

BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL nr 24

Welcome to the Spring 2023 edition of the bulletin compiled by Trevor Garrod to support campaigners for improved rail services throughout Europe.

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THE EUROPEAN SLEEPER WILL DEPART ON 25 MAY

At 22.56 on Thursday May 25th this important new service is due to leave Berlin Hauptbahnhof for Brussels Midi via Bad Bentheim, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Antwerp, reaching the Belgian capital at 09.27. The train will make this journey three times a week, on

Thursday, Sundays and Tuesday. It will leave Brussels at 19.22 on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and arrive in Berlin at 06.48.

This service is innovative, as it is run by a co-operative founded by Elmer van Buuren and Chris Engelsman, who started with over 350 small investors from various European countries and beyond.

Fares will range from 49 euro in a seating car, 79 euro in the couchette and 159 euro in a sleeping car and tickets can be booked via the website <https://www.europeansleeper.eu/en>.

British media have written about a “London – Berlin service”. Yes, it has the potential to be, but with a change in Brussels. At the eastern end of the route, it will be possible to change to a train to Dresden and Prague, but ultimately the European Sleeper is due to be extended to and from those cities.

For period up to 22nd June engineering work in Germany is likely to affect the timings.

CONNECTING EUROPE – TEN CROSS-BORDER PILOTS

The European Sleeper is one of ten services listed by the European Commission in an announcement on 31 January as pilots for better international connections.

The Commission has taken projects from the rail sector and relevant authorities in many European countries and its Action Plan will include measures to tackle any obstacles in the way.

The pilot projects, in order of starting date, are

1. Hungarian Ministry of Transport – new services to Austria and western Romania.

2. Germany - Denmark – Sweden corridor in co-operation with SJ, DSB, DB, CD, Snälltåget and Flixbus. Includes new night train Stockholm – Berlin and day train Hamburg – Gothenburg; new train Prague – Copenhagen and new train Leipzig - Stockholm.
3. Midnight trains new night service Paris – Milan – Venice.
4. Flixbus new service Munich – Zurich
5. WESTbahn new service Munich – Vienna – Budapest (Extension of existing service)
- 6 NS enhancement of London – Amsterdam service in co-operation with Eurostar.
7. European Sleeper (see previous article)
8. FSI/DB new services : Rome – Munich and Milan – Munich
9. ILSA new services Lisbon – A Coruna and Lisbon – Madrid.
10. FGC new service connecting Catalonia with South of France.

EPF ANNIVERSARY

The European Passengers' Federation marked its 20th anniversary with a reception in the European Parliament in Brussels on January 13th when 35 representatives gathered from EPF affiliated organisations in seven countries, the railway industry, political decision-makers and other stakeholders.

Presentations were given by four guest speakers, when tribute was paid to the work of EPF and the need was recognised for a strong international voice for public transport users.

It was appropriate that earlier that day EPF representatives from France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK had had a

90-minute meeting with high-level executives of the operators Eurostar and Thalys, now in the process of merging.

The Brussels event was jointly sponsored by two of EPF's members: PROBAHN and the European Rail Campaign (UK).

You can read a full account of the event on the website www.epf.eu.

EUROSTAR – PRESENT AND FUTURE

There is clear demand to Eurostar services between London and the Continent, but the level of service has not yet reached the level of 2019.

The Association of European Rail Agents and European Rail Campaign (UK) are among stakeholders who have written to the Government. The recent AERA letter identifies the cost in time and money of enhanced border checks and high access charges as areas in which the Government could take action.

The European Rail Campaign (UK) was approached by leading transport journalist Christian Wolmar as part of his research for an article on the problems which Eurostar was having in running a full service, and the article was published in issue 976 of RAIL magazine.

At the EPF high-level meeting with Eurostar on January 13th it was stated that Eurostar would concentrate on its core services between London, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam and Cologne/Dusseldorf at this stage and not introduce any new routes or, at present, serve any additional stations. They were

open to working with other operators, however, provided that these accepted their system.

EPF also raised the question of help or compensation for passengers when things went wrong, and were subsequently given links to mediation services,

On January 24th the new image of Eurostar was unveiled at Brussels Midi, when it was stated that dealing with station capacity issues would be the new merged company's main priority. The postponement of the new EU Entry/Exit system until 2024 would also ease the problems. It was stated that leisure traffic was now back to pre-pandemic levels but business travel was only 80%-85% what it had been in 2019.

Meanwhile, Eurostar have also announced that they will now again accept bicycles on their London – Paris trains. This is another small move towards normality.

BACK - ON – TRACK: CAMPAIGNING AND PUBLICITY

What do Palermo, Varna, Lviv, Inverness, Narvik and Kemijarvi have in common?

They all appear on a new map, *Sleeping across Europe*, produced by Back-on-Track member Juri Maier and now available via the website <https://back-on-track.eu/night-train-map>.

The map is in a diagrammatic format and can be printed off. If you wish to display it – such as in a workplace – please credit (CC-BY-NC) Juri Maier/Back-on-Track.eu . If you want to use it for commercial purposes , please contact Juri , on backontrack@jurimaier.de

“Enough is enough” is the message of Back-on-Track’s British affiliate, European Rail Campaign (UK), whose Chairman Nigel Perkins has written to the current Secretary of State for Transport, Mark Harper. With the sub-heading “Has Eurostar been strangled?” ERC(UK) calls upon Mr Harper to “at the very least” get access charges reduced; draw up and finance a plan to expand St Pancras International; introduce random baggage screening instead of forcing all passengers to have their luggage screened before departure; and “ideally” convince the UK Government to have a softer Brexit by joining the European Economic Area.

You can read the full letter on the website <https://back-on-track.eu> – where you can also find the press statement *Sustainable travel to Kiruna?*

The iron ore centre of Kiruna is Sweden’s northernmost city, where the European Commission held its January meeting during the Swedish Presidency..

The announcement of the Commission did not mention how the members travelled to Kiruna; but the Back-on-Track statement says, “The Swedish government provides operating support to run climate-friendly night trains up there every night from Stockholm. The train is comfortable and equipped with a dining car, bathroom facilities etc. So you can start a meeting in the morning at 09.30 fresh and well rested.”

Finally, Back-on-Track is also discussing with the Bureau européen des unions des consommateurs a joint project with the working title “Night trains – how consumer-friendly are they?” We hope to report more in a future edition of this bulletin.

SEAMLESS STENA – STEADY AS SHE GOES.. In previous issues of this bulletin we have commented on the position of foot passengers using Stena's service between Harwich and Hoek van Holland. Where once it was easy to buy a rail/sea/rail ticket, the conversion of the Hoek line to light rapid transit , making it part of the Greater Rotterdam metro system, has made the ticketing more fragmented. _

The Association of European Rail Agents has recently been in correspondence with Stena Line concerning onward travel information for foot passengers arriving at Hoek van Holland Haven.

The company replied that they have been in discussion with RET, who operate the light rail service from Hoek van Holland to the Rotterdam conurbation. They considered producing a brochure but decided in the end that a new website would be better.

You can now log on to

<https://www.ret.nl/home/reizen/stenaline.html>

This site tells you how to buy tickets and recommends purchasing these in advance to avoid queues at the (one) ticket vending machine on the (often windy) platform at Hoek van Holland Haven. Stena have also asked that pre-departure e-mails sent to customers shortly before they leave should contain this link.

CHEAP FARES IN GERMANY

Agreement has now been reached – subject to final European Commission approval – for the Deutschlandticket. This will go on sale from April 3rd and be valid from May 1st.

It will be a flat-rate public transport card for regional trains and other public transport and cost 49 euro a month. It builds on the

success of last year's 9 euro ticket and, like that ticket, will not be valid on international or ICE trains.

Special corporate deals are being introduced to enable businesses to purchase these tickets for their employees. They receive 5% discount on condition that they then offer 25% off the price when making the tickets available to their staff.

ANOTHER ANNIVERSARY: In March 1873 Thomas Cook published the first ever edition of the Cook's Continental Timetable & Tourist's Handbook. Thomas Cook produced their last edition in August 2013.

John Potter, the current Editor in Chief, with the help of a team of former Thomas Cook employees, published the first rebranded European Rail Timetable in March 2014.

You will soon be able to purchase the 150th birthday edition. It will be available digitally, but you can also order the spring 2023 printed edition, available from March 2nd, at £24.99 plus postage and packaging.

Log on to www.europeanrailtimetable.eu

EPF MEETING AND CONFERENCE COMING UP

The European Passengers' Federation will hold its Annual General Meeting on Saturday April 22nd in Dusseldorf and its annual conference in Barcelona on June 2nd/3rd. Bookings for the conference are already being taken. Log on to www.epf.eu

MORE USEFUL NEWS AND INFORMATION

The website of the European Rail Timetable (www.europeanrailtimetable.eu) also provides you with news of rail passenger services in European and indeed further afield. For

example, the current editorial tells you about work by Renfe to train its staff in readiness for Spanish trains working though to Lyon and Marseille; reinstatement of a media distancia service between Granada and Almeria and the introduction of the operator Iryo of a Madrid – Valencia train on December 16th and another on February 10th. _

You can also subscribe, free of charge, to the ERT's *Friday Flyer*, which lands in your inbox every week and gives you the very latest news as well as details of maps and other publications which you can order from them.

The website www.eurorailcampaignuk.org does not just inform you of the actions of the European Rail Campaign (UK) and the travel experiences of its members. It also contains rail maps of all European countries and practical information about each network and its services and links to enable you to find out more.

Trevor Garrod thanks all colleagues who have provided news for this bulletin. He has taken all steps to provide up-to-date and accurate information but cannot be held responsible for any errors or changes.

Bulletin 25 is due to appear at the beginning of June.

23/02/23

