

# Rail Report Europe

in co-operation with  
**Back on Track**

European network to support cross-border  
night trains

Issue 2/2020

## The role of an international day train service in the 21st century



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**Introduction**  
The EuroCity  
brand (EC) was  
introduced by the  
UIC in the late

'80s, following the demise of the few surviving TEE (Trans-European-Express) network of first-class train services. After a good start, some of these services have either now been withdrawn or downgraded when high-speed train services started to be operated in some countries.

Commercial managers have been more interested in developing strongly advertised new brand names for these services, such as TGV, ICE, AVE, Frecciarossa, Railjet, Regiojet, Eurostar, Thalys, etc, and have been far less concerned with their international description or potential to provide attractive cross-border express services, whether high-speed or at conventional line speeds.

The current Covid 19 pandemic (2020) has had a devastating effect on both



The central station in Wrocław, Poland. Important for a modern and ecological transport system throughout Europe is not only a synchronised day train schedule, but also a network of night trains as the backbone of cheap and comfortable travelling between the major cities of Europe.

Pic.: Carsten Weber / pixelio.de

air travel and train travel, and certainly the airlines will face very great difficulties in restoring their former services, likely to be much reduced in scope and coverage, and charging far higher fares than previously. The train operators will also face huge difficulties restoring their former service levels, unless they receive considerable funding from their governments and the EU. However the greater awareness of the impact of climate change effects arising from different travel modes, and the “Greta

Thunberg effect”, seems certain to give the railways a competitive advantage over air travel which it previously lacked, especially on fares. If we take a typical short-haul city to city air journey, this usually includes 1 hour to reach the departing airport, and 1 hour from arrival airport to city, 2 hours for check-in, security, identity checks, and 1 hour flight time, this is 5 hours. Journeys which can be accomplished by rail in under 5-6 hours have a definite competitive journey time advantage. This is

something that transport campaigners need to focus on, and use their knowledge and experience to promote to operators and politicians.

### What is a EuroCity (or similarly named) service and what is its role?

What do intending passengers expect to find when they will be travelling? Does it mean something special? Do

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they care? Some of the existing EC train services have fallen in quality with only minimum standards applied. We believe the “EC” EuroCity branding should convey an impression of minimum standards of international train travel that passengers can expect, and the branding could be applied additionally to those high-speed train services that cross borders, whether or not the commercial managers' own brand name is also retained.

Alternatively a new designation may be chosen if there is a widespread view that the otherwise appropriate name “EuroCity” has become dated, or is strongly resisted by some operators.

For us, public recognition of the brand should stimulate rail travel across Europe and present an effective challenge to competitive short-haul airline services, and be a worthwhile objective. The climate change factors and Europe-wide concerns

expressed by politicians about global warming and pollution already referred to, need to be developed into effective challenges to the restoration of short-haul airline services, or increased major highway construction.

### What standard of service offered?

The services should obviously be fast, running on high-speed lines where possible, although on many sections the infrastructure will still require them to be fairly slow. Their frequency should be at regular “clock-face” intervals, ideally running at hourly, two-hourly or four-hourly intervals, and serving the same intermediate stations in both directions.

The rolling stock should be comfortable, with mixed choice seating plans in all classes, i.e. both open cars and



compartments. There should be catering facilities of some kind, ideally restaurant/bar-buffet, but at least a trolley service available throughout the journey. Announcements in all languages of the countries served by the train should be used, plus English to help non-European passengers. On-board staff should work as a team and take responsibility when plans go wrong. When delays exceed 10 minutes passengers should be kept informed.

Tickets should be available before travel for any journey served directly by the train with as many connectational ticket prices and booking facilities as possible. Reservations should always be possible and shown when

#### Editorial committee

The Rail Report Europe is issued on a quarterly basis. The editorial team consists of Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ, and Jochen Reitstätter, Eisenacher Straße 44, 04105 Leipzig.

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booking as “advisory”, but should not be compulsory, if at all possible. As in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, passengers have this choice on most IC, EC, and ICE services, and accept that the risk of standing is a problem if deciding to forgo reservation. Supplements should be avoided; these have the effect of encouraging some passengers to travel on slower less convenient services, and in some conurbations unnecessarily filling trains needed by commuters at peak hours.



**The central station of Salzburg. At the moment of approaching the city, a wonderful panorama opens up in front of one's eyes, giving this incredible view of the Alps.**

Pic.: JR

As far as possible, there should be clear information on platform displays with markers where the lettered/numbered cars will stop, so that passengers are spared the need to run along platforms at short station calls. Timetable leaflets should be offered on train seats, as is standard on DB's EC, IC and ICE services. Wifi connection and fast internet should be widely available, free of charge, as this is increasingly a need for passengers whom we expect to be attracted to transfer willingly from airline services.

Is funding needed? Where existing services can be improved without additional trains or crews then additional costs for the improved standards we advocate should be minimal, particularly if increased passenger revenue can result from widespread, effective marketing of a comprehensive international EC train service network. No major new infrastructure costs are needed where flexible attitudes by operators can prevail. We presented a draft consultation paper “Proposed European International EuroCity Trains Network” at the EPF Conference in Budapest in March 2015, and it was agreed by EPF to set out common standards for the development of an enhanced EuroCity Trains Network, if not necessarily the services proposed.

The proposals contained in our first comprehensive paper represented a significant improvement in planned international express train services, which could still be a suitable and viable network, without any new physical route construction needed. This paper is still available on request.

### The Way Forward

The role for night train services to be restored and increased is well advocated by our friends in “Back on Track”. We in ERC (UK) advocate the enhancement of the EC (or similar) network for those who cannot travel at night, either by choice or due to other factors. This is a task in which Ministers of Transport/Railway Ministers, train operators, and politicians at both EU and national level could all have a role to play, and in which consultation with, and feedback from the customers, is a key element. Many of the services needed are fully in line with the EU's ambitions for an extensive TEN route network across Europe. We hope rail campaigners will give consideration to some of these ideas for enhanced international train travel in the future, and the environmental advantages.



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## Making progress – states took now action to improve the international rail network

The Dutch government has written to European Union Transport Commissioner Adina Valean stating the need for better international rail passenger services in view of the climate change crisis. It has called for a platform of transport ministers, the rail industry and passenger representatives to consider measures to make international rail travel easier and a clear mechanism to monitor progress. The transport Ministers of 22 other EU countries, plus Norway and Switzerland signed the letter. The Swedish train operator Snälltåget considers that an overnight train from

Stockholm to Berlin via Malmö, Hoje-Taastrup (for Copenhagen) and Hamburg will be viable and is planning to run every night in June, July and August 2021 and at weekends in April, May and September.

ÖBB is (re)launching a day train from Graz and Vienna to Berlin via Prague, like the Vindobona in former times. A night train with couchettes has also just started between Salzburg and Sylt for the summer season. Both Salzburg and Sylt are important tourist destinations, though very different from each other!



The rail network offers spare capacity at night, which is not available during day time. This is a chance for freight transport as well as night trains.

Pic.: michael hirschka / pixelio.de

The French association Objectif train de nuit is continuing its dialogue with decision-makers on the project for a night train from Barcelona to Frankfurt via Montpellier and Heidelberg and has just received an interim feasibility

report from the consultants Rail Concept.

The City Ticket add-on is a very convenient way for passengers arriving by rail at German cities to continue their journey by urban transport. In Berlin it has been extended to cover not just the central zone (Zone A) but also zone B, extending from Spandau and Wannsee in the west to Marzahn and Köpenick in the east. The passenger association Pro Bahn had been pressing for this.

Pro Bahn has also set up a working party to look at how train services can be improved between Germany and each of the countries with which it has a border.

The unique European Rail Timetable had suspended publication during the height of the COVID19 pandemic but plans to resume with its digital version on July 16th and a week later its paper edition.

For more information, log on to <http://www.europeanrailtimetable.eu>

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## Back-on-Track Autumn conference in Brussels

Back-on-Track Belgium is making good progress with organisation of the October conference, which will have public sessions on Thursday 15th and Friday 16th, with outside speakers, including from the European Commission. On Saturday 17th there will be a more internal session, to draw conclusions and plan ahead.

Other NGOs will also be invited to take part in this discussion. A venue has been booked in central Brussels on the basis that some COVID19 measures and advice may still be in place and not everyone who wants to participate may be able to travel. Therefore it is important for all

participants to register in advance, stating on which day(s) they will do so and whether in person or by ZOOM. Please refer to the Back-on-Track website for further updates; and the next issue of Rail Report Europe, at the beginning of September, which will contain full information.