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# **EUROPEAN PASSENGERS' FEDERATION**

## **6th ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

### **“SUSTAINABLE URBAN TRANSPORT IN EUROPE?”**

March 15th 2008, Tube Line headquarters,  
15 Westferry Circus, Canary Wharf, London, E14

## 1. WELCOME

EPF Chairman Trevor Garrod welcomed 70 delegates and visitors from 12 countries to London, stating that EPF now had 26 member organisations in 15 European countries. This year's conference was being held in London partly because the opening of its high speed rail link had brought the city closer to the rest of Europe; and partly because London had made, and was making, a significant contribution to the cause of sustainable urban mobility.

Brian Cook, Chair of London TravelWatch, also welcomed everyone to London, saying that the statutory body which he chaired represented all transport users, including motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. With elections for the London Mayor due on May 1st, they had been talking to all candidates about the city's transport needs.

## 2. TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

Dave Wetzel, Vice-Chair of Transport for London, gave a presentation on what had been achieved since TfL was set up in 2000 and what its vision was for the future. TfL had taken over 15 bodies, including London Transport and was answerable to the elected Mayor of London, who had set it the following agenda:

- (i) to serve the economy of London;
- (ii) to tackle climate change;
- (iii) to address social inclusion.

London today had 7.5 million people, 4.6 million jobs and 27 million trips per day. By 2025 the population is expected to increase by a further 11%. The London Transport Plan from now to 2025 embraced six strategies:

- (i) renew the existing system;
- (ii) ensure that the existing system is efficient and safe;
- (iii) reduce the need to travel;
- (iv) influence travel behaviour;
- (v) reduce congestion and emissions;
- (vi) provide new sustainable capacity.

Since the introduction of the congestion charge, there had been 70,000 fewer vehicles every day coming into London. Bus usage had increased by 53% since 2000 and ridership on the Underground had gone up by 19%. To provide extra rail capacity, Crossrail was being built and the East London Line and Dockland Light Railway were being extended while capacity on the Underground was being improved.

The introduction of the Oyster card had changed customer behaviour, streamlined travel, reduced queues and, with minimal cash handling, tackled fraud.

TfL's achievements included a modal shift from car to public transport of just over 5%; a 90% increase in cycling; reduction in road traffic accidents and a 78% growth in passengers using river services (but from a very low base). Future challenges were to introduce clean fuel technology; solar powered infrastructure and more efficient vehicles; and low emission / environmental zones combined with tough but realistically achievable EURO standards.

Mr. Wetzel explained that East/West Crossrail was unique among large infrastructure projects with a very attractive benefit-cost ratio of 2.6:1 and would bring Gross Domestic Product benefits of £30 billion. What we do in transport also creates increased land value, as had been shown at Canary Wharf.

He therefore argued the case for a Land Value Tax, since expenditure on public services usually led to an increase in land values. Such a tax would be more productive than Value Added Tax and could, for example, enable Leeds to build the tram system which the city needed.

Asked about how a Land Value Tax could be introduced, our speaker said "We need to convince landowners it is good for them."

Already some 30 cities in North America had LVT at a modest level while the experiences of Hong Kong and some Australian cities were also worth studying.

Questioned about renovation of the London Underground, Mr. Wetzel said that the Government had refused to invest in it during the 1980s; but a public / private partnership was now providing £1 billion per annum.

Mr. Wetzel was also asked about the London Oyster Card and its relevance elsewhere. In reply he said that he would like to see a compatible smartcard for cities throughout the world. "I can use American Express all over the world. Why not Oyster?... We have the key to solving this problem. Why don't we just put the key in the lock and turn it?"

### 3. EUROPEAN GREEN PAPER ON URBAN MOBILITY

M. Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Transport and Tourism, delivered the key-note address in which he said that it was appropriate to bring to a conclusion today the consultation on the Green Paper. This was a gathering of passenger representatives from across Europe and the Commission wanted to put the passenger at the heart of the public transport debate.

The European Union's objectives included improvement of energy efficiency and a halving of the number of road casualties; reducing emissions by 20% and a 20% increase in the use of environmentally friendly sources.

60% of EU citizens lived in urban areas, which was where two thirds of road accidents took place and congestion cost 100m euro per year.

The integration of different modes of transport was important and intelligent use of transport would improve efficiency. Smartcharging systems had a role to play in this respect.

M. Barrot stressed that the Green Paper was posing questions rather than offering solutions. This included the question of whether money could be better used than at present. Renewal of rolling stock on the railways was important and new guideline could favour rail modernisation. Basic passenger rights for all modes were also being developed.

300 responses (including one from EPF) had been received to the Green Paper, and these would now be analysed as part of an Action Plan due to be published in the autumn.

Our speaker dealt with a wide range of questions. Asked about air pollution, he said that in June a methodology would be presented to calculate the costs of pollution by each mode of transport. The Eurovignette would be reviewed as part of intelligent charging for lorries and the times at which lorries could be used in urban areas would also be considered.

It was put to M. Barrot that the Green Paper should also contain reference to the role of cycling in cities. He replied that it was intended to facilitate cycle usage through cycle lanes, lighter helmets for cyclists and other equipment.

The proliferation of diesel cars brought problems of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In response M. Barrot pointed out that a particle filter was now required for diesel vehicles; that he

was against the use of 4x4s in cities and that the EC's main concern was to promote hybrid vehicles in urban areas.

It was pointed out that, a few years ago, DGTREN (a Directorate of the European Commission for Transport and Energy) had been very committed to engaging users in its work. Since DGTREN had been reorganised there seemed to be less involvement of passengers' representatives. M. Barrot replied that it was certainly important to ensure that the Commission engaged users in its work and it was also important that city authorities also consult them,

Asked to explain more about the concept "transport on demand", our speaker said that satellite navigation would assist this and that the GALILEO system would make it much easier to organise. He also saw car-sharing as a step in the right direction and it was important to share and promote good practice.

It was put to our speaker that more railway electrification and high speed lines were needed; but that the British government was not taking this seriously as an alternative to airport expansion. Should the EC also be taking a lead in persuading member governments to introduce aviation fuel tax, not just emission trading?

Our speaker replied that, because of global competition, we must not "blindly tax European airlines." However, the EC planned to reduce aircraft pollution in three ways: entry into the Emissions Trading Scheme; the Clean Sky programme to which it had committed 1.6 billion euro in research; and the Caesar project to modernise air traffic control and reduce stacking.

High speed railways may be less relevant to the UK because of the shorter distances between major towns and cities. However in its investment programme the EC had favoured the less polluting modes, with, for example, 74% of its 6 billion euro annual investment going to rail and 12% to inland waterways. It was also trying to encourage on to trains cargo which was currently being transported by air.

It was pointed out to M. Barrot that most of the work carried out by EPF and its constituent member associations was voluntary and that more time and money was needed. Our speaker responded that, with European passengers' rights in the rail sector due to come into force on 3 Dec 2009, there could be opportunities for associations to increase their income by playing a mediatory role - perhaps taking a commission for successful compensation claims. He also cited a scheme in the Netherlands to compensate airline passengers, and lessons could be learned from this. Our speaker did, however, emphasise that he understood the problems facing voluntary bodies.

It was pointed out that the Green Paper had very little to say about urban planning - but the more dispersed it was, the greater the likelihood of people travelling by car. Could the EC also influence industrial planning and therefore freight movements? M. Barrot said that the EC had no competencies in this sphere but could give advice and draw attention to good practice. He added, "We must organise cities more rationally."

The "love/hate" relationship between some rail operators and passengers' associations was raised, with the particular example of the Dutch Railways quoted: they had signed the CER Charter on passengers' rights but would not enter into any meaningful discussions over fares or timetables.

"The solution is in competition," M. Barrot replied, saying that companies would then need to have dialogue with their customers. From 2010 there would also be competition in the international rail market and it was necessary for passengers to be organised - "which is what you have done, and I congratulate you."

It was then put to M. Barrot that most users' organisations relied heavily or entirely on volunteers. Funding needed to be found so that they could follow the British

example (of Passenger Focus and London Travelwatch) and employ professional staff to defend users.

M. Barrot replied that he understood the problem and would look into the possibilities of support for volunteers, concluding: "We are there to build users' rights but I cannot make easy promises."

The Chairman thanked M. Barrot for his interesting presentation and wide-ranging responses and was pleased that the door was open for further discussions between EPF and the Commission.

#### 4. THE LONDON MAYOR AND HEAVY RAIL

Ian Brown, Managing Director of London Rail and Chairman of Docklands Light Railway, gave a presentation in which he explained that the recent Transport Act: gave no responsibility for heavy rail but that London was a big region and needed long-term planning which must include national rail.

A 30-40% growth in rail usage was expected and this was linked to a projected growth in employment of 800,000 from 2001 to 2026. This increase would be particularly along the east / west corridor - hence the need for Crossrail - but the expected population rise of 1,000,000 would be more dispersed.

There were therefore two options: "smarter travel or grow the city". Smarter travel could mean putting fares up by, say, 30% but would destroy the city's economy as people would work elsewhere. Crossrail would cater for many existing and future commuters, but increased capacity was also needed on the existing national rail network. Instead of working out what the growth will be, said our speaker, "we should just postulate 40%, as we are bound to get there one day, and then work out how to cope".

London Rail does not control all the network in the capital. The Government, however, had no interest in developing the inner urban railway but was allowing London Rail to do this; which led to the "Overground" concept with increased frequency and new routes.

Crossrail was part of an integrated plan to develop the economy, as the case for it could not be made purely on transport grounds. Thameslink development was also proceeding. The need for increased capacity would also lead to longer trains and platforms and improved signalling systems.

London Rail was interested in running the Southern franchise itself. Thameslink would be at least half complete in time for the 2012 Olympics. The 30-year strategy was funded through Network Rail and priced by the Rail Regulator. Crossrail would be franchised to an operator but, unlike with other franchises, London Rail would control important things like fares and timetables.

Strategic objectives will be to accommodate population and employment, giving a transport benefit ratio exceeding 2:1, supporting London's finance and business centre. As well as Crossrail and the upgrade of Thameslink there is a need for Waterloo station to be upgraded to cope with longer trains. There is also a desire to buy new trains since leasing them takes too long. Bus integration needs to be improved, and London could learn from Paris in this respect.

Our speaker also explained how London Rail was improving the East London and West London orbital lines. He suggested that a new fast radial link, for example from Cambridge, would bring benefits to the economy. Buses needed to be focussed into the system as feeders rather than operating as a competing network.

Mr. Brown responded to a range of questions, including one on the case for investing in orbital rather than radial routes. He stated that rail was not always the solution for orbital journeys but London Rail had endeavoured to make a case for it. It depended on where people wanted to go, since rail was very efficient at moving large number of people who wanted to go to work in a particular place. At Canary Wharf, for example, 91% of commuters arrived by Underground or Docklands Light Railway.

He was also asked whether it was right to assume that London would continue to grow and whether overheating of the London economy would be bad for the rest of the United Kingdom. In a related question it was pointed out that it was much more difficult to secure rail investment outside London and the South East.

Mr. Brown agreed that there should be more rail investment in other cities, such as Birmingham. It was easier to make the economic case for rail in London, especially as there was no room for more roads. The imbalance in the UK was because local control was not being given to regional authorities.

Asked about the possibility of double decker trains, our speaker said that these had been considered but that because of curved platforms and other structures on the line "we've gone for length rather than height". There were also issues concerning the Disability Discrimination Act. The Crossrail tunnels would be bigger than existing tunnels, but still not UIC standard.

The Oyster card now being used on the London Underground was praised, but the reluctance of Train Operating Companies to accept it caused difficulties for customers. Mr. Brown said that the supplier of the Oyster smartcard had a monopoly contract. The Train Operating companies had been offered £40 million to install new machines but were still not keen. He would like to see the market for this equipment opened up and this could happen in due course.

Mr. Brown was asked about the slippage in dates for the installation of ERTMS. He said that it was possible to get more out of the existing infrastructure in some cases, for example by moving block signalling or increasing train lengths.

It was suggested that, when a line was closed for engineering work, more trains should be run on other lines, rather than laying on replacement buses. Mr. Brown said this could be done in certain cases and that in Docklands the normal plan was to keep the Jubilee Line running when the DLR was closed, and vice versa. It was more difficult on other more complicated links, however.

On the question of greater use of trains, Mr. Brown said that insufficient political support meant that it was easier to extend existing systems than build new ones.

Tearing up the streets in central Croydon had been quite a problem when Croydon Tramlink was built, for example. However, he concluded, "When people are familiar with trams, they are less afraid of them."

Rufus Barnes concluded the discussion by saying that, during 25 years with London Transport Users' Committee and now London TravelWatch, he had always argued for greater transport integration. This was now coming closer, thanks to the Mayor's powers over heavy rail.

When London Underground and British Rail / National Rail had been controlled by two different sets of politicians, it had "led to some silly situations." For example, demand for trains from Harrow into central London fluctuated according to whose fares were cheaper.

However, the merger of Travelcard (bus and Underground) and Capital Card (heavy rail services) had solved this problem and been to the benefit of all customers. He was now looking forward to seeing Oystercard operating more and more on National Rail.

## 5. EUROSTAR - THE ST PANCRAS FACTOR

Nick Mercer, Commercial Director of Eurostar gave a presentation on the company's progress.

The company was a joint venture by SNCF, SNCB and Eurostar UK. In 2003 the business had not been in a very good state, with its trains still having to use the classic network in south east England. However, once it was known the new line (High Speed 1) would be brought into use on a known date in November 2007, they were able to plan ahead in readiness for the changes. The shortening of journey times between London and Paris and Brussels had had "a profound psychological effect". £10.5 billion of regeneration was also already committed on the back of the new line which itself had cost £6 billion.

During the 12 months up to November 14th 2001 Eurostar had mounted a publicity campaign, taking advantage of the "fantastic opportunity to change people's perceptions of rail." The move from Waterloo to St Pancras was a massive task which had been successfully undertaken in 12 hours and 97% of trains ran on time on the first day of operation from the new terminal.

Using a very sophisticated research programme, applying election campaign techniques to tell the story, Eurostar had conducted "a hugely successful communications exercise, with media coverage worth £135 million in PR value. We have helped convince people that rail is a 21st century means of transport and now feel very optimistic about the future."

The re-routing of Eurostar to St Pancras had had a profound effect on usage of trains to the north of England; but there had been a decline of 2-3% in Eurostar customers from Hampshire and Dorset for whom Waterloo had been more convenient.

Eurostar's annual passenger carryings had gone up from 6.8 million in 2003 (when only 77% of trains had run on time) to 8.3 million in 2007 (when half of HS1 was in use and punctuality was 91.5%) expected to increase to 10 million by 2010.

As another measure of Eurostar's success, Mr. Mercer pointed out that there used to be a plane from London to Paris every 50 minutes; now there was a plane only every 70 minutes.

Turning to environmental concerns, Mr. Mercer said that these had come into much prominence in the past 3 years. Research showed that high speed trains only emitted 10% of the carbon dioxide emitted by aircraft on comparable journeys. Eurostar journeys were now carbon neutral.

Our speaker also referred to the achievements of Thalys high speed trains between Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam and Cologne. It was after the 10th anniversary celebrations of Thalys in Brussels on June 1st 2006 that the Directors and Chief Executives of train operators present started discussions which were to lead to the creation of Rail Team.

The aim of this new consortium was to promote seamless train journeys across Europe. Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Cologne, Brussels and Lille were identified as five key hubs where it was possible to change between two high speed trains in one station. To be part of the Rail Team offer, trains must run at over 225 kph with at least three services a day and meet minimum quality standards.

Research showed that what people most wanted was an integrated booking and information system. 20 million euro was being invested to produce attractive through

fares and the aim was for this system to be live in June 2009. When prices were combined at the cheapest rate, rail became “incredibly competitive with the airlines”. The new system should also enable passengers to make changes if they had gone abroad and then needed to change their onward or return bookings. Until now, however, European train operators had been “too domestically driven.” They needed to improve information for international travellers before, during and after travel, with better information points at hub stations and on-train announcements - for example, about connecting services and platforms. It was also important that, if a train was late, the next operator should allow the passenger to travel on the next available train without paying a penalty.

Rail Team were also looking at the issue of baggage handling at hubs and allowing frequent travellers to use different companies’ lounges there.

In conclusion, Mr. Mercer said “Everything is now in favour of rail - especially when airports are affected by environmental and security issues and when the price of oil gives concern”.

Our speaker answered many questions - the first of which was that it was possible to book a year ahead for an airline ticket whereas rail tickets could only be booked 3 or 4 months in advance. He acknowledged that UK leisure market research did indicate that customers wanted to book further in advance and Eurostar was likely to be experimenting with this. It would probably take 3 or 4 years to develop such a system for all high speed operators, however.

Asked about sleepers from Scotland to France, Mr. Mercer was not optimistic, referring to a report which indicated “the economics would be pretty disastrous.” There had been much local concern about the reduction in stops at Ashford International since November 2007, but Eurostar had promised to hold further discussions with the various bodies after six months.

Concern was expressed that some Rail Team partners, such as Deutsche Bahn, were not publicising it and that many of their staff were unaware of its existence. Mr. Mercer thought that with larger concerns (DB had 200,000 employees) it would take more time to train them all than with smaller companies like Eurostar.

One regular traveller between London and Brussels expressed concern about the poor customer care when a lineside fire had recently caused trains to be cancelled; and about other aspects, such as the business lounge at St Pancras and the on-train meals service, where a little more thought was needed.

Mr. Mercer said that, at the time of the fire incident, a decision was taken to suspend the service for 24 hours rather than have “a botched operation”. They had been let down by contractors who were fitting out the business lounge.

He was asked about current difficulties in booking through tickets and replied that there was a growing number of British stations with through ticketing to the Continent. Already it was possible to book from the UK to anywhere on the TGV network (including Switzerland) and Thalys while Eurostar tickets to Brussels were, of course, valid for onward travel to any station in Belgium. They did need more automatic ticket machines at stations where customers could collect an international ticket paid for elsewhere.

Our speaker also clarified the structure of Eurostar. Until 2002 it had been run as an unincorporated joint venture with the three operators (Eurostar UK, SNCF and SNCB) agreeing to work together. In 2002 they created the “Eurostar Group” to centralise marketing, and management of on-board staff, with a joint board. There was an aspiration to become a completely independent European rail company with shareholders.



## 6. THE NATIONAL PASSENGERS SURVEY

Anthony Smith, Chief Executive of Passenger Focus, the statutory body for British rail passengers, introduced his presentation with the words, "Rail travel is not about running trains - it's about moving people around". Passenger Focus was not a pro rail organisation as such, but was concerned with "putting passengers first", helping them to get where they wanted to go and undertaking research to this end.

The National Passengers Survey was the largest of its type in the world. Every year 50,000 passengers completed a form about a train journey they had made. This enabled comparisons to be made between different Train Operating Companies, none of which wanted to be at the bottom!

Passenger Focus had achieved "a happy arm's length relationship with the Government". "They want to fund us", he said, "because we're useful to them. We're part of the solution, not part of the problem". They concentrated on two issues where it was possible to make a difference: fares / value for money and getting a seat.

Rail usage overall in the UK had been increasing with a proportionally higher increase in season-ticket holders. Income from the latter was regulated and so leisure fares income had been going up more, with a wide range of fares.

Mr. Smith said that there was a strong correlation between rail performance and passenger satisfaction. Research did not, on the whole, back up claims of a need for faster trains. Passengers were more concerned with reliability, staff presence and how the operators dealt with delays. These were things that were "relatively easy to fix". Top priorities for customers were value for money, enough trains, punctuality and the ability to find a seat.

Turning to the European Passengers' Federation, in which he had been involved since its earliest days, our speaker considered that it, and the railway industry, had "a very bright future". This was because "a vibrant, competitive rail industry needs a vibrant independent passenger body with resources behind it."

It was necessary to convince the European Commission - who wanted to fund action, not talking - that EPF could contribute to research, for example into comparative customer satisfaction. We needed to be able to compare passenger experiences in France with those in Germany with those in Britain and so on.

The first question to our speaker was - Should there be surveys of non-users, to establish why they are not travelling by train? Our speaker replied that in some areas of Britain there was no space for more passengers in the peak. Off-peak services offered more scope, however. People who used a service often had a better image of it than those who did not. The best form of advertising was when a friend or colleague told you that they had had a good journey. Simpler ticketing would encourage more off-peak users, however.

It was pointed out that more rail users than bus users tended to have cars. Mr. Smith agreed, but commented that motoring may seem less expensive than rail travel but that as cars become harder and dearer to use trains become more competitive. Car owners who are travelling by train will already have weighed up those pros and cons.

The issue of fuel tax was raised, with the questioner pointing out that there is no tax on aviation fuel. Mr. Smith agreed that the playing field between rail and air was not

a level one although the fuel tax position varied from country to country. An EU Directive allowed Governments to exempt rail operators from fuel duty.

Asked about the effects of the elaborate system of compensation in the UK, Mr. Smith said that the proportion of passengers who formally complained was minute. The existence of compensation had a key role in the image of rail, however. If your complaint had been handled badly you would probably tell 10 other people.

Our speaker also explained the high degree of regulation of train services, with the strict performance measures for the private operators and the penalties that could be imposed upon them. There was similar regulation for buses in London, but not elsewhere. It was important to spread good practice, while recognising that the problems of railways varied from country to country. On the problems of obtaining the cheapest fare, he considered that Train Operating Companies should be more open and advised, "Don't just rely on the Internet. You may get a more helpful answer from a human being".

## 7. CONCLUSION

Varujan Apelian of the Association of Railway Friends in Bulgaria spoke of hopes for a better rail network in south-eastern Europe, with a high level of safety, better information and more customer feedback. The existence of EPF was very important in this respect.

The Chairman thanked all delegates for their contributions and all colleagues who had helped towards the success of the conference. The 2009 Conference and Annual General Meeting will be in Berne, Switzerland on March 14th.

Report compiled by Trevor Garrod with input from Trevor Jones and Ray King.

EPF wishes to thank Tube Lines and Eurostar for sponsoring aspects of the conference.

To learn more about the European Passengers' Federation and its member associations, please visit our website: [www.epf.eu](http://www.epf.eu)