

BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL 21

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

Thank you to everyone who has provided information.

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BACK ON TRACK CONFERENCE IN BRUSSELS MARCH 24TH

There was an excited buzz in the air as a hundred activists and professionals gathered in Conference Centre L42 in Brussels at the end of March, welcomed by M. Georges Gilkinet, Belgian Federal Minister of Mobility; while other participants also participated by video link. The day was filled with presentations and debate on the potential of Brussels to become a night train hub but also the wider issues facing international night trains and the expansion of the network.

You can hear the presentations by logging on to www.backontrack.eu/meetings-and-activities . Trevor Garrod (who was there) has also produced a 2-page summary . For a copy, e-mail him at tgarrod21@gmail.com .

EUROPEAN PASSENGERS' FEDERATION CAMPAIGNS AND ANNIVERSARY

EPF is due to hold its annual conference in Copenhagen on June 10th/11th , hosted by the Danish statutory body Passagerpulsen, and this will be reported on its website www.epf.eu .

The Federation has also been working with the Community of European Railways and eight other bodies on a study of International Passenger Rail Services. Its latest progress report appeared on June 1st and has been sent to the European Parliament and European Council.

A joint statement by CER and EPF recognises the need to prioritise improvements in passengers' overall journey experiences, including addressing infrastructure constraints; better quality cross-border journeys including easier ticketing and information to attract more potential passengers; and "a better integrated regulatory framework to facilitate international service provision." Also required are enhanced interoperability and coherent timetabling; completing missing links and removal of bottlenecks; and better support for passengers during disruption and delays.

EPF was formed in Ghent in October 2002 by a dozen voluntary and statutory bodies from 9 European countries. It has now grown to three times that size and in October this year will be marking its 20th anniversary. There will be more details about this in the next Bulletin of European Rail Travel, due out on September 1st.

WORK OF THE EUROPEAN RAIL CAMPAIGN (UK)

"Save Time... Go Further... Travel by night" is the title of a new illustrated leaflet by this association. It is obtainable in paper version from Trevor Garrod but can also be viewed and downloaded from the website www.eurorailcampaig-nuk.org.

The leaflet is aimed at a general audience and sets out the advantages of night trains as part of a 24/7 international network, lists a selection of all-year and seasonal services and unfolds to give a large map of overnight services in western and central Europe. It also includes Great Britain, where the sleepers from London to Scotland and the South West are shown.

Important daytime feeder and connecting links – such as Eurostar or Nice to Genoa are also shown. This, if you are planning a rail alternative to a flight from, say, London to Vienna or Zurich to Naples, this leaflet is a good start.

ERC(UK) has also been pursuing the case for Eurostars to resume calls at Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International, which were suspended

during the pandemic. The operator has increased services between London and Paris and, to a slightly lesser extent, London, Brussels and Amsterdam, as demand has built up. Rail is the fastest and easiest means of transport between Kent, in South East England, and the Near Continent, and of course the most environmentally friendly.

ERC(UK) Secretary Ian McDonald has been corresponding with Eurostar, the Secretary of State for Transport, local Members of Parliament and sympathetic Kent County Councillors on this matter.

RAIL DEVELOPMENTS AROUND EUROPE

London Crossrail has opened and is named the Elizabeth Line. It is a 42-km east/west tunnel under the city, and can be used by main line trains – similar to the RER in Paris. Initially trains are operating between Abbey Wood, in the south east of the city, to Paddington but they will also extend in due course to Shenfield (on the main line towards Norwich), Reading (on the main line to Wales and the West) and Heathrow Airport.

A very interesting article in the *Basler Zeitung* on May 25th (thank you to Juerg Tschopp for sending it) speculates whether it will be the last of its kind, since home working or hybrid working has, since March 2020, reduced the numbers of people travelling into London.

The article also quotes people in the English provinces criticising lack of expenditure on transport infrastructure outside the South East.

When the Elizabeth Line was being planned, it was expected to carry 250 million passengers a year by 2026, whereas now it is expected to carry a maximum of 170 million.

Nevertheless, if that means 170 million fewer journeys using the internal combustion engine, Europe's newest railway is still very welcome!

Paris – Berlin High Speed Trains?

A joint project by SNCF and Deutsche Bahn is for a high speed train between Paris and Berlin via Frankfurt by the end of 2023, taking 7 hours.

Initially it would be by ICE once a day; and then a second daily train using a TGV.

Jean-Pierre Farandou, CEO of SNCF, stated, “People are accepting longer and longer journeys. There really are people willing to spend 5, 6 or 7 hours on a train.”

Nightjet Berlin – Graz

From June 12th, the Berlin – Vienna night train is due to be extended to and from Graz. That is welcome news.

However, some other new night train projects are facing problems, for example with rolling stock. Regiojet is concentrating its stock this summer on the sleeper trains to and from the Adriatic. There are therefore delays in launching The European Sleeper between Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin and Prague.

Trams back in Odense after 70 years is the good news from Denmark. The Danish city of 180,000 closed its tram network in 1952 but on May 28th opened a brand new 14.4km line between Tarup and Hjallere, using Stadler trams, and a further 7.8km extension is planned.

Flixtrain, a “no frills” operator, is being extended to Basel (Badischer Bahnhof) on June 23rd, with a service to/from Berlin. Passengers can also change at Heidelberg into a Flixbus to Paris. This will be cheaper than going all the way from Basel to Paris by train, but the overall journey time will be longer.

CO2 EMISSIONS AND THE ROLE OF RAIL

The Back-on-Track network has been considering this issue since the very successful Brussels conference reported above, and drafted a detailed study on the scope for modal shift from, in particular, air to rail, in reducing carbon emissions. In particular this means greater use of night trains, which would be possible on a lesser timescale than would be needed to build new infrastructure.

The draft is currently being checked and fine-tuned and Back-on-Track will approach other NGOs for their support. It is then planned to publish the study in the early autumn, possibly during European Mobility Week.

STAY GROUNDED GATHERING IN LILLE IN OCTOBER

The Stay Grounded network, which seeks to reduce dependency on aviation, will hold an Action Conference in Lille between the afternoon of October 5th and October 9th. There will be many hybrid sessions and the final day is intended to be a European Network Meeting.

The local hosts will be the campaign “Non a l’agrandissement de l’Aeroport de Lille” which is fighting the proposed expansion of Lille Lesquin Airport.

Further information will be in our next bulletin – but meanwhile you can obtain updates from ines@stay-grounded.org

TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

In issue 19 of this Bulletin we reported the experiences of a British group making a trip from London to Clermont Ferrand and Montpellier in October, as it became possible to do so again.

In early May this year, a second group made nearly the same trip, and this time only had to show evidence of covid vaccination in addition to the obvious tickets and passports. It was still necessary to wear face masks on public transport in France (though that has now ceased to be the case) and it was no longer necessary to check in quite as early.

Engineering work on the Cevennes line between Clermont Ferrand and Nimes meant that the group (who were not keen on a lengthy replacement bus journey) opted to catch the one train a day from Clermont Ferrand to Beziers. We did not realise it was not actually a through train! The line southwards from Clermont Ferrand is diesel operated and so a modern diesel multiple unit took us to the rural junction of Neussargues. There we had to change to an electric multiple unit which had brought passengers from the Midi who would change into our diesel to continue into the Auvergne!

The Causses line south of Neussargues has been electrified since the early 1930s, when it also carried express trains from Paris. The journey through “la

France profonde” (“deep France”) on a sunny spring day was a memorable experience. In the longer term, however, perhaps electrifying the gap or employing bimode trains would be a way forward?

The British party were also impressed by Montpellier and its region; and its modern tram network. Several also went by bus to the mediaeval town of Aigues Mortes. (Yes, it has a train service, but very infrequent at present). It was interesting to learn that the rural buses do not go into the centre of Montpellier. They leave from Place de France tram stop in the eastern suburbs.

The party returned north by TGV via Nimes and Valence – again a remarkable travel experience.

KEEP INFORMED

The European Rail Timetable is due to publish its summer edition on June 9th. It is the best way to obtain comprehensive information about services (in the UK as well as on the Continent). You can order it via the website www.europeanrailtimetable.eu and also subscribe to its *Friday Flyer* which provides very useful updates.

The Association of European Rail Agents brings together specialist travel agents and tour operators 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 very highly regarded 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 tgarrod21@gmail.com

Lowestoft, UK June 5th 2022.

Next issue due September 1st.

