



European Passengers' Federation

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Report of 10th Annual Conference

MARCH 9TH/10TH 2012

BEST WESTERN PARKHOTEL BRUNAUER, SALZBURG, AUSTRIA

**CHALLENGES OF URBAN TRANSPORT
LIBERALISATION OF RAIL PASSENGER SERVICES
EUROPEAN TRANSPORT POLICY-ISSUES AND ASPIRATIONS**

Nearly 90 members of public transport users' associations from 12 European countries gathered in Salzburg for the 10th Annual Conference of the European Passengers' Federation.

On Friday afternoon, March 9th, they took part in a seminar on Public Transport in and around Salzburg. On Sunday March 11th many participants then experienced it for themselves - either by a visit to the city's trolley-bus depot and special tour of the network; or by a visit to train to Zell am See and then a journey on the Pinzgauer Bahn to Krimml.

SEMINAR:

Mr Gunter Mackinger, Transport Director of Salzburg AG, opened the seminar by describing Salzburg AG, whose public transport services carried 160,000 passengers per day. With 700 employees they were the leading provider of mobility in the Land of Salzburg and prided themselves on their customer orientation.

The Salzburger Lokalbahn (local railway) had suffered a decline to 1.2 million passengers per year in the 1970s but the downward spiral had been halted and they now carried 4.8 million customers per year. Their fleet of 18 modern electric trains had 98% reliability, running up to a 15-minute frequency in the peaks. They owned their own infrastructure. The SLB recognised the importance of on-train staff, and had a conductor on every train. They could sell tickets for transfer journeys on to the Austrian and German Federal Railways as well as their own line.

93 trolleybuses on 10 routes in and around the city carried 38 million passengers per year. Mr Mackinger said "The trolleybus is the answer to the climate change discussion. We save 60,000 tonnes of CO2 per year." The overhead wires gave the customers more assurance, emphasising long-term public transport that was also "clean, green and smart."

Salzburg AG also operated a funicular, a cog-wheel railway up the Schafberg, a hotel at the summit and six ships on the Wolfgangsee. In 2008 they had also purchased from ÖBB (Austrian Federal Railways) the Pinzgauer Lokalbahn, which had been 50% destroyed by flooding in 2005. Within 18 months, 23 km of track had been rebuilt and the line was now fully open and carrying commuter, tourist and freight traffic.

Finally, Salzburg AG was also operating local trains on the Berchtesgadener Land Bahn across the border in Germany

Mr Mackinger quoted the secrets of success as being -

- a motivated team
- good contacts to politicians
- good public relations
- a positive image
- flexibility and quick decisions
- offering benefits to passengers

In answer to questions, Mr Mackinger said that the trolleybus, rather than the tram, was the correct choice for Salzburg. The local public transport system was now "in a consolidation phase" and it was important to recognise where one's strengths were. He also referred to strong motorbus lobbying by the bus industry, especially in German-speaking Europe. "A motorbus has a shorter life - only 8 years whereas a trolleybus has a life of 20 years." Trolleybuses were also cheaper to operate than motorbuses and they had a better safety record.

He also emphasised the importance of on-train staff. Those employed by Salzburg AG did not just sell tickets. They also had technical training.

Mrs Angelika Gasteiner, responsible for Customer Service & Marketing at Salzburg AG, gave a presentation on Older Passengers as an Important Target Group.

She had developed programmes for different groups of customers and said that elderly people were "a group always forgotten", An ageing population meant that in 20 years 50% of customers would be over 60 and public transport helped them stay mobile and enjoy quality of life. A generation of car drivers was now getting old and needed to get used to public transport. It was important to know about their needs and their fears.

Salzburg AG had devised a 2-day training programme for such people, with tips and hints on using the buses and then a joint bus ride followed by coffee and cakes. They had also produced a safety brochure, bearing in mind that 50% of accidents happened when a passengers was boarding or alighting from a vehicle.

Drivers were also given training on the needs of older people and those of reduced mobility.who should if possible be allowed to sit within sight of the driver and only have a short walk to and from the door of the vehicle

Mrs Gasteiner stressed the importance of "direct human contact". She and her colleagues had information stands - for example at weekly markets - and gave presentations at clubs. Leaflets and posters were produced on themes such as "On the bus with Granny" (aimed at children 5-10) and descriptions of places of interest and convenient walks from bus stops - in which case it was also important to show where there were seats and toilets. Their work also helped create understanding between generations.

In answer to questions, Mrs Gasteiner said that focussing on accessibility ultimately helped all passengers. About two-thirds of 25-year-olds could be lost to public transport as they became motorised, and there was a challenge to operators to keep them using it or to win them back when they reached a new stage in their lives.

There was a temptation to cover windows with advertising, which created problems for everyone. This could be reduced, and in Salzburg, while the advertising revenue was welcome, they concentrated the advertising on the back window and only 25% - 30% of the remainder.

On cheap fares, Mrs Gasteiner said that, unlike those in Great Britain, older people in Salzburg did not have free bus travel. The operators needed the revenue from all passengers, but the City Council did fund monthly passes for people on a low income.

CONFERENCE

EPF Chairman Trevor Garrod welcomed participants to the tenth Annual Conference, on Saturday March 10th, meeting for the first time in Austria. EPF now had 33 member associations in 19 countries, the most recent to join being For Jernbane from Norway.

For probahn Österreich, Peter Haibach welcomed everyone to Salzburg and expressed the wish that railway operators would work together in the same way that EPF member associations did.

AUSTRIAN FEDERAL RAILWAYS' INTERNATIONAL WORK

Mrs Maria Gasteiger, Head of Corporate & International Affairs at ÖBB Holding, described their operation, carrying 460 million passengers per year and also operating 900 bus routes.

There had been improvements in customer services with record levels of punctuality, new rolling stock, improved passenger information and better on-board catering. In five of the nine Länder (provinces) usage of local services had increased, thanks to political will and favourable funding.

ÖBB was also an environmentally friendly railway system, with 93% of trains powered by green electricity, partly from ÖBB's own hydro power plants, and compared favourably with short-distance air traffic, cars and coaches in this respect.

Asked about cross-border services, Mrs Gasteiger referred to electrification from Vienna to the Slovakian border and to the Brenner base tunnel which would improve services to Italy. There had recently been a big discussion about major infrastructure projects but implementation of some of these might be delayed.

Our speaker was also asked about the lack of an Austrian national timetable book. She replied that it had been expensive to produce and so more emphasis was now being placed on electronic means of information. The Chairman commented that in Great Britain the national rail industry (Association of Train Operating Companies) no longer produced such a timetable, but that two private publishers had obtained permission to do so. This might be a model for other countries.

CHALLENGES FOR URBAN TRANSPORT

Mr Walter Joks of Wiener Linien gave a vivid presentation of how the Vienna city transport operator had increased its market share from 29% to 37% since 1993 and now had 373,000 annual season ticket holders. Under the slogan "Die Stadt gehört Dir" ("The city belongs to you") they had sought to change the perception of public transport "from mass transport to individual mobility." Imaginative publicity campaigns had targeted different types of people such as senior citizens, children or young people having a night out. Two examples were -

"Did you know your daughter is going out at night with this man?" (The man being a bus driver)

A little boy at school tries hard to spell "Straßenbahn" ("tram") correctly and then gives up and writes "Bim" (Viennese slang for "Straßenbahn").

Mr Joks said that the underground network also now ran 24 hours day at weekends, a further innovation in response to demand and to keep people travelling safely in public transport.

Pau Noy of PTP (Catalan public transport association) and EPF Council member gave an interim report on the EPF comparative survey of public transport in major European cities. The survey was evaluating the speed, frequency and user-friendliness of the services together with the cost. Surveys had so far been completed of Madrid, Barcelona and Birmingham. These initial results would put Madrid in first place followed by Barcelona; Birmingham was not far behind in terms of quality, but its fares were considerably higher than those in the Spanish cities.

Volunteers were requested to continue the surveys in other European cities of more than 1 million inhabitants.

CHALLENGES OF RAIL LIBERALISATION

Mr Manfred Mader of WESTbahn GmbH gave a presentation on the experiences so far of WESTbahn, the open-access Inter City operator between Vienna and Salzburg, some of whose trains also continued across the German border to Freilassing.

They started to compete with the former monopoly operator, ÖBB on December 11th 2011, providing thirteen trains each way per day.

WESTbahn wanted particularly to score with a high level of service quality. Thus in each of the new operator's carriages there is a member of staff, who does not just check tickets, but also sells these without any surcharge, serves drinks and snacks and looks after safety and cleanliness.

Moreover, WESTbahn stakes everything on a clear, simple offer. There are only two sales channels - on line and on board - and three types of ticket: single, season and kilometre bank. Tickets can be cancelled or exchanged at no extra charge.

The new company aims to have 25% of the market share on the Vienna - Salzburg main line within five years. 85% of the staff have direct contact with customers. The managers also spend one day a month working in their trains. Mr Mader described their business as "delivering a service rather than operating transport."

After 11 days they had welcomed their 100,000th customer having had a 70% load factor on their first day of operation (a Sunday) and their punctuality rate was 98%.

There was a long way to go before they had fair competition with ÖBB, however. ÖBB received a ten-year operating grant of 6 billion Euro from the government and was awarded contracts without competitive bidding. Initially WESTbahn was not included in the published timetable, but this was now obligatory.

In answer to questions, Mr Mader said that there was no difference between peak and off-peak prices on WESTbahn, but there were special weekend offers. Bicycles were carried for 5 Euro. SNCF had a 26% share in the company, while Swiss and Austrian businesses also had a financial stake in it. The company planned to be able to pay back in five years, the loans which it had taken out to buy trains.

WESTbahn saw their main competitor as the car, since Vienna - Salzburg was too short a distance for air travel to be competitive.

WESTbahn did not accept InterRail tickets and were not part of Railteam. If connections were missed (for example on a journey from Munich to Salzburg) it was not possible to use a WESTbahn ticket on an ÖBB train or vice versa. Passengers would have to buy a new ticket. However, WESTbahn did promise its passengers a 50% refund in the event of one hour delay by one of their trains.

WESTbahn had also, with a partner, introduced some long-distance coaches (WESTbus), for example between Linz and Prague.

Asked about loyalty cards, Mr Mader said that they were not able to join the ÖBB scheme and so had started one of their own.

MERIDIAN

Mr Jörg Frank-Marquardt, Manager Sales/Business Development of Veolia Verkehr GmbH, described his company's plans for the regional franchise in Upper Bavaria. The trains would be branded MERIDIAN with a core network between Munich, Holzkirchen, Rosenheim, Kufstein and Salzburg.

Veolia had 4574 employees and 33 active subsidiaries in Germany. They operated buses and (in Gornitz) trams as well as trains.

Rail liberalisation in Germany had started in 1994/5 and in 1998 Veolia had started to operate the Bayerische Oberlandbahn. There were now nearly 400 railway companies registered in Germany with between 20 and 25 key players. There was a trend for such railway companies to be part of a national one such as NS, DB or FS.

Our speaker identified two "bottleneck factors" which posed problems for private operators - competition between operators could lead to a shortage of employees, especially drivers; and capacity problems at some stations and sidings.

The MERIDIAN contract was due to run from 2013 to 2028 and 35 new FLIRT electric multiple unit trains were being built for it plus a new workshop in Munich.

FLIRT stands for "Flinker leichter innovativer Regionaltriebzug" (Nimble lightweight innovative regional multiple unit train). Each unit would include a multi-purpose space for up to 12 bicycles, have better accessibility than current trains and be capable of being coupled to two other units.

The operating company would have ticket centres in six stations but also use vending machines, on-line and on-board sales. After 19.00 trains on the Holzkirchen line would also have a conductor. A passenger consultative committee and an on-line bulletin board would be other innovations, while future challenges included adjustment and co-ordination with local buses, park & ride and "bike & ride".

Answering questions, Mr Frank-Marquardt said that if Veolia disposed of the contract, a new owner would continue it. The terms of the tender required the operator to accept Bahncard (a national railcard) and InterRail. This was a complicated matter, with problems with some tariff structures, but they were "working hard to bring both sides together."

PROBAHN ÖSTERREICH

The afternoon session of the conference opened with a presentation by Peter Haibach on the work of probahn Österreich, the EPF member association which was hosting the event.

Mr Haibach explained that probahn Österreich had existed for fifteen years, albeit earlier under another name, and was a federal body, with local associations in the various Länder or provinces of Austria.

It was interested in buses as well as trains, and in promoting electric buses. Members had made a cost comparison between rail, road transport and air and been involved in local protest actions. Each year in October the Salzburger Verkehrstage were held, attracting participants from the German-speaking countries and beyond, to discuss a wide range of transport issues.

Mr Haibach also drew attention to the questionnaire on the probahn website (www.pro-bahn.at) for readers to record their experiences of travelling by ÖBB or WESTbahn.

He also drew attention to the fact that by 2050 it was expected that 70% of Europeans would be living in cities and the need to improve public transport accordingly.

USEMOBILITY

Josef Schneider, Secretary of EPF, gave an interim report on the EU-funded USEmobility project, in which we were involved.

It was important to break out of a downward spiral of greater car use and less public transport use in some regions and countries and the work of the project was vital in this respect.

More information can be found on www.usemobility.eu and it is planned to have a full report at the 2013 EPF Conference.

EUROPEAN TRANSPORT POLICY

Mr Keir Fitch, Deputy Head of Cabinet of EU Transport Commissioner Siim Kallas, spoke on current issues and aspirations.

It was nearly a year since publication of the White Paper, "The Future of Transport - Roadmap for a Single Transport Area", which aimed for free movement of people and goods. Europe faced the challenges of the target of an increase in passenger kilometres of 50% by 2050 and an 80% increase in freight kilometres.

Currently transport was 96% dependent on oil. Fuel security was an issue and the exploiting of fossil fuels was becoming increasingly problematic. The challenge of climate change had led to the setting of a target of 80% reduction in CO₂ emissions by 2050.

Vice-President Kallas had stated, "restricting mobility is not an option"; and nor was taxing people to achieve modal shift. Rail had to be made more attractive for passengers and it had to become more reliable for freight.

In the autumn of 2011, the EU had agreed investment in the core TEN network for the next 8-10 years to ease bottlenecks and improve cross-border links. It was important to join key cities, ports and industrial areas. The European Parliament was still discussing which missing cross-border links should be funded.

A 4th Railway Package, possibly to be called "Better Railways", was due to be launched later this year by the European Commission. Much work was still to be done towards harmonisation of technical standards. At the moment, each national railway was still too often "doing its own thing".

Our speaker said that freight liberalisation had led to innovation - "anyone can get a licence to run." Passenger liberalisation, however, had made more progress in some countries than in others. In Germany, for example, costs had been reduced by contracting out regional services. "Passenger liberalisation is not an end in itself," Mr Fitch stressed, adding "It is still important to preserve the network benefits of rail."

The European Commission would probably not adopt a "one size fits all" approach, but set a range of options from which member states could choose the one which best suited them. The result had to be a service that was better for customers.

On passenger rights, Mr Fitch said that the European Union had done much in the past ten years and that air passengers' rights in Europe were now "the best in the world." By this time next year there would be rights across all public transport sectors.

However, there remained a challenge to make multimodal journeys more effective.

Existing passenger rights had perhaps been tested more than anyone could have foreseen during the volcanic ash crisis. Questions had been raised about how far one could go with customer care and protection. There was currently a public consultation on air passenger rights and it was important that passenger organisations contributed to it.

Enforcement of passenger rights was also variable in different member states and needed to be improved. Passengers needed to be more aware of their rights, notably on accessibility, information, reimbursement, compensation (if appropriate), customer care in the event of substantial delays and quick resolution of complaints.

Mr Michael Cramer MEP, Transport Spokesman for the Greens on the Transport & Tourism Committee, gave a presentation on Passenger Rights - a Fair Deal for Passengers and the Climate.

He stated, "Transport in the EU is too cheap; only the environmentally friendly transport is too expensive - and all that is politically intended." As a result, the transport sector was responsible for 30% of all greenhouse gases in the EU. Since 1990 it had been possible to reduce CO2 emission in industry by 34%, in energy production by 17% and in households by 14%. During the same period in the transport sector they had risen by 29%.

In German cities most car trips were less than 6km. In the EU on average there were 450 cars per 1000 people. In China there were only 15 cars per 1000 people. "We have to be a positive model for China", said Mr Cramer.

The problem was not that environmentally friendly forms of transport were in themselves uncompetitive; but they were burdened by a whole series of distortions of competition which were also a burden to the environment and to taxpayers. For example, airlines, through their exemption from kerosene tax and, on international flights, VAT, are subsidised each year to the tune of 60 billion Euro by the European taxpayer. The railways, however, have to pay, even though CO2 emissions in the stratosphere are 3 to 4 times more damaging to the climate than those on the ground.

In competition between road and rail, said Mr Cramer, there were massive distortions. Thus throughout the EU it was prescribed that for each locomotive on each kilometre of track, a track charge with no upper limit must be levied. The levying of a road charge was a voluntary decision of the member states, had an upper limit and mostly only applied to lorries of over 12 tons; and moreover an upper limit was given by the EU.

Passenger rights had to be seen in this context. Of course customers must have a claim to assistance and compensation when transport contracts had been concluded but not kept. On the other hand passenger rights must always be looked at with regard to the distortions in competition referred to above.

"Currently the environmentally friendly railway is subject to the strictest rules," said Mr Cramer. Thus in long-distance train journeys, after a delay of one hour, 25% of the ticket price must be refunded and 50% after a delay of two hours. If one made the journey by aeroplane, compensation could only be claimed after 3 hours delay - and that was only because the European Court of Justice considered the originally determined 5-hour limit to be untenable.

He also cited as unfair the fact that in Berlin the fine for incorrect parking for one hour was only 5 Euro whereas the penalty for not buying a ticket on public transport was 40 Euro.

Our speaker concluded, "The EU must therefore urgently produce fair conditions for passengers and intermodal competition. We Greens demand that all transport providers introduce a uniformly high level of rights and particularly that these are effectively enforced in the member states. Therefore we need an independent mediation service encompassing all operators, applying the rules in a non-bureaucratic manner. We shall use the proposal announced by the European Commission for this year to bring together all passenger rights, in order to place this topic right at the head of the agenda!"

Questions were then put to both speakers.

Asked about rural transport, Mr Cramer said "The countryside is not the problem. The car can be environmentally friendly there. The problem is in the cities. There we need tramways."

On liberalisation, Mr Fitch said that a proposal was expected at the end of the year and was likely to focus on regional services. It must be organised to deliver passenger satisfaction rather than fragmentation. If the existing rail infrastructure was already saturated, they would probably not encourage newcomers.

On ERTMS Mr Fitch expressed concern about the current German position but hoped that the EC could work with the German Transport Minister to reach a solution. There were 20 different signalling systems in Europe and the aim was to have just one.

Mr Cramer said that he had been rapporteur on this issue in the European Parliament in 2006 and that standardisation was still needed. A deadline should be set for the implementation of an acceptable system.

What would be the reaction of the EC if one country decided to reduce public transport fares and increase fuel prices? Mr Fitch said that the competition implications would have to be assessed and the fuel excise directives examined. It was pointed out that lorry charges in Austria were very low and disadvantaged rail freight.

A delegate suggested that liberalisation was not reassuring to the passenger, especially if tickets were not interoperable. It might also mean employing more civil servants to sort out the fragmentation problems. Mr Fitch pointed out that the UK had introduced liberalisation but had preserved through ticketing. However, more players in the systems could mean more pressure on the government. Another delegate cited the Berlin/Brandenburg transport authority as a good example of many operators - train and bus - working effectively together

EPF UPDATE

Christopher Irwin, Vice-Chairman of EPF, reported on progress since the 2011 conference in Barcelona.

The European Commission had been listening to us, as shown by the December 19th Communication - a European Vision for Passengers. It accepted the case for passenger rights and principles which applied to all modes of transport; and that these should be easy to understand for both passengers and operators.

There were currently examples of non-compliance. The EC accepted the need for effective enforcement and monitoring.

EPF had worked effectively on the TAP-TSI (Telematics Application for Passengers) and a further technical standards document for Persons of Reduced Mobility and could help shape legislation for the benefit of passengers.

Transport Commissioner Kallas accepted the need for easy end-to-end journeys and had launched a challenge for the development of an EU-wide multi-modal journey planner.

EPF members had also pressed passengers' interests in dialogue with MEPs, Rail Forum Europe, the EU Economic & Social Committee, at the Civil Aviation Conference and with international train operators.

We established our priorities; we had concentrated on them and now we were beginning to see the fruits.

"There is little point in market opening," said our Vice-Chairman, "unless it satisfies the needs of passengers." The Commission had accepted this and measured passenger satisfaction in 25 EU states with rail networks. Public transport generally performed poorly on the Consumer Protection Scoreboard.

The long-term aims of the Transport White Paper, to increase rail passenger numbers to more than 50% of journeys over 2-300 km by 2050 was an enormous challenge. These aims could only be met if transport providers started listening more effectively and people chose public transport because it was attractive, rather than because they had no alternative. The absolute demand for travel was not going to decrease. To achieve modal shift we had to improve rail capacity.

Mr Irwin continued, "Rail is central to the new transport economy. Operators must concentrate on performance, reliability, changes in culture and management's ability to handle problems. There must be greater cross-border co-operation by national operators."

A promised Fourth Railway Package must include greater formal engagement with users; the maintenance of network benefits; co-operation between all relevant bodies; and a strategy to meet the climate change challenge.

Investment was also needed in public transport infrastructure - which was beneficial, even in times of economic crisis. He cited the UK and Italy as good examples of investing in rail infrastructure, even at a time of economic austerity; and regretted that in Greece and Portugal such schemes had been victims of the crisis.

Mr Irwin concluded, "To help make public transport the mode of choice, EPF must be recognised as the fully-fledged representative of European passengers."

CONCLUSION

Trevor Garrod thanked all contributors to the 2012 seminar and conference and to all colleagues who had helped organise it. He also drew attention to a reactions questionnaire to help EPF in the planning of future conferences.

Jürg Tschopp of Verkehrs-Club der Schweiz then invited all delegates to the 2013 Annual Conference of EPF, which will be held in Basle, Switzerland on March 16th. It will also include a Sunday excursion to Mulhouse, France, to sample the train-tram and National Railway Museum.

The Conference was followed by the Annual General Meeting of EPF, at which activity and financial reports were discussed and accepted; a work programme for 2012-13 agreed and a 5-Year Strategy discussed and accepted.

The Administrative Council was appointed and at its first meeting elected as Chairman Trevor Garrod; as Vice-Chairman Christopher Irwin; as Secretary Josef Schneider; as Treasurer Rian van der Borgt; as Assistant Secretary Kurt Hultgren; as Assistant Treasurer Pierre Havelange; as Bulletin Editor Marc Broeckart and as Webmaster Rian van der Borgt.

This report has been compiled by Trevor Garrod with assistance from Trevor Jones.

The European Passengers' Federation is an international non-profit association registered in Belgium.