

REPORT OF BACK-ON-TRACK CONFERENCE 2019

Around 150 rail users from eleven European countries filled the Kollegiensaal of the town hall at Hamburg-Altona on the evening of Friday October 18th for the conference of Back-on-Track on the theme “Nachtzüge statt Flüge” – “Night Trains instead of Flights”

The public session on Friday was followed by the internal conference on Saturday and Sunday in Werkstatt 3, attended by over 60 people. Conference languages were German and English.

Video recordings of most introductions are available on the Back-on-Track Youtube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9QWdzqU3PMS5pvZ206FYbQ>

Everyone was welcomed to the public session by Michael Jung of the local citizens’ initiative Prellbock and Joachim Holstein, and a message was read from Hamburg Finance Senator Dr Dressel. He saw the plans to relocate Altona station on to a smaller less convenient site as a “decisive weakening of the railway system”. Instead of this, “by strengthening the rail system, demanding more cross-border and night train connections between European centres, we are not only protecting the environment, we are also strengthening Europe and preventing entire regions from being neglected.”

Ellie Cijvat from Sweden then moderated a panel of experts and Edward Schofield translated. A report of the event is also available on <https://railguideeurope.com> Ms Karima Delli, Chair of the European Parliament’s Transport & Tourism Committee, had also planned to take part, but her train was severely delayed near Hannover. Instead, she had an informal discussion with a group of Back-on-Track colleagues after the conference.

Carl Suss of the student initiative Fridays for Future stated that he had travelled widely by air with his family but had not always been aware of the effects of his actions. Now he no longer went by plane and he called for fairer taxation of modes of transport and a better

information and ticketing system. He would welcome more train operators, to give more choice to customers. A pool of modern carriages could help smaller companies to enter the market.

Sven Pollauer, EU and International Affairs Manager of OeBB, thanked Back-on-Track for its engagement, which had made it possible to the company to expand its Nightjet network. In the near future they would also be serving Brussels and Amsterdam and were investing in new rolling stock. Already 1,400,000 passengers a year were using Nightjet, a 10% annual increase.

Patrik Nylander, representing the Swedish government, spoke of their aim of a 70% reduction in CO2 emissions by 2030. The coalition government had tasked Trafikverket with studying the costs and practicalities of a plan which included night trains to Continental cities, which should if possible pay for themselves. Reports back from the present consultation would be made in early 2020.

Nick Brooks of ALLRAIL (for new entrants) said that market opening would bring new business, reduce prices and help the environment. Some new entrants already ran night buses and so could see the demand for overnight travel. He called for competitive tenders, but these must be fair to all potential operators. Track access charges for overnight trains should be reduced and the same sales channels made available both to legacy and to new operators.

Bernhard Knierim of Bahn-fuer-alle said that it was difficult for DB to admit that it may have made a mistake by withdrawing sleeper trains and it was not possible to sleep on the company's overnight ICE and Inter City trains. He was sure that there was a demand for new night train routes in Germany, especially to Paris but also (using high speed lines) to Barcelona. A tax policy was needed which favoured environmentally friendly modes of transport.

In questions and discussion the following points were made:

- *Night trains are more expensive to operate than day trains, but there needs to be a fair framework for competition. The new operators want to bring more business to rail but the stock currently available is mostly quite old.

- *Trains must also become more reliable, but they do require a more complex infrastructure than planes.

- * Should air travel below a certain distance simply be banned? Or was it more important to stress the advantages and pleasures of rail travel?

- * Rail travel could be made easier through a unified ticketing system at EU level and more co-operation between operators. Indeed, there were five alliances in the airline industry but none in the rail sector. Such alliances made it possible to buy one ticket and change flights

between operators. Why not also be train? Currently a journey between Bonn and Lille is complicated when it is not possible to combine different operators' offers.

- * There was considerable support for rolling stock leasing, as happened in Great Britain and on certain routes in Sweden, where cross-border Public Service Obligations with Norway also existed. This could be a model for elsewhere.

- * A plea was also made to re-introduce more seasonal trains, which may not be at the highest speed but would have adequate luggage space and avoid too many changes.

- * Some overnight passengers valued having more individual space and a train could be marketed as a "rolling hotel". Indeed, the experience of the Caledonian Sleeper was relevant here. But what level of comfort was the state willing to subsidise?

- * It was pointed out that some independent booking platforms already existed to sell tickets, but operators must be prepared to provide their data.

- * arguments were put forward to make it easier to lease rolling stock, which would also encourage smaller private operators whose credit ratings were not as high as those of state operators.

- * Fragmentation of the rail industry was criticised by some, notably of DB where each part now had to make a profit.

- * Eastern Europe had had particular problems after 1989, with the rapid purchase of private cars, but there was evidence that younger people were now turning more to trains; and the EU financing of the standard gauge Rail Baltica was welcome. Within 20 years, there could be high speed international trains from Helsinki to Berlin or even Brussels.

Asked to predict how we might travel across Europe in 2040, speakers predicted faster trains covering longer distances, partly through the completion of major infrastructure projects; advances in sales and ticketing to encourage rail as a key element in door-to-door transport; all modes to be fossil-free and main road arteries electrified; but also an adjustment in people's expectations on how much and where they could and should travel.

Thanks were recorded to the speakers, moderator and translator and all who had contributed to the discussion.

Saturday morning focussed on the revival of European night trains, with contributions from many countries.

NETHERLANDS – Elmer van Buuren of TRAIN2EU explained that the introduction of an Amsterdam –Vienna night train in 2021 was based on the obligations of the Dutch main line

concession and would be an experiment for up to three years. There would be a maximum subsidy of 6.7m Euro and the train operators would have to deliver evidence of their results.

More market entry was expected in 2023-4 when an Amsterdam – Zurich night train was possible. Lack of rolling stock and little access to financing were barriers to future developments; but the Transport Ministry wanted to see two million extra passengers per year in international trains.

Research had been conducted into customers' willingness to use a sleeper and the findings showed privacy was the first deciding factor, followed by comfort, with price being the least important. No one was "a fan of early morning flights" and there was a potential for rail to gain 60-67% of market share. Business travellers were more likely to be regular customers than were leisure users.

SWEDEN – Lennart Lennefors of Trafikverket said that night trains were especially popular in winter. More passengers went overnight from Malmo to Stockholm than in the reverse direction until better marketing improved the balance. There was a desire by some passengers to reach Hamburg by 06.00 as they could then continue their journey by day train, while others would like to sleep longer. It was hoped to re-introduce a night service from Copenhagen to Hamburg and further south in 2022. The operators of the Snalltaget only bought couchettes – but do people who take overnight buses or low cost flights necessarily want a sleeper?

BELGIUM – Back-on-Track Belgium had collected 10,000 signatures on a petition and was sure that there was a demand from the large number of expatriates working or attending meetings in Brussels. It was pointed out that many British people would like to link into night trains at Brussels or Paris for their onward journey.

FRANCE – Nicolas Forien said that the government had accepted the case for renovating older night train stock and its new Mobility Law included a study of domestic and international night trains. Flixbus was planning a night service to Nice but it was not yet clear if this would have couchettes or only seating. SNCF had a new CEO and was offering some lower prices.

SWITZERLAND – The country relied at present on OeBB to provide its overnight services, and campaign groups such as Umverkehr were trying to get different national companies to work together. Currently each European country was looking for its own solution and Switzerland was not large enough for domestic night trains. Objectif Train de Nuit, which had originated in France, was pressing for an innovative freight and passenger night train between Barcelona and Frankfurt via Switzerland. SBB had announced that they would look again at night train investment.

An 18,000 signature petition had been presented to Parliament, calling for a plane ticket tax, increasing public awareness of the true costs of aviation and the need to improve climate-

friendly alternatives. This initiative included setting up the websites www.flugfacts.ch and www.aviation-verite.ch, giving important data and answering commonly posed questions.

GERMANY- Night train connections were needed to the west and south. OeBB, within their 4-day train rosters could consider running to Paris or Barcelona.

EASTERN EUROPE – Night trains were formerly used a lot to link Bucharest with regional centres in Romania, but now increasing numbers of people took the plane. It was pointed out, however, that EU funds had paid for improvements to rail infrastructure in Romania and other eastern European countries, and pressure should now be mounted for more attractive services to be run on the enhanced network. It was also pointed out that such countries still had a significant rolling-stock manufacturing industry – so why not build night train stock there?

Martin Marek from the Czech Republic referred to the 60th anniversary of the company JLV (originally part of Czechoslovak Railways, CSD) with its experience of train catering and sleeper car operation. International night trains currently ran from Prague to six destinations but timings could sometimes be a problem. For example a departure from Prague at 6.00 pm and then a 3-hour wait in Linz was not attractive to customers. Recent improvements had included better breakfasts and the night service was now being promoted by CD through various media, including Youtube.

Peter Romen spoke of the difficulty in buying a sleeper ticket from Riga to Kiev – “It was a battle, but I won it.”

EXPANSION OF OEBB SERVICES – Sven Pollauer described OeBB as “the most climate-friendly company in Austria” with the success of its brands Cityjet, Railjet and Nightjet and the increasing demand for rail travel to and from Switzerland. Nightjet was “good for the environment, for regional development and for social inclusion.” On some routes they were competing successfully with low-cost airlines. Their night trains were offering customers a choice of categories and introducing minisuite capsules and new deluxe compartments.

The new Brussels service was partly a response to the recent European Parliament election campaign when many politicians had asked for a night train. This would initially be an existing night train currently going to a different destination.

Business people might only know the night before that they needed to make a journey and this had to be taken into account in reservations policy.

OeBB were proposing to scrap some of their old stock, but as an alternative could well sell this to another operator not directly competing with them. Safety requirements in Italy were becoming stricter and so new rolling stock was needed for international trains.

Our speaker agreed that there was a need for more co-operation within the rail industry and spoke of the ways in which OeBB worked with DB, such as upgrading on the last train of the

day. He also referred to next year’s expected enhancement of passenger rights, which was likely to bring improvements to through ticketing. Co-operation could also involve CER and ALLRAIL lobbying jointly for a night train alliance.

Saturday afternoon saw the conference divide into two parallel sessions.

TRAINS, JOBS AND CLIMATE

The first of these received a presentation from Simon Mader of the firm M-Five Consulting on how trains can save both jobs and the climate. M-Five had recently completed a study, “Employment Effects of Sustainable Mobility: A Systematic Analysis of Perspectives in Germany until 2035”. The independent consultants had a trade union background group to assist them in their work.

The research is based on German data, but the results can be used as guidelines in the rest of Europe. It should also be noted that the car industry in Germany is large and of great importance. The research includes a base line from 2015 and two low-carbon scenarios from 2035. Scenario 1 (ES35) focuses on electro-mobility on the streets. Scenario 2 (MM35) assumes more pedestrians, bicycles and rail-based public transport. Predictions were made about regional changes of employment and employment among the sectors (including freight services). The key figures are:

Vehicle building, trade and maintenance plus road infrastructure

<i>REF15</i>	<i>ES35</i>	<i>MM35</i>
<i>1.930.830</i>	<i>1.654.800</i>	<i>1.270.900</i>

Public transport including rail vehicle building and maintenance and rail infrastructure production

<i>600.300</i>	<i>763.400</i>	<i>781.500</i>
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Sharing services

<i>4.000</i>	<i>155.500</i>	<i>203.800</i>
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Cycling

<i>46.100</i>	<i>91.700</i>	<i>174 700</i>
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Transport digitalisation

<i>55.900</i>	<i>67.100</i>	<i>68.300</i>
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Transport services

958.400 1.166.800 1.166.800

Total: 3.595.500 3.899.100 3.666.000

Therefore, future electric-mobility is not a danger to employment in the transport sector. However, jobs will move away from the traditional car manufacturing sector into the service sector. That will demand changes and new skills. Jobs will also move around in geographical areas.

Contact: sm@m-five.de

WORK GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL JOURNEYS

The second parallel session was of the work group on international journeys. This group of members of EPF associations held a meeting in which a considerable number of Back-on-Track colleagues also took part.

They considered progress with some 20 priority cases for new or improved cross-border links, following a 2018 report by the consultants KCW, to which the European Passengers' Federation has also had input. At least three of those present will also attend a conference in Brussels on November 14th on cross-border services and regions.

Other topics discussed were standards in conventional daytime international services and issues concerning the operators Eurostar and Thalys.

Plans were also drawn up for a series of reports on international rail topics to be issued during 2020.

A full report of this meeting has been sent to EPF-affiliated associations and can also be obtained from trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk

TICKETING AND NIGHT TRAIN HUBS

The Sunday morning session focussed on ticketing and night train hubs, and concluded with group discussions on the future development of Back-on-Track.

FUTURE OF HAMBURG ALTONA STATION – Michael Jung of Prellbock gave a presentation showing how well-sited the the 8-platform station was for night train and motorail loading as well as urban public transport connections. Indeed, it had all the basic facilities for a good station

*railway ticket and information counter

- * shops for necessities
- *heated waiting area with toilets
- * good connections with the city transport system
- * an attractive station environment with shopping facilities and restaurants

Today's Altona qualified as a night train hub, although the existing facilities required modernisation. Moving it 2km north to Diebsteich on an industrial estate with poor bus connections and only space for 6 platforms was no substitute for this. The campaign to keep Altona terminus was now in the courts.

In discussion it was pointed out that DB's motivation was to sell off railway land and similar plans had been put forward, but subsequently abandoned, for certain other city centre stations. Real estate developers were also looking at the motorail terminals at Munchen and Lorrach. Altona also had an Inter City hotel and breakfast vouchers there could be offered to passengers alighting from overnight trains. These could include an overnight service from Stockholm, calling at Copenhagen (or Castrup Airport).

It was also pointed out that the three top destinations for air passengers from Hamburg were Munich, Frankfurt and London – so there was scope for better long-distance train services, including night trains.

INFORMATION AND TICKETING – Peter Koller of Bahnagentur Schoeneberg in Berlin said that DB wanted more and more long-distance bookings by passengers done on line; but there were currently 2000 travel agents who could sell rail tickets. Changes in their commission and conditions could mean that in future there would only be 500.

Our speaker said that all ticket offices and agencies were listed on the DB website. He gave examples of how to use the system to obtain information and a good deal, pointing out also that Eurostar was continuing to offer the Europa Spezial ticket to London till January 15th. SNCF wanted to withdraw from the international reservation system EPA. It was understood that this was because it did not allow the input of personal data.

In discussion, Peter Cornelius of Pro Bahn referred to EU passenger rights, which included a right to information – a matter which could be raised with the Verbraucherzentrale (Central Office for Consumers). EU regulations also covered a journey chain for which tickets might be bought at an agency and stated that all train operators' tickets must be bookable by every other operator.

Trevor Garrod referred to the Association in European Rail Agents in Great Britain, who sold tickets to and on the continent (www.aera.co.uk) and of the importance of being able to discuss with an expert when planning a journey.

Peter Cornelius also suggested that these issues should be raised with DGMOVE in Brussels - possibly in a joint submission by Back-on-Track and the European Passengers' Federation. Peter Koller would like to contribute to such a submission and was also due to meet Mathias Gastel, Bundestag member, shortly.

Other comments were that the Swiss Direkter Verkehr system, whereby all operators had the same ticketing, should become the norm throughout Europe; but on the other hand there were "different ways of achieving the same result."

SWEDISH DEVELOPMENTS –Lennart Lennefors gave an update on developments in Sweden which had experienced a 59% growth in travel by train, notably by long-distance commuting into Stockholm. Indeed, the growth was higher than official forecasts had been. Low speeds on the Stockholm – Oslo route - some of which was single track - affected rail's market share, but 200kph was possible from Stockholm to Malmo and Gothenburg. These main lines handled over 100 trains a day (freight as well as passenger).

Much of Sweden was within 12 hours' travel time of Copenhagen and the completion of the Fehmarn Belt fixed link in 2028 opened up the possibility to night trains to Warsaw, Marseille, Vienna and Bordeaux.

The plan for 2018-29 was to increase speeds on some other sections of the Swedish network, including up to 250kph on the west coast line.

CONCLUSION

The final session of the conference was divided into three groups which considered outreach, lobbying and campaigning.

The results were presented in a final plenary session and will be processed in the regular teleconferences and circulated on the internal Back-on-Track list. There will included an updated position paper, more formalising of the Back-on-Track structure, further meetings with decision-makers in Brussels and where appropriate co-operation between Back-on-Track members in affiliates in neighbouring countries and co-operation between Back-on-Track and like-minded organisations. It is planned to hold the next major Back-on-Track conference in May or October 2020 in Brussels.

Thanks were recorded to our Hamburg colleagues for hosting this year's very successful event, to colleagues who moderated, translated and co-ordinated the arrangements and to all participants for their input into Back-on-Track's largest gathering so far.

Report by Trevor Garrod with input from Poul Kattler.

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