

BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL 30

WELCOME to the autumn 2024 issue of the bulletin issued by Trevor Garrod to support campaigners for better rail services throughout Europe. You may forward it to other interested people.

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EUROSTAR UPDATES

Have you travelled by Eurostar between London, Paris and Brussels in recent months?

If so, please complete the short questionnaire on the European Passengers' Federation website (www.epf.eu) on the specific journey(s) you make. This will help EPF to produce a report in preparation for its next high-level meeting with the operator in January. You can also access and complete the same questionnaire on the website of the Association of European Rail Agents www.aera.co.uk, which is an associate member of EPF.

Journeys by Eurostar from the UK to the European Union will undergo some changes from November 10th for non-EU citizens when the European Entry/Exit System (EES) comes into force. It requires more staff to be employed at London St Pancras, the Eurotunnel Terminal and the Port of Dover for additional controls and extra kiosks are being provided. The British Government is paying for these and has also promised an

information campaign in advance. We are advised that additional staff will also be on hand to direct passengers to the right kiosks.

Investment in Amsterdam Centraal will make things easier for Eurostar passengers to London in 2025. Because of building work in Amsterdam, Eurostar trains are starting from Brussels for the remainder of 2024 and passengers from Amsterdam and Rotterdam are required to use domestic services to reach the Belgian capital. The building work should be complete by the end of the year and there will then be capacity for more than twice as many London-bound passengers from Amsterdam. The Dutch Government is paying compensation to Eurostar for this temporary inconvenience.

The British charity Campaign for Better Transport has also launched a survey of passengers travelling by Eurostar. You can access it by their website <https://bettertransport.org.uk>

SEAMLESS TRAVEL VIA NEWHAVEN AND DIEPPE

Traditionally the cheapest rail/sea/rail journey between London and Paris was via Newhaven and Dieppe, but over the years it became less attractive for foot passengers as these and other ferry operators concentrated more on vehicular traffic. This sometimes also meant ferry berths were moved to less convenient places for pedestrians or harbour stations were closed.

It was therefore encouraging to learn that this summer, following suggestions by pro-rail campaigners in Sussex, the French departement authority agreed to subsidise a bus link between Dieppe ferry terminal (served by DFDS) and Dieppe Ville rail station. The bus is provided by Grisel, connects with the ferry arrivals and departures and takes 15-20 minutes for the journey.

It costs 3 euro for the trip and passengers are advised only to bring luggage that they can carry. We hope this link will be well enough promoted and used for it to continue beyond the trial period due to end on December 31st.

At Newhaven the ferry berth is very conveniently sited for Newhaven Town station.

A group of members of Railfuture and the European Rail Campaign (UK) are going to try this link on a trip from London to Rouen shortly, and we shall report their experiences in our winter bulletin.

EUROPEAN SLEEPER NEWS

From December the Amsterdam – Vienna night train is due to be diverted via Bad Bentheim instead of running via Arnhem and Emmerich. This is because that route is too

congested and because there is engineering work between Oberhausen and Emmerich till the end of May 2026 to add a third track.

Meanwhile, the European Sleeper plans to start operating its second service, between Amsterdam and Venice in the New Year and a restaurant car on its Brussels – Prague service this autumn.

Meanwhile, you can still order the new leaflet “Save time – go further – travel by night train” published in May by the European Rail Campaign (UK). 60% of the print run has been distributed, but that still leaves 40% in stock. The leaflet is available free of charge on paper from Simon Hope, 4 Doughty’s Cottages, Golden Dog Lane, Norwich, Norwich, NR3 1BS; or as a pdf from tgarrod21@gmail.com .

TRAIN & PLANE - WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK

Have you, or someone you know – recently caught a train (or light rail service) to or from an airport at the start or end of a flight?

If so the European Rail Campaign (UK) would like to hear from you, with good or bad experiences.

Let us know the name of the airport, original & destination of your journey and date of the journey.

How easy was it to get between terminal and platform?

How easy was it to buy a train or light rail ticket?

Could your experiences be improved? If so how?

Please e-mail your experiences, by October 20th, to ERC(UK) committee member Ian Ring (rebianring@gmail.com).

GRONINGEN REVISITED

This item is a shortened version of the latest Traveller’s Tale contributed to the ERC(UK) website by Trevor Garrod.

“30 years ago I cycled from Amsterdam to Groningen, including taking my bicycle by ferry across the IJsselmeer from Enkhuizen to Urk. This year I made my second visit to Groningen – this time by train. When I arrived at passport control at Hoek van Holland, the official asked me where I was heading, and when I told her ‘Groningen’ she said, ‘We don’t get many visitors going there.’

Groningen and two other provincial capitals of the north – Leeuwarden and Assen – have InterCity trains from Rotterdam and The Hague on a route that was electrified in 1952, The completion of the Hansa Line across the Flevoland polders has also brought them closer to Amsterdam.

I was now visiting the centre of Groningen as a pedestrian rather than a cyclist, which was something of an eye-opener. There seemed to be at least as many bicycles as in 1994, but there were also now buses run on batteries or hydrogen.

Groningen's central station is a magnificent gothic-style edifice from the 1890s, while the main station of its smaller neighbour Leeuwarden (which I also visited for a day) is also a handsome building. In between the platforms at Groningen builders are excavating to create an underpass which will be capped by a piazza and hoardings tell you they are "making the Netherlands' most beautiful station even more beautiful."

This northern Dutch region has seven local lines operated by Arriva diesel multiple units and I used four of these services. I dutifully entered all such journeys on my Interrail pass but not all the trains had a conductor and few stations had a ticket barrier.

One of these lines serving a string of villages and small towns to the north of Groningen was extended in the 1990s to Eemshaven, a modern port at the mouth of the river Ems. No one lives there as far as I could tell, but a lot of people work there and freight trains run into the complex. Most passenger trains still terminate at Roodeschool, but I used one that runs through to the port, which also has a ferry to the German island of Borkum. The train terminates at a simple platform opened in 2018, sheltered from the sea breezes by a grassy dyke.

In contrast, south east of Groningen, towards the German border, is a curious area of swamps and small lakes that used to be important for peat extraction but is now peppered by wind turbines and solar panels or, further on, arable and dairy farms on reclaimed land.

This area gained an extra passenger service in 2013 on the freight-only line as far as Veendam, a quiet neat town of some 25,000 which had lost its passenger trains as long ago as 1953. Close to its smart new platform is a large bus station, while the old rail station is used by a heritage line called STAR. (www.stadskanaalrail.nl)

After coffee and apple cake in the station cafe, I exchanged my internet receipt (having booked my journey on line in the UK) for a ticket for a return trip to Stadskanaal (40 minutes each way) provided by a German steam locomotive from the 1940s, four carriages and 2 waggons, one of which was for bicycles.

Stadskanaal is a linear settlement along a canal, built in typical Dutch style and its station is the headquarters of the heritage railway which has one employee, the remainder of the staff being volunteers. Two of them showed me their museum and said that Arriva had shown interest in extending its Groningen – Veendam diesel trains to Stadskanaal and even beyond.

As it is, STAR owns the track, but if its founder members had not acted swiftly in the 1990s (after the freight south of Veendam had ended), the tracks would have been lifted and a housing estate built there. In fact, my cycling holiday in 1994 had taken me along the low Hondsrug ridge south of Groningen and across to Germany through Stadskanaal and I recall seeing rusty tracks largely covered in weeds and no sign of life. The resurrection of at least some of this line, and hopefully part of the national network, has been partly funded by the EU and other public bodies.

WUNDERLINIE GETS CLOSER

Our last issue reported on work to repair the bridge carrying the Groningen – Bremen line over the River Ems. At the end of July the local media reported on the delivery of a key section of the new bridge to plug the gap, and confirmed that this potentially very useful cross-border line should reopen in its entirety by the summer of next year.

It will be interesting to learn what sort of trains will use it, as it is currently only electrified in Germany. Perhaps bimodes?

RAILWAY 200

In the last issue of this bulletin Rail 200 – now “Railway 200” next year’s events to mark the 200th anniversary of the world’s first public passenger railway: the Stockton & Darlington in North East England in September 1825.

A website has now been set up to give you more information and invite your input: www.railway200.co.uk

Already the European Passengers’ Federation has decided to mark the anniversary by holding its annual conference in the UK for the first time since 2008. The conference will take place on June 14th and 15th in Swindon, which developed as an important railway centre on the Great Western Railway from London to the West Country and South Wales and has fast electric Inter City trains from London.

For more information as arrangements take shape, log on to www.epf.eu

HIGH SPEED RAIL IN SPAIN

Passenger numbers on Spanish high speed trains increased by 37% in 2023.

Rail now has a market share of over 85% compared to air on almost all corridors, linking Madrid to Alicante, Seville and Valencia. Business on the key Barcelona – Madrid line increased last year by 34.6 %

INTERNATIONAL TICKETING FOR SWITZERLAND

Of course, it is not just speed that enables rail to compete effectively with air. A customer-friendly ticketing system is also important. Our colleague Juerg Tschopp from ProBahn Schweiz has sent an article from the *Basler Zeitung* of 26th August setting out issues that need to be addressed. For example, Swiss customers can buy a train ticket to London but not to anywhere else in Great Britain. Interfaces are needed between the ticketing systems of different countries. The fact that some countries require a reservation for Inter City tickets and others do not is a challenge if a passenger needs to change his or her plans, especially if the ticketing is on line. Agreements for on line refunds for tickets to France, Italy and Austria, bought in Switzerland did come into force in August 2024. An SBB spokesperson said that they were working on similar arrangements for other countries, with Germany being the next priority.

EUROPEAN PASSENGERS' FEDERATION DATES

EPF will hold its next General Meeting in Ljubljana, Slovenia on Saturday September 28th. Participation by zoom will also be possible.

The following General Meeting will be in Brussels on Saturday January 18th.

Remember the sources of useful information such as The Man in seat 61

(<https://www.seat61.com>) The European Rail Timetable

(www.europeanrailtimetable.eu) as well as others mentioned earlier in this bulletin.

Trevor Garrod thanks all colleagues for this input. He has taken all reasonable steps to provide up-to-date information but cannot be held responsible for any errors or changes.

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Next issue due early

December.