

EUROPEAN PASSENGERS' FEDERATION
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9TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Museu Picasso, BARCELONA, 12th March 2011

CONNECTING PEOPLE

WORKSHOP ON CROSS-BORDER SERVICES

The conference was attended by over 80 delegates from 15 European countries and was preceded by a workshop on the afternoon on March 11th. The workshop, at the Estació de Franca, discussed how cross-border services could be improved. It was led by Ricard Riol, Josip Maria Olive and Francesc Xandri. There are three rail crossings between France and Spain - Cerbère/Port Bou, La Tour de Carol/Puigcerdá and Hendaye/Irun - and since December 19th two French TGV services each day have also used the new line across the border as far as Figueras. The Canfranc/Oloron crossing was closed following an accident on the French side. SNCF runs three buses a day between Pau and Canfranc but there are only two Spanish trains to this station. Connections at each crossing could be improved at relatively little cost. At Port Bou, half the Renfe trains terminate there and those which do continue to Cerbère have to return empty. Only SNCF runs passenger trains to Port Bou.

A Spanish regional train to Port Bou could connect with the night train to Paris but does not. It is assumed that only people from Barcelona and Madrid want to go to Paris. Standard gauge continues from La Tour de Carol to Puigcerdá, but SNCF never runs there. The last Spanish train of the evening terminates at Puigcerdá but could continue to la Tour de Carol to connect into the last SNCF departure. French trains could continue across the border to Irun but do not. The metre-gauge Euskotren does serve Hendaye, but then uses different stations to Renfe in Spain. SNCF has an agreement with the Basque regional government for integrated fares to San Sebastian/Donastia ; but no such agreement with Renfe.

On the La Tour de Carol route it is not possible to buy a through ticket from Toulouse to Barcelona. Travellers arriving from France at La Tour de Carol find no timetables for Spain and are advised to buy their onward ticket on the train. It was suggested that market research should be done on both sides of the border to measure the demand for through travel; and that in a tourist area such as this it should be made easy to use public transport on both sides of the border. The Renfe website does not sell tickets for commuter trains. However, it was pointed out that the DB website (based on Hafas) gives information about Spanish local trains. For example, it is useful for anyone landing at Barcelona Airport and wanting to continue by train to, say, the resort of Calella. It was pointed out that cross-border co-ordination of timetables is not always easy because SNCF has many exceptions, e.g. different times on different days.

However, there was a need for discussion between RFF and ADIF (the French and Spanish infrastructure companies), the government of Catalonia and regional government of Languedoc-Rousillon. Regional politicians need to be shown that there are advantages for their regions in better cross-border train services. This included cross-border links for commuters and leisure day trips into a region. It was also pointed out that politicians did not like people who just complained; but if they were given constructive options then they would listen.

Finally, attention was drawn to the EPF report "Journeys without Borders" in October 2010 and the associated list of cross-border services, recently updated, on the EPF website www.epf.eu

CONFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

Trevor Garrod, Chairman of EPF welcomed everyone to this, the ninth annual conference, being held for the first time in Spain.

Ricard Riol, President of PTP, welcomed delegates to Barcelona.

The Deputy Mayor of Barcelona, Senor Francesc Narvaez, in his welcome, spoke of the city's efforts to support sustainable public transport; and the important role of voluntary associations in defending passengers' rights and promoting public transport.

BARCELONA'S MOBILITY STRATEGY

Angel Lopéz, from Barcelona City Council, explained that the metropolitan region comprised 164 municipalities containing 4.4 million people. 30% of internal travel was by public transport, 24% by car and 46% on foot or by bicycle. For longer journeys, 44% were by public transport and 47% by car. Since 2001 there had been a reduction in vehicle-kilometers per inhabitant. 60% of the cars in the city belonged to people who did not live there.

Elections were held every four years but transport needed longer term planning and so a Mobility Plan was adopted every six years, with clear objectives: sustainability, safety, efficiency and social equality; reduction in accidents and reduction in emissions.

In 2005 there was an “Area Verde” There were loading and unloading areas and 30-minute restrictions on parking. Congestion had been reduced by 16% as 44,000 people had opted not to use the car for journeys. EU funding had also helped implement these policies. Reduction of private vehicle use had to be accompanied by improved alternatives. Investment in rail was increasing and a plan had been drawn up with ADIF, Renfe and FGC for better commuter services. However, a recent referendum showed opposition to a tramway extension along the Diagonal boulevard.

The City Council was also learning from, and contributing to, best practice in other European cities.

In answer to questions, Señor Lopez said that some traffic lights might have to be adapted for more cyclists as they had originally been designed for pedestrians. Through POLIS and the Association of Capital Cities, the City of Barcelona worked together with others on projects such as motor cycle safety and shared ideas, policies and benchmarking. A British delegate drew attention to referenda in Edinburgh and Manchester which resulted in votes against congestion charging; whereas in London this measure had been successfully introduced without a referendum. Our speaker commented that Barcelona’s green areas were equivalent to congestion charge areas and had been initially rejected but then local people started asking for them. It was important, however, in any consultation, to give an option in exchange for reducing private vehicles.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL RAILWAYS IN CATALONIA

Oriel Juncadella, Operations Director, began by describing the creation of Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya in 1979 to manage lines previously run by Renfe and FEVE, as part of the process of regionalisation in Spain. There were two main lines, one from Placa Espanya to Montserrat and other destinations; the other from Placa Catalunya together with the line from Lleida to Pobla de Segur and short links such as funiculars and cable cars. The 139 km of meter gauge line from Anoia to Llobregat also carried freight.

FGC’s aim was to be ahead of customer expectations. Recreational facilities were not subsidised. They had three principles; to improve customers’ perception of the service; to maximise economic and social profitability; participation and good use of staff. There was a high frequency of trains on the underground sections with 75% line occupation. Changes in the signalling system had made it possible to run 32 trains an hour and they could if necessary go up to 40 trains per hour.

The operations centre at Rubi was “a brain with three legs” - a station supervision centre (covering all stations - which had no offices but staff to guide passengers); centralised traffic control; and a centre for customer information which also produced client indicators and a quality control index. Our speaker said that FGC had developed tools for measuring customer satisfaction which had been adopted elsewhere in Europe.

Of 27 issues that might concern customers, the priorities were punctuality and safety, while value for money (in terms of service levels) was also important. Bus replacement had caused a loss of 20% of passengers when line repairs had to be made. On the other hand, increased frequency and new trains had increased passenger satisfaction from 64% to 71%. Ticket machine failures were evaluated. Punctuality stood at 99%, with trains regarded as late if they were delayed by more than 3 minutes. A decrease in passenger satisfaction on one line had led to the formation of passenger focus groups and showed the need for FGC to explain its long-term plans to customers.

Senor Juncadella also described the transport of potash, salt and SEAT vehicles by FGC to the port of Barcelona. They had regained a market share lost in 2009 and providing an alternative to road congestion was a factor here. In transporting car parts they worked in partnership with Renfe and a private operator with 539 car-carrying trains removing 32,000 lorry movements from the roads.

FGC was also involved in educational activities to promote public transport and encouraged feeder buses from residential areas to bring passengers to stations. They were also constantly on the lookout for new business and new markets.

In answer to a question, our speaker said that there was no direct relation between passenger satisfaction and regional government support, “but a satisfied customer will defend your service and travel more and so bring in more income.” Each year FGC received more income from fare-paying passengers and required less deficit funding.

“RETBUS” FUTURE BUS PROJECT IN BARCELONA

Dr Miquel Estrada Project manager of the Centre for Transport Innovation at the Polytechnic University of Barcelona, described the project to introduce a new service of high-performance vehicles in the city centre. Congestion in the central

area affected bus speeds, which could be just 15kph when there were many traffic lights and only 300m between stops. Some bus lines were inherited from 1920s tramlines. The network needed to be easy to understand and was likely to be a hybrid between a grid pattern (with 3 minute frequency) in the central area and radial routes (with 6 minute frequency) branching out into the suburbs.

The intention was to have route corridors rather than routes between a large number of places. This meant that a journey often required a connection into another bus service but waiting times were minimal because of the frequent services along each gridline. An analysis had been done of transfer times at bus stops and these were planned to avoid passengers having to cross the street. In future it was proposed to have 430m between bus stops in the city centre; and 600m towards the ends of the radial routes (where speeds were higher). Bus priority measures could bring about a speed increase of 30%.

In answer to questions, Dr Estrada said that the average travel distance by a bus passenger was believed to be 3km. As you increase the distance between stops, customer usage will change. A journey with the Retbus should be compared with one by private car rather than one on foot. He agreed that the new network would mean fewer bus services. However, would there be protests by customers at the disappearance of their local bus service? Dr Estrada said that it would be up to the City Council to consider how to respond in such cases.

THE WORK OF PTP (ASSOCIACIO PER A LA PROMOCIO DEL TRANSPORT PUBLIC)

PTP President Ricard Riol said that the association's objective was to promote public transport. It was born after the 1992 Olympics had put Barcelona on the map. A major success had been agreeing integrated fares; another was the creation of one authority, as in London, for transport administration, both public and private. A third achievement was the introduction of a car-free day in Catalonia. Road demand exceeded supply. Buses consumed less energy, used less public space, made less noise and caused less pollution. Public transport provided twice as many jobs per kilometre. The work of PTP was of benefit not only for passengers but for the whole of society. People did not use public transport purely for environmental reasons. Key factors were private vehicle restrictions, economic promotion, compact and mixed urbanisation and competitiveness. "There is a chicken and egg situation," said our speaker. "Fewer people using public transport means more deficit, but better public transport means more users. There is also a difference between pulled demand and pushed demand."

Spain liked to talk about infrastructure, both high speed railways and roads. Spain had broken the European record for road building, having 239km of motorway but 334km of railway per million people. There was good public transport usage in Barcelona, but not in the rest of Catalonia. (see www.transportpublic.org). In 1970 the first motorway was built in Spain. In 1971, the tramways in Barcelona were shut down in the interests of motorists rather than society as a whole. There was a need for more public transport awareness in parliament (where the members all had free car parking.)

"PTP believes in trains," said Senor Riol, "but they need to be planned better. The railways should be the backbone of the public transport system. Spain had the most kilometres of high speed line in Europe, and the most motorway, despite not being the most populous nation in Europe. In fact, most passengers were daily commuters and between Barcelona and the important town of Tarragona more passengers used the conventional train than the new high speed train. This was partly because the high speed line did not serve the centre of Tarragona but had its own station (Camp de Tarragona) 8 km away. Only 14 passengers per high speed train travelled between Barcelona and Tarragona. On 5% of passengers using Camp de Tarragona made use of the shuttle bus to and from the town centre. The rest went by car. In Barcelona, on the other hand, only 6% of passengers accessed the station by car.

There was now a commuter plan, but because of structural deficiencies in 2006 two tracks were lost for ever. There was a need to resolve local capacity. It was important to decide on what services were required first, then build the infrastructure to match - not vice versa. In the Plan Tren 2014 the emphasis was on improving capacity rather than high speed. Trains should serve all places in Catalonia with a population of at least 30,000 with better and faster regional services as well as all-stations trains. This would mean doubling of some single track lines and adding a third or fourth track to some others.

There was a case for "tram-trains" in some low density areas; while a new broad-gauge tunnel was proposed to enable Placa Catalunya station to cater better for commuters. The majority in the Catalan Parliament supported such plans, which were also nominated for UITP awards. The urban lesson, concluded our speaker, was "less concrete, more intelligence."

In answer to a question, he explained that PTP's founder members were mainly engineering professionals but the membership was then widened, especially to include younger people. They held meetings with multi-disciplinary experts, obtained funding for publications and then also used the internet. Organising in southern Europe was rather different from in the North, however, as the South had more emphasis on working with friends and family.

THE SPANISH STRATEGY TO DEVELOP THE HIGH SPEED NETWORK

Señor Felix Martin Merino, Renfe Director of Transversal Services, began with a brief historical summary: the first railway in Spain was opened in 1848 and the rail network was nationalised as Renfe in 1943. In 2003 the separation of infrastructure and operations was agreed, with ADIF being formed for the former and Renfe focussing on the latter.

On commercial train services, prices were determined by the market while on public interest services they were decided by the national or regional authorities. Renfe's fares were influenced partly by what passengers were prepared to pay and by what the railways' competitors charged. Spain's first high speed line was opened from Madrid to Seville in 1992 and changed the dynamics. Spain had long distances which were suitable for high speed rail and now had 2056 km of route with a further 1767 under construction or planned. The network now served Malaga, Valencia, Valladolid, Huesca and Barcelona; while extensions to Galicia, San Sebastian/Donostia and Irun were still to come. Improvements were also needed along the Mediterranean corridor. Future plans included high speed trains to France and a high speed connection for Madrid airport. Renfe wanted it to be possible for their tickets to be bought anywhere in the world.

Señor Merino stated that, from the start of high speed services in 1992, Renfe had a policy of compensation for late running and other deficiencies, such as in advertised catering. In fact, the high speed trains had a punctuality rate of 98.54%, compared to 91.5% for Eurostar and 92% for TGV. Surveys showed that passengers valued punctuality, personal care, security, comfort, design and on-board services.

It was also important to integrate high speed trains into local services "to get the customer home". A mixed network was used to provide fast services to cities such as Cadiz, Huelva, Alicante and Bilbao and the current fleet consisted of 187 high speed trains and 100 conventional long-distance trains. A passenger profile showed that the average passenger on a high speed train was aged 30-44, 76% were in employment, 84.1% were loyal or frequent travellers and 47% of journeys were for business or professional reasons.

On the Seville route, rail had always had a larger market share than air and soon overtook air on the Malaga route. Rail's market share between Madrid and Barcelona had taken more time to grow, but was now equal to that of the airlines. Since the opening of the high speed route to Valencia in December, rail usage had grown by 150%.

In 2010 Renfe had a positive balance for the first time. Its trains were affordable and attracting passengers from cars and airlines.

CONNECTING PEOPLE - EASY TRAVEL FOR EUROPEANS

The conference then moved from the regional and national to the European perspective with our guest speaker Mrs Meglena Kuneva, special adviser to Vice-President Kallas, the EU transport Commissioner. Mrs Kuneva is herself formerly the European Commissioner for Consumer Affairs. She was accompanied by Mrs Veronica Manfredi, a member of the Vice-President's cabinet.

Mrs Kuneva announced that the EU had reached the goal of extending passenger rights to all transport modes. Indeed it was "the first integrated area in the world providing passenger protection in all modes of transport." Passenger rights made travel easier and more comfortable and ensured that passenger could benefit from common rules for reimbursement or rerouting. Air and rail passengers' rights were already in place and those for maritime and bus/coach passengers would apply from 2013.

The Commission now had to ensure that the legislation was effectively and consistently applied in all Member States. Further work might be needed on implementation of the Denied Boarding Regulation and the provisions for Persons of Reduced Mobility. The Commission would welcome the passenger organisations' view on their perception of complaint handling procedures and the specificities of each mode in improving intermodality in transport.

“Passengers can only reap the benefits of passenger rights legislation,” said Mrs Kuneva, “if they know their rights.” Vice-President Kallas had therefore launched a Europe-wide information campaign in June 2010, with posters, video clips and information leaflets and a multi-lingual campaign website. She appealed to all EPF member organisations to work with the Commission to get this information across to EU citizens, saying, “An informed citizen is a competent citizen who can make smart choices.”

Our speaker then set out Vice-President Kallas’ vision of “a system of seamless multimodal travelling and integrated ticketing, which would result in an overall better travel experience for citizens.” This would require single tickets or billing systems and door-to-door journey information. To achieve this aim there would have to be EU-wide multimodal travel platforms which could provide commercial services. This in turn required integrated management of national and modal infrastructure, such as could already be observed developing along certain freight corridors. She also referred in this context to the current review of the Trans-European Networks.

Information technology was likely to become one of the most distinctive features of future transport systems. It could be used to deliver meaningful real time and personalised travel information to the user interested in door-to-door information, especially for cross-border and multi-modal travel. Directive 2010/40/EU was important in this respect. The Commission would also encourage the development of national and regional multimodal journey planners and links between existing planners, “with the ultimate aim of building a Europe-wide service.”

Mrs Kuneva spoke of new forms of electronic ticketing gradually taking over from the old paper ticket and said that the Commission would soon be publishing a study and making recommendations. The aim was to move towards harmonisation of Intelligent Transport Systems while leaving full freedom to deploy systems locally, regionally and nationally as appropriate. It was important to remember that the technology was there to provide “services for real people with real needs.” Mrs Kuneva concluded by stressing that better travel connections would also enable other goals, such as decarbonisation, to be reached.

One questioner asked, “Is every journey necessary? If you can work from home, why not make that choice?” Mrs Kuneva commented, “You cannot stop the economy by not travelling. But you can make travelling more efficient.” Another question referred to paperless ticketing as already being developed in air travel. Mrs Kuneva said that assistants were available at airports to help passengers in such cases but paper tickets should still be available. Mrs Manfredi added, “The screen is the new market place. It creates more possibility for long multimodal and complex ticketing.” Asked what the Commission could do to make trains more attractive than air travel, Mrs Kuneva said that all modes of transport had their role to play and that just as competition had brought down air fares, so it could also reduce rail fares. The important thing was to offer choice to consumers.

Were some countries or operators working with or against the Commission? Mrs Kuneva replied, “We’re in a constant state of improvement. We must stay firm on the community interest. The EC can improve the institutional framework and public awareness. If someone breaches the rules, proceedings can be started against them.” Other questions referred to the opposition to an Amsterdam - London train service and the withdrawal of international trains across the Greek border. Mrs Manfredi said that Vice-President Kallas was telling Member States and operators that projects with a European dimension should go ahead or funding could be stopped. Delegates also referred to lack of publicity for rail passengers’ rights in some countries and lack of multi-modal travel information in others. Our speakers said that permanent dialogue between users and the providers was important as were peer pressure and the spread of good practice. National Enforcement Bodies in some countries also needed to be made more effective. The knowledge-based economy and spread of broadband were seen as “the clue for the future.”

THE PROTECTION OF PASSENGER RIGHTS IN EUROPE

Christopher Irwin, Vice-Chairman of EPF, began by showing how travel disruption during the past year had demonstrated the need for passenger rights and the interdependence of the different transport modes.

There had been progress but was still much to do, for “a modern public transport system is not an optional luxury. It is essential to the twin challenges of enabling economic growth while reducing dealy emissions of carbon and greenhouse gases.” Passenger needs and passenger satisfaction were central. Passengers must make themselves heard. in the imperfect market conditions in which public transport was provided, they could not rely on the forces of supply and demand to do it for them.

There should be three priorities for EPF in the coming year:

1. On passenger rights there should be consistency between modes, with improved and comparable levels of enforcement by National Enforcement Bodies. The likely recast of Air Passengers' Rights legislation should provide an opportunity to take steps in this direction.
2. During the recast of the First Railway Package we must stress the importance of greater market transparency and effective independent regulation. For example, passengers should be able to obtain impartial information from a single ticket office and be able to buy a ticket between any pair of stations, regardless of operator. Indeed, this principle had been established in Great Britain as early as 1842.
3. Continuing work with the European Railway Agency on the Technical Standard for Interoperability on Passenger Applications' Telematics. Progress had been made, and legislation was expected shortly, but our long-term aim should be reliable end-to-end journey information across all modes, for timetables, ticketing and journey characteristics. We also needed to encourage EU action to promote common standards to enable electronic ticketing distribution. Our Vice-Chairman urged the railway industry to work together with EPF, and other users' representatives such as the European Disability Forum, to this end.

Mr Irwin also referred to the Global Distribution Systems companies who had grown up to service the air sector. They were now showing great interest in the potential attractions of High Speed Rail for their industry. Could this be an important new means of selling rail travel?

He concluded, "Listening to passengers, understanding what they want and explaining to their representatives how feasibly to achieve an attractive, affordable and sustainable alternative to reliance on the private car is vital. EPF is ready to work with the public transport industry to achieve these things. We are determined to press our case, with the Commission, the Council, the European Economic & Social Committee and the Parliament as well as in our home territories."

ON-LINE INFORMATION NEEDS FROM THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT USERS' VIEW

Mr Enric Cañas, Technical Director of FMSS (Foundation Safe and Sustainable Mobility) spoke on developments in information systems. During the 20th century, these had consisted of guides, maps and telephone information services; with paper and audio information provided at stations and stops.

The 21st century has seen a move into tele-indicators with real time information and internet portals providing all types of information, including different routes. They also enabled travel information to be more personalised.

He drew a comparison with changes in society. In industrial society, there had been a small number of managers and large number of workers. Post-industrial society led to more managers and fewer workers. Now the "society of knowledge" was more disparate and less hierarchical. Knowledge now had a strategic value and was a key element in the development of new services.

Information had to be multi-channel and simultaneous. It included new types of mobile phone and social networking sites as well as google and bing. For the public transport user, modern technology provided information when preparing the journey; during the journey and after it. This could include information on disruptions and contingencies; fulfilment of service indicators and customer care. Such technical developments meant that operators sometimes had to change their mindset; but there were also issues, such as protection of privacy, which needed to be addressed. Laws had to be developed guaranteeing access to public transport information especially as technological developments were moving faster than information management.

CONCLUSION

EPF Chairman Trevor Garrod thanked all speakers for their presentations and all delegates for their contributions. He gave special thanks to Pau Noy and Ricard Riol and other PTP members for their hard and effective work in organising the conference, workshop and associated events; to the EPF officers and administrator for their work; to the translators and to the sponsors - Ajuntament de Barcelona; Area de Barcelona; Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona; Tranvía Metropolitana and FGC-Turisme y Muntanya, and Associació d'Amics del Ferrocarril Barcelona.

The Chairman announced that the 2012 Conference and Annual General Meeting of EPF would be held on Saturday March 10th in Salzburg, Austria.

This report has been prepared by Trevor Jones and Trevor Garrod.

The full presentations can also be found on the EPF website www.epf.eu

TG April 2011