market share. ALLRAIL called for transparent impartial ticket sales, with all operators’ services bookable through both incumbent and third-party channels, as well as missed connection protection, adding “These are political rather than technical matters” and called for implementation by 2024.

BACK-ON-TRACK’S 10-POINT RESPONSE

If you log on to www.back-on-track.eu you can read the response of Back-on-Track, representing the views of passengers from EU and non-EU states.

To summarise:

- (i) The introduction welcomes the plan but says it needs to be more ambitious.
- (ii) The issues of track charges and taxes need to be addressed.
- (iii) The removal of obstacles is a priority.
- (iv) Better information and clear passenger rights
- (v) There is scope for replacing short-haul air by rail in many cases.
- (vi) Length of journey is important in many (but not all) cases.

- (vii) Arrival times in the morning should suit the customer.
- (viii) Consideration must be given to staff, controls and language(s) used.
- (ix) Regional authorities and the tourist industry must be consulted.
- (x) There must be robust measures to monitor modal shift.

The full document has been sent to all relevant political and industry decision-makers.

RESULTS OF POSTER COMPETITION

The international judging panel had a difficult but enjoyable task in deciding the best of the 89 entries to this competition entitled “Renaissance of the Night Train.” The use of ZOOM technology meant that they would do it from home and the results were announced in Brussels on December 2rd. The winning entries can be viewed on <https://www.backontrackbelgium.be/poster-contest>.

The first prize was won by an entry showing an early morning view from the train window and the caption “Le temps d’une rêve. TRAIN DE NUIT” (“Dream Time. Night Train.”) The other winning entries had imaginative graphics and English captions.

EUROPEAN RAIL CAMPAIGN (UK)

Members of ERC(UK) have been busy in the past six months researching and enhancing their website, which now contains maps of nearly all countries in Continental Europe with travel information and advice, together with a growing number of travelogues.

Why not log on to www.eurorailcampaig-nuk.org ?

In the coming weeks the website will also include a new leaflet on night trains which can be downloaded. You can also order the paper version from ERC(UK) committee member Trevor Garrod tgarrod21@gmail.com . The leaflet bears the slogan “SAVE A DAY...GO FURTHER...TRAVEL BY NIGHT”

Obviously the website and leaflet are primarily aimed at a British clientele, but no doubt be helpful for Continental colleagues as well. Indeed, the website also has a built-in translation facility.

PARIS SYMPOSIUM ON FEBRUARY 23RD

France has the current Presidency of the European Union and so it was appropriate for this gathering to discuss the revitalisation of night trains to take place in the French capital.

A number of Back-on-Track supporters were able to attend.

Karima Delli MEP, Chair of the European Parliament's Transport & Tourism Committee, stated, "We need a denser network than today" and that it should serve all territories, not just capital cities. She also called for state aid to be revised, as the current legal framework was "too cumbersome."

Josef Schneider, Chairman of the European Passengers' Federation saw a need for improved passenger information and said "Competition is good, but co-ordination is also needed to guarantee passengers' rights."

It was announced that the French government was willing to see a dozen domestic night train services by 2030, while the European Commission would publish new Public Service Obligation guidelines this year to facilitate the combination of state aid and open access.

Participants stressed environmental the value of night trains in reducing the carbon footprint; the need for a successful night service to attract both business and leisure users; and the case for international co-ordination in traffic management.

There was also considerable debate about how to obtain new rolling stock, and the merits of new builds or adaption of older stock.

Some of those present stressed how well-used existing night trains were and it was stated that many airlines knew that they would have to focus on long-haul routes in the future.

BACK-ON-TRACK BELGIUM ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Thursday March 24th sees the Back-on-Track Belgium annual conference, postponed from its original 2021 date. It will focus on how Brussels can again become a night train hub, with keynote speakers, but also consider the wider night train issues.

Places are already being taken, and you can book via the website <https://www.backontrackbelgium.be> while it is also possible to join the event virtually. It runs from 09.00 to 17.00 (CET) at Conference Center L42, rue de la Loi, Wetstraat, Brussels.

EUROSTAR RECOVERING – THE EUROPEAN SLEEPER STARTING SOON?

The omicron covid variant in the winter had a negative effect on travel in Great Britain and on Eurostar, but numbers of journeys are increasing again now and Eurostar is again operating up to 11 trains each way between London and Paris and 4 to and from Brussels (2 of these continuing to/from Amsterdam). It is possible, of course, to obtain up-to-date information through www.eurostar.com.

When The European Sleeper starts it should be possible to leave London at 15.04 for Brussels, have a drink or a light meal in one of the brasseries near the South Station and catch the 19.22 Sleeper. This will bring you to Berlin at 05.52 the following morning, Dresden at 07.49 and Prague at 10.24.

This Sleeper will operate, initially, Monday, Wednesday and Friday; while the reverse working on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday will bring you back to Brussels at 09.54. On the present Eurostar timetable, you will have to wait till 15.56 for a train back to London; but let us hope that the frequency of Brussels – London Eurostars will gradually increase to the levels of 2019.

Of course, as The European Sleeper also calls at Rotterdam Centraal some enterprising travellers may want to use the metro between Rotterdam and Hoek van Holland and the daytime ferry to Harwich!

We do not yet have a start date for The European Sleeper, but it will be announced on the company's website <https://www.europeansleeper.eu> – where you can also register to be on their mailing list.

TRAIN-TRAM – ALSO NOW IN THE UK!

Trevor Garrod writes –

My first ride on a train-tram was in Karlsruhe some fifteen years ago, followed a few years later by one in Mulhouse.

My first ride on one in England was on January 28th when, following a night in Sheffield, I took the train-tram to Rotherham (pronounced “Rotherrum.”)

This industrial town is 5 miles (8km) northeast of the city centre of Sheffield and in 2018 the city trams started to operate on conventional track from Meadowhall Junction to Rotherham Central station and then on a single track for a further mile to Parkgate.

It is possible to catch a regional diesel train from Sheffield station to Rotherham Central. The tram (officially Supertram) is the only electric public transport system serving this city of nearly 600,000 people, which is reached by modern Inter City trains from London St Pancras and so is only one change of train away from Paris and Brussels.

I caught the Rotherham service at the tram stop outside Sheffield Cathedral using a 1-day ticket at £4.40 which was promptly inspected by the conductor. (Yes, the city trams have conductors as well as drivers).

After proceeding slowly down the hill through the city centre we soon reached reserved track and gathered speed, calling at stops such as Arena/Olympic Legacy Park and Valley Centertainment in a post-industrial landscape being regenerated.

After Meadowhall South (near a modern shopping centre), the tram turned on to a new chord and, effectively, became an electric train for the rest of its journey. The vehicle halted for 20 seconds as the driver flicked a switch in his cab to change from tram to train mode. We passed the Magna Science Adventure Centre, built on the site of a former steel mill, and presently a football stadium before reaching Rotherham Central station.

This station was built in 1987 on the site of one closed in 1966. It only has two platforms. The southern end of each is on a lower level, for use by the trams. Passengers then walk up a short ramp to the higher level platform used by conventional trains. (It reminded me somewhat of Laan van NOI station in The Hague, where heavy and light rail co-exist on one platform.) Thus it is possible to change from the tram to a regional train to Doncaster, Leeds and beyond.

I continued for a further mile to the Parkgate terminus where there is a retail park and a small park-and-ride facility. There could well be extensions to the system later this decade

EPF EVENTS – AND MORE INFORMATION

The European Passengers' Federation is due to hold its Annual General Meeting at Amersfoort in the Netherlands on Saturday April; 2nd. Details can be found on the website www.epf.eu – where you can also find out about the EPF Conference due to take place in Copenhagen on June 10th/11th. Via the website you can also sign up to receive a monthly newsletter which is useful to find out about the EU projects in which EPF is engaged.

The European Rail Timetable has paper and digital editions and is the best way to find out about international services. You can order it via the website www.europeanrailtimetable.eu and also subscribe to its Friday Flyer which gives very useful updates.

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 and from the Continent and indeed in some cases further afield. They are all on the website www.aera.co.uk – as is also a link to The Man in Seat 61

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 or last-minute changes. Feedback is welcome to tgarrrod21@gmail.com.

Lowestoft, UK, March 1st 2021

Next issue due June 1st.