

# BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL

Welcome to the bulletin issued once a quarter by Trevor Garrod to pro-rail campaigners throughout Europe. We hope you will find it helpful and you are welcome to pass it on to others.

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UK TO REJOIN ERASMUS As one of the 48.1% who voted in 2016 to remain in the European Union I make no apology for starting with this item. The British government and the EU have agreed that from 2027 the UK will rejoin the Erasmus+ scheme which helps students, trainees, school pupils, adult learners, staff and youth workers to travel to other European countries for reasons other than holidays.

This does not mean the UK becomes an EU member again, but it does encourage British and EU citizens to spend periods in each other's countries – and of course there are opportunities for the rail industry and other sustainable modes to encourage them to do so.

## BACK-ON-TRACK MOVES FORWARD

The network Back-on-Track held its first European annual general meeting as a registered "association sans but lucratif" (Non-profit association) on November 4<sup>th</sup> and a month later elected a board of five - with Juri Maier as Chairman, Peter Baeyens as Treasurer, Giovanni Antoniazzi, Elizabeth and Poul Kattler as board members. The new organisation has nine member associations, in Germany, Belgium, France, Switzerland, the UK, Denmark, Czechia, Italy and Spain. In addition there are individuals and small groups elsewhere.

You can find out more on <https://www.back-on-track.eu>. There will continue to be specialist groups and an on-line co-ordination meeting each month, at which all active members will be welcome.

Back-on-Track Europe has developed dialogue with decision-makers at EU level in recent years but its members also continue grass-roots work. Thus on December 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> pyjama parties took place on stations in Berlin, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Vienna, Paris, Lisbon, Basel, Helsinki, Umea, Fungalvas, Malmo, Amsterdam and Strasbourg.

## MIXED NEWS ON NIGHT TRAINS

The pyjama parties and other demonstrations and reinforced the basic demands of Back-on-Track for an end of night train cancellations; and the creation of a fully connected night train network with affordable fares. Often Back-on-Track supporters were joined by activists from Stay Grounded, advocating a rail alternative to airline expansion, and in Switzerland they were joined by colleagues from Verkehrsclub der Schweiz, Back-on-Track Switzerland and umverkehR.

There have been particular protests at the decision of the Swiss Government (by a narrow majority) to withdraw funding from the Basel – Malmö night train due to be launched shortly, and for which bookings were already being taken.

We referred in the last issue of this bulletin about the withdrawal of the OeBB night train to Paris. However The European Sleeper is coming to the rescue with its own Paris – Berlin service from 26<sup>th</sup> March; and from 18<sup>th</sup> June it will also offer a service of trains from Brussels and Amsterdam, combining in western Germany to head south to Berne and Milan. Back-on-Track has just launched a newsletter, *Track Record*, which will give you detailed up-to-date information on these ups and downs. Subscribe to it on <https://www.back-on-track.eu/newsletter>.

EUROPEAN RAIL CAMPAIGN (UK), which is an associate member of Back-on-track and full member of the European Passengers' Federation, has been pursuing a number of issues, including the case for some Channel Tunnel trains to serve at least one station in Kent (i.e. Ashford or Ebbsfleet International). If Eurostar are not willing to do this, there is at least one alternative, since by 2030 at least one new operator is making serious plans to run through the Channel Tunnel.

ERC(UK) is also in close contact with the group TransManche Metro who are discussing with various bodies options such as an express coach between key towns in Kent in southeast England and Hauts de France or the Belgian province of West Flanders.

The long-term future of the Newhaven- Dieppe ferry may be affected by a court action in France which is not yet resolved; but in the meantime agreement has been reached between the ferry operator and at least some public transport operators in Sussex to promote each other's services.

#### EUROPEAN PASSENGERS' FEDERATION

EPF has a high-level discussion with Eurostar each January. The next one is on January 16<sup>th</sup> in Brussels; and EPF colleagues holding their General Meeting in the city the following day will be keen to hear a report of that discussion.

EPF will then hold its Annual General Meeting on Switzerland on April 18<sup>th</sup> and its Annual Conference in Maastricht on June 5/6 on the theme Modal shift to sustainable mobility. The

conference is open to all public transport users and members of EPF-affiliated organisations receive a discount. We expect to have full information in our next issue.

### GOOD NEWS ON THE GERMAN/POLISH BORDER

The German rail passengers' association PRO BAHN has welcomed the improvements in cross-border services with Poland from December 14<sup>th</sup>. There were 11 cross-border long-distance trains in each direction and there are now 17.

It means a train every two hours between Berlin and Warsaw; two new services in each direction between Leipzig, Wroclaw and Kakow via Horka and Wegliniec; and four in each direction between Berlin and Wroclaw. Previously there was only the weekend "Culture Train" between these two cities, supported by the provincial governments of Berlin and Brandenburg. That train is withdrawn as it has "served its purpose" according to the operator.

PRO BAHN and its Polish partner Kolej-depl have welcomed the initiative of the national, Polish operator PKP in reinstating or introducing these services; while expressing concern about the high access charges for them in Germany and the need to use non-electrified stretches between Berlin and Gorlitz and Dresden and Gorlitz.

PROBAHN's spokesman Ingo Koschenz, in a news release, commends the approach of the Poles, who "do not shelter behind feasibility studies but simply get on with the job!"

### NEW CROSS-BORDER CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

Jon Worth, who has campaigned for more than a decade for better cross-border links, has launch a new international campaigning body, the EUROPEAN RAIL PASSENGER UNION. You can join, or find out more, by e-mailing [info@erpu.eu](mailto:info@erpu.eu)

### EUROPEAN ENTRY SYSTEM (EES)

The European Rail Campaign(UK) is collecting evidence of the effects, positive or negative, of this new border control system which came into effect between Schengen and non-Schengen countries on October 12<sup>th</sup>. It affects travellers between the UK and EU countries, by all modes of transport.

We have received reports of very long queues at certain Continental airports; but also examples of passengers at certain others passing through with minimal delay; and a passenger by Eurostar (who was of reduced mobility and informed Eurostar in advance) having a very smooth journey. It appears that operators of some stations, airports and seaports are only gradually introducing the new controls.

Trevor Garrod would be keen to receive other such reports to [tgarrod21@gmail.com](mailto:tgarrod21@gmail.com) .

Meanwhile, the Association of European Rail Agents is seeking a meeting in January with the International Rail Group at the Department for Transport to discuss how the scheme is progressing.

### GROUP TRAVEL FROM LONDON TO MARSEILLE

Trevor Garrod has over three decades of experience in group travel by rail and is organising a group trip from London to Marseille by Eurostar and TGV from May 6<sup>th</sup> to May 13<sup>th</sup>.

If you are interested, please email Trevor Garrod ([tgarrod21@gmail.com](mailto:tgarrod21@gmail.com)) who will send out details after the festive season.

ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN RAIL AGENTS ([www.aera.co.uk](http://www.aera.co.uk)) brings together travel agents and tour organisers specialising in rail. Its website is undergoing a major overhaul and will be even easier to use in 2026.

### “DESTINATIONS EUROPE”

This is the title of a new illustrated leaflet being prepared by the European Rail Campaign (UK) .

It highlights destinations that are only one change of train from London – such as Lyon (via Lille); Luxembourg (via Brussels), Berlin (via Amsterdam) or Bordeaux (via Paris).

It also points to some places only two changes of train away – such as Warsaw or Hamburg. The leaflet will be available in the early spring, on paper or digitally, from Trevor Garrod.

OTHER INFORMATION:The man in seat 61 has a website full of useful information for rail travellers. The European Rail Timetable greatly deserves its high reputation. It is published on line but also twice a year in print.

Trevor Garrod has made every effort to provide up-to-date information but cannot be held responsible for any errors or changes. Next issue early March.

19/12/2025