

Fourth INTER-Regio-Rail email newsletter

Date: 7 May 2012

(Mailing list: Passenger Rail Authorities in Europe)

Dear Sir/Madam,

More than four months have passed since we sent you our last electronic newsletter, and during this time a lot of activities have taken place: the German association of passenger rail authorities, together with our French (GART), Italian (FederMobilità) and Czech (CAOVD) partner associations and the city of Strasbourg, is organising this year's conference of European passenger rail authorities.

We have finalised the programme, and most of you have received the invitation. We will be happy to welcome you to the meeting!

We have been in Brussels several times this year already, discussing current political issues with members of the European Parliament and representatives of the European Commission. One of the most important current topics for the passenger rail authorities is the fourth railway package. Read more about this below.

My team and I hope that you enjoy the spring that has finally arrived in all the countries of Europe.

Yours faithfully,
Susanne Henckel

General Manager, German Association of Passenger Rail Authorities

Contents of the newsletter

EU Fourth Railway Package

As announced in the last newsletter, the European Commission has launched a second stakeholder consultation relating to the preparation of the fourth railway package, which deals with market opening for domestic passenger rail transport and ensuring non-discriminatory access to rail infrastructure and services. This consultation is part of an impact assessment on further action which seeks to understand stakeholders' views.

The survey was sent at the beginning of March, and stakeholders had four weeks to answer it. Although this deadline was subsequently put back by 10 days two days before the initial cut-off date of 6 April, it was still quite a challenging task for us to draft the model answers – which resulted in over 30 pages of text – and then to coordinate these internally and with further partners all over Europe. We consider our work to have been successful: partners from six EU member states participated in

the survey, thereby showing that passenger rail authorities are becoming involved in the discussion of EU policy.

As the format of the survey is not very easy-to-read, we arranged two meetings with the Commission's consultants and one with various representatives of the railway unit of the Commission's DG MOVE in order to explain and discuss our points of view.

Being well aware of the fact that the structure and thus the perspective of the passenger rail authorities in the different member states of the European Union vary considerably (work on national vs. work on regional level; some authorities own the incumbent railway undertakings, others do not) we have carefully formulated our basic positions as follows:

- + Currently there is no level playing field between the different modes of transport.
- + Passenger rail authorities in some European countries have had positive experiences with the competitive tendering of services: increases in quality and the number of trains, and decreases in subsidy. The efficiency of rail transport can be enhanced through competition.
- + However, we are well aware of the social issues linked to competition. Competition without responsible public stewardship, especially well-balanced service descriptions, is in most cases not an option.
- + In recent years, there have been problems attracting sufficient bidders for calls for tender. It therefore seems necessary to lower the barriers to market entry for non-incumbent railway undertakings if we wish to enhance competition.
- + Regulatory bodies can rarely be strong enough to prevent active and de-facto discrimination against new market entrants by integrated incumbent railway undertakings. If a member state intends to lower the barriers to market entry, the vertical separation of railway undertakings and infrastructure managers can be a more efficient option than strengthening the regulatory body.

We hope that these statements do not contradict your points of view; if there is any discrepancy, please let us know.

The next step in the stakeholder consultation will be the presentation of the evaluation of the consultants' survey, which has been announced for 29 May. INTER-Regio-Rail will be represented.

Survey on the future role of the European Railway Agency

On 28 February, the European Commission presented the results of the stakeholder consultation relating to the future role of the European Railway Agency.

From our point of view, the analysis of the survey was rather disappointing. Altogether 358 stakeholders were consulted, but only 67 complete surveys were received, giving a poor response rate of only 19 %. A quantitative analysis was conducted, but it is not at all clear whether appropriate consideration was given to the contributions of associations and individual stakeholders. Furthermore, we doubt if the evaluation on the basis of the prescribed stakeholder categories was in any way useful: we ticked the category "Association representative" (a better one was not available), and in fact it transpired that our answers were mixed in with, for instance, those of the association representing incumbent railway undertakings, CER, which usually does not share our stance.

Fortunately a lively debate took place during the event, encompassing both the methodology as well as the contents of the survey. We pointed out, amongst other things, that the main issue for passenger rail authorities is not so much the tasks and the scope of the regulatory bodies, safety authorities and notified bodies, but rather the outcome of their work.

In fact the future policy options proposed by the Commission are difficult for us to evaluate. This is why we cannot give a concrete recommendation on these. It is clear, however, that in future the determining factor will be the structure of the incumbent railway undertakings – integrated undertakings require much closer regulation in order to prevent them from discriminating against non-incumbent undertakings, and the separation of railway undertakings and infrastructure managers will probably lead to a greater workload for the safety authorities.

Conference of European passenger rail authorities

The big event is approaching. Together with our partner organisations GART (the passenger rail authorities' association of France), Federmobilità (Italy) and CAOVD (Czech Republic), we have prepared an interesting programme for our joint conference on 24-25 May in Strasbourg, to which we warmly invite you. This conference has two aims: firstly, we wish to give passenger rail authorities from the member states of the European Union, Switzerland and Norway the occasion to share their experience, projects and ideas; secondly, we want to discuss the European Union's strategies for developing railway transport in Europe and possibly formulate our own recommendations.

The conference will be structured in line with the following aims:

- Representatives of the European Commission and members of the European Parliament will provide us with feedback on the ongoing legislative initiatives in Brussels.
- There will be three round tables on the main topics that passenger rail authorities deal with. These are firstly, the organisation of passenger rail authorities; secondly, issues linked to the development, operation and use of railway infrastructure; and thirdly, the competitive tendering of railway services. During each of these round tables some of our colleagues from various countries will briefly present their ideas, which the podium and the audience will subsequently discuss.
- In order to get to know each other better, GART will be organising a field visit to interesting passenger rail projects in the Strasbourg region for the afternoon of 24 May. In the evening the city of Strasbourg invites us to a joint dinner in the old town hall.

We are sure that you will benefit from this conference in many ways, and we thus look forward to seeing you in Strasbourg!

Survey on the European Accessibility Act

In September 2012, the European Commission plans to present a draft directive (the European Accessibility Act) aiming to improve, among other things, access to transport services through measures to promote the establishment and harmonisation of accessibility standards. On 13

December 2011, the Commission launched a related public consultation on the obstacles faced by people with disabilities, and stakeholders were asked to return their answers by 29 February 2012.

The German Association of passenger rail authorities answered this survey jointly with the Association of the French Regions (ARF), the Italian association of regional public transport (FederMobilità), the Slovenian Ministry for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning and the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic on the basis of the following positions:

- + The accessibility of the railway system is an **issue of great importance** for passenger rail authorities because the number of passengers with reduced mobility is high and indeed will increase in future.
- + Already today, regional passenger rail authorities in Germany and many other countries in Europe spend significant amounts improving the accessibility of stations for disabled people.
- + The German Association of Passenger Rail Authorities (BAG-SPNV) therefore supports the general aim of creating a barrier-free railway system.
- + However, the costs of operating a barrier-free railway system have to be seen in relation to the benefit to the potential users.
- + In general we do not consider **common standards** to be an appropriate means of improving the accessibility of the regional railway system, since many decisions on the implementation of barrier-free accessibility are much more efficient if they are taken at regional level.
- + We therefore propose that any European accessibility legislation be **limited to framework rules**, leaving the decisions pertaining to the implementation of accessibility measures to the relevant regional and national level.

We look forward to receiving your comments on these positions and to the further discussions at European level.

Best practice for improved regional rail transport

Leisure travel accounts for around 40% of kilometres travelled in Germany. It is therefore the most important source of passenger traffic. At the same time, this kind of traffic is very difficult for railways to cater for since origins and destinations are very diverse and may change greatly and at short notice. In Brandenburg the VBB has introduced a way to cope with this fluctuating traffic flow.

Every spring, from mid-April till mid-May, the pheasant's eye (or Adonis) flower blossoms around the small village of Mallnow on the slopes of the River Oder close to the Polish-German border. Named after Adonis, the Greek god of beauty, the flower is rare in Germany. Originating from continental Eastern Europe and Asia, it is restricted to a very few dry, sandy areas. The blooming of the flower therefore draws thousands of nature enthusiasts to the Oder every spring.



The Pheasant's Eye (picture: Kenpei)

The response of the transport association for Berlin and Brandenburg (VBB) has been to introduce more flexible offers for these kinds of transport users. The closest railway station (Schönfließ Dorf), located in a small village, is only serviced for a short time in spring when the flower blossoms. The offer is advertised by the VBB and the regional railway undertaking.

Several other temporary stops have been introduced in the area covered by the VBB. One is close to the Helenesee, also in the south-east of Brandenburg, and is offered only for several weeks in summer. This was introduced to allow bathers to reach the very popular lake by train. In one case a railway undertaking has introduced such a stop on its own initiative. The Prignitzer Eisenbahn (PEG), today part of NETINERA, is a railway undertaking and manager of its own infrastructure. The company has constructed a small stop with basic facilities close to an outdoor public swimming pool in order to allow summer visitors to use the train.

As society becomes more diverse and more flexible, authorities and undertakings have to react. Stops offered in response to temporary demand are a way of offering better service and winning new customers.



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