

# NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR EUROPEAN PASSENGERS?

5TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE

OF THE

EUROPEAN PASSENGERS' FEDERATION

TELEKOM-TAGUNGSHOTEL, ISMANING, NEAR MUNICH

MARCH 10<sup>TH</sup> 2007

70 members and guests attended the event and there were nine apologies for absence.

## GENERAL MEETING

**1. Opening:** The Chairman, Trevor Garrod, welcomed members from associations and organisations in 12 European countries.

**2. The Annual Report** was accepted and is now posted, in English, French, German and Dutch, on the EPF website: [www.epf.eu](http://www.epf.eu)

The financial report and budget were discussed and adopted. The work plan for the coming year was agreed, and the Administrative Council will discuss possible modifications and priorities within it. The Administrative Council for the coming twelve months was appointed, as were Auditors.

Full minutes of the General Meeting are sent to each affiliated association.

**3. Gavin Booth**, representative of a new member, Bus Users UK, introduced his association and spoke of its work.

## CONFERENCE

**4. Stefan Jugelt**, on behalf of the board of Pro Bahn, welcomed everyone to Germany and emphasised the need for a Europe-wide policy for attractive public transport, as part of an international strategy for dealing with environmental problems.

The previous day there had been a European agreement announced on climate change but a clear strategy for tackling it had yet to be developed. When that strategy was developed, advantage must be taken of technical progress but the customer must also be central to it.

**5. Alexander Freitag**, President of MVV, the Munich regional transport authority, welcomed participants to Munich and said that his was the second oldest public transport authority in Germany, after Hamburg. The city of Munich had one of the most successful economies in Europe and 2,600,000 people lived in the city and its surrounding districts. Local councils were stakeholders in the authority and some 50 companies were involved through the tendering of services. For the past ten years there had also been a passengers' advisory council meeting twice a year.

“From the point of view of the customer,” said Mr. Freitag, “we want to have one corporate identity.” This meant one network and one fares system.

In the city of Munich, 32% of journeys were made by public transport, 17% on foot and 8% by bicycle. The buses were all low-floor vehicles, air-conditioned with modern ticket machines. A subsidy of €20 million was paid each year to buses in the region, but the last ten years had seen a 56% increase in bus usage and 21% decrease in subsidy. Mr. Freitag concluded, "It's cool to own a BMW but to use public transport in Munich."

Plans to improve the infrastructure had been drawn up, the most important being a second tunnel for the east/west S-bahn (suburban railway) under the city centre over which trains currently operated with a 2-minute headway. The MVV preferred to bring passengers to the station by bus, but recognised a role for Park & Ride as well, so was extending car parking spaces.

**6. EPF Themes:** Christopher Irwin, a member of the EPF Board (and subsequently elected Vice-Chairman) outlined the work of the federation. Its principles were putting passengers first; thinking co-modality and shaping EU policy. The 2001 White Paper issued by the Commission had advocated passenger rights which were gradually being introduced for all modes of transport - air, rail, bus and coach, maritime and ultimately also urban transport.

Legislation would be needed but progress was being made with quality indicators, service delivery and complaint handling. In its early days, EPF had promoted "public transport as a public good". Rail passengers' rights were likely soon to be finalised and we then looked forward to similar rights for bus/coach and maritime passengers, based on simplicity, consistency and equality.

EPF had been delighted when the European Commission invited tenders for a "European Passengers' Network" and in 2006 had, with a number of other bodies, put together "a world-beating alliance." The idea of the network was then dropped by the EC as being of insufficiently high priority, which prompted the question, "Is the EC really intent on putting users at the heart of things?"

However, EPF was also involving itself in other projects, notably the FP7 project to identify passengers' needs (initiated by UIC) and the telematics applications. We were also following with interest a project being developed for standards of passenger coaches.

**7. Community of European Railways:** Mr. Alberto Gallo, Passenger Policy Advisor of CER, said that the 62 operating and infrastructure companies making up its membership were exercising a proactive influence on transport policy. They supported the Eurovignette directive and the externalisation of costs so that a level playing field could be created between transport modes.

The problem of financing new East European rolling stock needed to be addressed and differences between the European Parliament and Council of Ministers on passenger rights and other aspects of the 3rd Railway Package needed to be resolved.

Different conditions in different countries made it difficult to impose the same passenger rights across Europe.

CER had introduced a website [www.railpassenger.info](http://www.railpassenger.info) and was doing work on better information and ticketing and timetable co-ordination. Finally, he welcomed the imminent opening of the high speed line from Paris to Strasbourg in June 2007 saying it would add "a new dimension" to travel between France and Germany with an average reduction in journey time of 2 hours between many centres.

**8. Pro Rail:** Klaas Hofstra of the Dutch infrastructure company Pro Rail spoke about improving train performance. Over the past two years, Dutch Railways had seen a growth in passenger traffic but had failed to meet Government-set reliability targets. Pro Rail and Nederlandse Spoorwegen (the main operator) blamed each other for this.

Each company had set up a new department to analyse punctuality, which was measured at 35 points throughout the country. It was found that 75% of lateness was caused by interference with other trains, 5% by infrastructure problems and 5% by problems with the rolling stock.

As no additional infrastructure was expected until 2012, yet the Government was demanding more reliability and more trains, NS and Pro Rail had to look for other solutions.

“The devil is in the detail,” said Mr. Hofstra, stressing that punctuality was often a matter of seconds rather than minutes.

Among the examples which he gave was the case of a station on a curve where the conductor could not see the signal easily and trains were staying for 60 seconds when they were only supposed to stop for 30 seconds. Some staff also performed their duties more quickly than others - but on the other hand staff sometimes had to give information to passengers.

In some cases, timetables had been amended to give a later departure time since it had been found that the trains with the smallest margins had the best punctuality. About 50% of Dutch stations were beside level crossings and timers had been re-adjusted to reduce delays here.

Finally, Mr. Hofstra pointed out that crossing movements in major stations such as Amsterdam Centraal and Utrecht caused delays and so they were trying to plan so that trains on one line did not have to cross those coming in the opposite direction on another.

**9. PlusBus:** Giles Fearnley of Journey Solutions described how this bus/train integration project had developed in Great Britain over the past eight years.

There were over 20 Train Operating Companies, 5 large bus operators and literally hundreds of small bus operators. Through ticketing was voluntary, but with station car parks often full to capacity and a 40% increase in rail usage over the past ten years, the main operators were keen to offer integrated ticketing and to encourage more customers to arrive at the station by bus.

At present, about 50% of British rail passengers arrive by car at the station and only 20% by bus. Customers want “ease, convenience and value for money,” said Mr. Fearnley and one way to offer them this is to add bus travel to their train ticket. The addition can be as little as £1 a day (about €1.50) and the scheme also encompasses tram systems. The price varies from town to town because of competition law. Virtually all towns and cities with over 80,000 people (and many smaller ones) were now in the scheme - 195 in all. Plus Bus was now being marketed nationally and from a slow start was now showing a 47% increase in sales year-on-year.

“We are the only European country to achieve this by voluntary co-operation between private companies,” said Mr. Fearnley, who added that Plus Bus tickets would also soon be available on line and through self-service machines. For more information visit the website [www.plusbus.info](http://www.plusbus.info)

## **10. Questions and discussion** took place on issues raised by the morning speakers.

Concerns were raised about level crossing safety, but it was pointed out that the Dutch were not changing their system; they were changing clock settings according to whether or not a train was stopping at the station.

Concern was also expressed about how competition rules could form a barrier to co-operation between operators. In Britain, each "Plus Bus" fare had to be agreed locally but the Government wanted to see bus/train integration and so had granted certain exemptions to Plus Bus and had encouraged its schemes.

## **11. Workshop I: Practicalities at start and end of journey**

A fast long-distance train is usually only part of the journey.

Joerg Bruchertseifer introduced his Nahverkehrswegweiser website which enables travellers to find out how to reach the station and how to continue to their final destination by local public transport. The website is currently in German and refers to German-speaking countries; but an English introduction has also been produced and EPF will work on a French one. There could be links to this website from those of EPF, its member organisations and rail operators.

In Great Britain, Traveline can provide some similar help as can the Plus Bus website. In Alsace, a map of local public transport has been produced to accompany the rail timetable. In the Netherlands there is a website giving information on a complete journey chain.

It was suggested that information should also be provided on luggage logistics.

The Nahverkehrswegweiser can be used for planning simple out-and-back journeys; journeys between several different points and journeys lasting a few days. EPF members are asked to try it out and send their comments to Herr Bruchertseifer.

Please note "Nahverkehrswegweiser" can be translated as "local public transport guide" or "signpost". [www.nahverkehr.info](http://www.nahverkehr.info). Send e-mails to [redaktion@nahverkehr.info](mailto:redaktion@nahverkehr.info)

Mr. Firmin Criel, a member of BTTB who is also blind, spoke about his experiences in travelling by train through several different countries. He produced 9 suggestions to facilitate a train journey throughout Europe for persons with reduced mobility. These included informing stations en route in advance; a unique telephone number but a decentralised assistance; a personal welcome; use of the loading bridge; a welcome centre in every station; a standard name and situation for this centre; an emergency telephone at every unstaffed station; voice announcements of all stops; and a clear agreement on what staff should do, and where, to help people of reduced mobility.

Mr. Criel said that he was generally pleased with services in stations and that on his arrival the previous day at Munich main station, staff were waiting for him with an electric trolley to transport him and his luggage.

## **12. Workshop II: Users' expectations on ticketing and information systems**

Stefan Jugelt introduced the workshop by explaining why the European Rail Agency had initiated a project "Telematics applications for passengers." Bodies such as UITP and EPF were involved in the working party.

International car travel was easy - there were plenty of road maps, the traffic signs were standardised and you could buy petrol by credit card. International travel by public transport was difficult in terms of information, payment and booking. Mr. Jugelt took as a specific example the region of the Riesengebirge (Giants' Mountains) which lie partly in Poland and partly in the Czech Republic. This is an important tourist area but travelling around it by public transport is not easy. Only one rail line, from Tanvald to Skalarska Poreba crosses the

border and it is only used for freight. Most local lines on the Polish side have closed although there is a good network of local lines and bus routes in the Czech part of the area.

It is not easy for visitors to plan their journeys in advance because the two countries use different internet-based timetable and information systems; there are no end-to-end fares or through tickets. Therefore it is not surprising that most tourists in the Riesengebirge either go by car or use package-tour coaches.

Information for travellers in this and other areas is often only available in the local language and occasionally in English.

A common ticketing system is needed and this should be backed by agreed revenue handling systems.

The proposed telematics system will interface with different national and regional systems and standardise these. It should be accessible by mobile phones as well as computers.

A further function of the telematics system would be to make available maps of streets and public transport networks in towns and cities, to help people travelling there to plan their journeys to and from the station.

**13. Mr. Paul Arents**, European Affairs Officer of the Flemish public transport operator De Lijn, spoke of the project on “European Bus of the Future.” The European Commission was contributing €30 million in a co-financing deal through which other partners (such as De Lijn) would also have to contribute €30 million.

There had been an earlier “Bus of the Future” project which was “very utopian” and therefore nothing came of it. The new project would still deal with vehicles but would also be concerned with their interaction with the environment (bus stops, bus lanes and priority measures, for example).

It was important to have the input of operators, organising authorities and passengers. Direct participation by EPF in the project would not be possible, because of the financial commitment required; but De Lijn believed that passengers should be involved in defining users’ needs and requirements and what the future European bus should look like. There could also be a role for EPF in collecting data for De Lijn.

Requirements for the project would have to be submitted by May 3rd, and work on it was then planned to be spread over 3 years.

After the Conference, the EPF Administrative Council agreed to work with De Lijn on this project.

**14. Mr. Martin Schiefelbusch** of the NEXUS Institute, Berlin, reported on the customer services project which they had undertaken, with input from EPF.

They had studied in particular customer charters, service guarantees and complaints handling standards.

In each member state they had contacted passenger associations statutory bodies, mediation boards and other relevant bodies where these existed. It was found that there were some 500 public transport operators, 115 associations and about 300 passenger charters!

NEXUS had then sought to rank schemes according to coverage and content, customer perception and effectiveness of complaint handling. On this basis, the United Kingdom came out best, with 12.5 points, followed by Sweden (11.5), France (10.5) and Germany (10 points).

At the bottom of the scale were Austria (5), the Czech Republic and Latvia (4.5) and Slovakia and Malta (4). Mr. Schiefelbusch added however that it had been difficult to obtain reliable information in some countries.

An earlier NEXUS project, BUSREP, dealing with user representation in public transport planning, was also now complete and the results were on the NEXUS website and also due to be published in book form later in 2007.

**15. Mr. Peter Faross**, Head of Unit A5, DGTREN at the European Commission, spoke on the topic, "What's Europe doing for the Passengers?"

The Commission's White Paper on Transport "put the passenger at the heart" and the rights already established for airline passengers were now gradually being extended to those using other modes.

In 2005 the Commission had published its philosophy of passenger protection and on February 17th 2005 legislation protecting air passengers came into force. Low-cost airlines had complained to the courts and by the end of March 2007 there should be a ruling on their complaint.

Mr. Faross referred to the Ryanair case where passengers had been stranded at Carcassonne after a flight had been cancelled. The issue had not yet been settled. It would have been a legal obligation for the carrier to inform passengers of their rights and then find a way of getting them home.

He explained what the Commission had wanted to achieve and what had so far been achieved, stating that the procedure had been adopted after a conciliation process. It was not perfect as some airlines were interpreting it in different ways.

Attempts were now being made to harmonise national enforcement agencies.

Mr. Faross' department received nearly 4,000 letters of complaint per year from passengers; and a further 18,000 were received by national agencies. The great majority of these complaints were about cancellations and delays - 14% of them being about Iberia, the airline which generated most complaints.

In February 2005, a proposal from the Commission about Persons of Reduced Mobility had been adopted at first reading by the European Parliament. Airlines should not normally refuse entry to PRMs, who should be assisted by the managing body of the airport.

"There have been some changes in the attitudes of the airlines and so we have achieved something," commented Mr. Faross. He pointed out that the cost of providing for PRMs would amount to between 50 cents and 1 euro - "so it will not deter anyone from flying" - and the legislation would come into effect in 2008.

Turning to rail passengers, he said that proposed legislation was now through its second reading and was likely to come into force in 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> years' time. It would cover information, ticketing, compensation and liability. There was some difference of opinion between the Parliament and the Council of Ministers. The former considered that passenger rights should not just be for "rich international travellers" but for domestic passengers as well. The latter considered this would impose too much expense on the operators, especially in the new member states.

In the bus and coach sector, consultation had been completed and an Impact Assessment Study was expected in April 2007 with proposals affecting PRMs, liability and compensation probably being published in autumn 2007. To illustrate the sorts of issue to be addressed, Mr. Faross quoted the example of a Belgian bus with a Moroccan driver having an accident in France.

Finally, the Commission was looking at the rights of passengers in the maritime sector. Liability here was already covered by the Athens Convention which could be extended to all EC countries. Other issues were similar to those faced by passengers in other modes. There was no uniformity as to who is there to help passengers when things go wrong and only 3 or 4 countries seemed to have a good information system.

**16. Mrs. Beata Czerwenka** of the German Federal Ministry of Justice spoke on the question “What can passengers and public transport expect from the German Presidency in 2007?”

She explained that there were seven proposals on their agenda - such as the 3rd Maritime Safety Package - and not all would be completed by the end of the Presidency on June 30th. They did, however, aim to get the 3rd Railway Package adopted, having reached the agreement of the Parliament. On January 18th, 63 amendments to the draft proposals had been tabled and these were now being subjected to the conciliation process.

As an example of the issues raised, Mrs. Czerwenka cited assistance for PRMs on unstaffed stations. Discussion was also going on about liability - should there be a minimum and maximum or should it be unlimited? Information, ticketing and quality management were also being addressed, with the suggestion that the railway operators should report once a year on quality.

Some member states opposed the scope of the legislation on grounds of cost; and others because they considered their national laws were better than the EU was suggesting.

Mrs. Czerwenka concluded, “The German Presidency aims to have constructive debate and a good compromise - a fair balance for all interests involved.”

**17. Issues raised in questions and discussion included:**

- (a) Lack of information about buying an international train ticket and making a reservation – Mr. Faross said that the Commission would have preferred to oblige operators to offer more to passengers but a compromise had been reached. He would be meeting several rail operators shortly to discuss the issues, which also included a fares structure which worked against international journeys in some cases.
- (b) The EC could work towards a level playing field for all transport operators - but one question to be addressed was “Who pays what for the infrastructure?”
- (c) Some private railways used to issue long-distance tickets (e.g. from the Bayrische Oberlandbahn to Stuttgart) but no longer did so. The problem hinged on lack of agreement between two operators on sharing the money. Mr. Faross commented, “We know where the weak points are. But everything is possible. We need someone to give a political push. It also depends on what makes economic sense.”
- (d) Several delegates pointed to the inconsistencies of giving rights to international but not to domestic passengers, if both were travelling in the same train; and to the fact that an international journey could be disrupted because of problems in a domestic train before the passenger had boarded his or her international train.

Mr. Faross commented, “I do not want to make the second step before the first step is realised.” It was important to have a stable legal framework for the public transport sector. Urban and regional train and bus services were not at present a priority for the EC, but measures to protect the rights of their passengers would not necessarily be excluded in the future.

**18. The Chairman** thanked all speakers and delegates for their contributions and closed the conference at 17.30, announcing that the 2008 conference was due to take place on March 15th in London.