



EUROPEAN PASSENGERS' FEDERATION REPORT OF THE 15TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

MARCH 17TH – 18TH IN ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

Close to 100 participants from 20 public transport users' organisations all over Europa attended the 2017 Annual Conference of the European Passengers' Federation in Rotterdam. Guests from the professional sector also took part, users of all public transport modes discussed current issues and learned from each other's experiences.

FRIDAY 17TH MARCH: MASTERCLASS

Friday afternoon began with a masterclass, moderated by Marc Maartens with reviews by Pieter Walraven. Presentations were given by representatives of five of EPF's member organisations.

LONDON TRAVELWATCH – Janet Cooke explained how the organisation, a statutory body funded by the Greater London Assembly, gathered evidence from passengers and sought to influence the transport industry and politicians, while understanding the constraints under which both operated.

London Travel Watch took a very practical evidence-based approach, illustrating problems and offering solutions. For example, in a review of the closure of ticket offices, they suggested ways to make staff more visible, they suggested improvements to the "Delay Repay" scheme and to signage and information.

They also had a casework team dealing with passengers' appeals, which in turn meant have a constructive relationship with operators' customer services teams.

FNAUT (France) – Anne-Marie Ghémard outlined the concerns of FNAUT, which brought together many local and specialist associations and lobbied for all modes of sustainable mobility. "To be listened to, one has to be accurate and credible", she stated.

Members of FNAUT had accumulated much scientific, technical and legal knowledge and in recent years had greatly enhanced its communication – for example issuing up to 4 press releases per month. Their advice was much appreciated by transport decision-makers, but convincing some politicians to support public transport was more of a challenge.

FNAUT 's target was to ensure the future of the whole French rail network, not just the high speed lines, with more competition on the track, while in urban transport high quality was more important than free transport in most cases to attract people out of their cars.

The advice to all associations was "adopt a multimodal approach – not purely railway."

ROVER (Netherlands) – Arriën Kruyt described how the 5.000-strong association sought to work in a broad coalition (including, for example, organisations of consumers, cyclists, students and also motorists) pointing out that 70% of members of the union of car owners also used public transport some of the time and 44% of rail passengers reached the station by bicycle while 25% went by bike to their final destination.

Rover took part in meetings of LOCOV (the Advisory Board for Consumers in Public Transport) and had informal but well-prepared discussions with the Minister, rail infrastructure company and national train operator and sometimes other operators – who, together with selected politicians and civil servants, also received a weekly blog from them.

The message which the association sought to convey was “Public transport is good – but it can be better” – and it was important not to be seen as always complaining.

In discussion he pointed out that one of Rover’s strengths was “the incredible level of knowledge of its members” and another was that “we tell companies the customer experience and so they appreciate what they say”.

Rover also set up study groups on particular topics, for example on marketing opening and franchising. They found that “There is no perfect system” but that the main rail network should be left intact.

PRO BAHN (Germany) – Jörg Bruchertseifer explained how passengers in the Augsburg area had been organised by Pro Bahn to undertake research and organise workshops to prepare a detailed submission on local rail franchises which were due to be re-tendered in 2017/18.

It emerged that key concerns were rolling stock quality, service frequency on some routes and poor connections in the evening. For example, regional trains should provide comfort for journeys of up to 2 hours, including silent areas but with no seats in narrow aisles.

If 1st class passengers were expected to pay 60% higher fares, operators needed to provide suitably comfortable accommodation for them.

Pro Bahn had produced a 68pp brochure, as a result of this exercise, and it had been sent to district councils, local mayors, chambers of commerce and other interested bodies, and would also be sent to operators bidding to run the franchise. They would also send it to local members of the Bavarian state government.

In discussion he said that they tried to have dialogue with politicians of all parties, but sometimes it was more productive to share information with one supportive Member of Parliament. “Such decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis.”

The consensus of their discussions was that there should be two toilets in each diesel multiple unit, but cycle provision depended upon the area served. It was sometimes best to have flexispace, with tip-up seats rather than designated a cycle section.

HELPING TO SHAPE EU TRANSPORT POLICY – Christopher Irwin (Transport Focus) reported on his experiences, including via the European Railway Agency and Rail Market Monitoring Study.

At the ERA he had stressed how its work on interoperability must be to the benefit of users and was instrumental in setting up a reflection group to identify the aims of the 4th Railway Package.

The impact of the Technical Pillar of this package should benefit passengers, but would take 4-5 years to have an impact.



Christopher Irwin during the Master Class on Friday 17 March

An important lesson in this process was “Perfect the message – distil it down to a simple core idea – adapt it for each audience – use familiar terms. It was important to focus on “nodes not modes” – connections were more important for the passenger than individual modes.

It was also essential to consider whether what you were asking for was in the European Commission’s competency; and helpful to refer to the aims of specific documents, such as the White Paper on Transport or the Communication on Decarbonisation.

As well as “developing thinking with officials” responsible for particular areas of policy it was useful to “build stakeholder alliances”, since public transport users’ interests would often overlap with those of other bodies.

In the final analysis, he said, “EPF speaks for the weaker party to transport contracts. What we say is evidence-led, not assertion-driven. We represent citizens.”

In discussion, the importance of reporting back to individual association on the relevance of our lobbying work at European level was stressed. It was also pointed out that Members of the European Parliament valued the opportunity to hear the experiences of citizens.

EUROPEAN PROJECTS – Mention was also made of EPF’s participation in EU projects, and particularly at the moment the CIPTEC project (Collective Innovation for Public Transport in European Cities). This was now entering its second stage, a crowdsourcing platform. Member associations were encouraged to submit ideas for innovation. (See also www.ciptec.eu and europe.ciptec.eu for the crowdsourcing platform – ideas can be submitted until 30th April 2017)



Saturday's program was moderated by transport journalist Marc Maartens.

SATURDAY 18th March: CONNECTIVITY, MULTIMODAL, LAST MILE TRANSPORT

Delegates were welcomed to the Saturday session by Mr Pex Langenberg, Deputy Mayor of Rotterdam. The city's view was that its public transport facilities must be attractive and user-friendly. It had a role in regeneration – for example when in 1993 the line through Blaak had been put underground and the area around this station was then developed. Rotterdam had been rebuilt after the war as a “car city” but now by offering better public transport and cycle facilities the Council could encourage people to leave the car at home.

ROTTERDAM'S REWARD PROGRAMME – Pedro Peters, CEO of the Rotterdam public transport company RET, said that they had a history of innovation and had purposely remained as an integrated organization. “We connect communities logistically and socially”, he added, and in 2014 RET had introduced a loyalty programme which was still the only one in the Netherlands (www.ovmiles.nl). Almost all regular customers use the chipcard and, thanks to RET's 39 commercial partners, they can receive discounts or extras in, for example, shops, cafes and restaurants.

The target was to have 55.000 members in the scheme by the end of this year. It also gave RET a lot of information about their customers, which helped them improve their services. One side effect mentioned by Mr Peters was that they could send an SMS greeting to customers on their birthday.

In answer to a question, our speaker said that anyone from elsewhere in the Netherlands could also obtain a Rotterdam card, but only for journeys in Rotterdam. Asked about data security, he said that the whole system was protected against hackers.

Looking to the future, he saw the growth of “ticketless travel” via smartphones and said that it was also technically possible to travel throughout the country on a contactless bank card.

CAN THROUGH BOOKINGS CHANGE CONNECTIVITY? – Nick Brooks of Trainline (the largest independent rail ticket vendor in Europe) said that, since the company was founded 19 years ago it had complemented the marketing of train operators, so that more people were aware of the benefits of rail.

The challenge was to book through journeys when there was no tariff co-operation, and Trainline aimed to recruit the best programmers (who did not have to come from the railway industry). They could, for example, show 4 different options for a journey from Rome to Milan, whereas a train operator could only show its own services and offers

A rail journey from, say, Bonn to Lille was the ideal length to meet the targets of the Transport White Paper – but to encourage customers to go by train, it was necessary to give full information about the options. It was essential for a distributor such as Trainline to have details of all the relevant data. He was also concerned that compensation for delay did not cover through bookings and that EU Regulation 1371/2007 was not yet fully enforced.

LAST MILE TRAVEL – Bart Schmeink of Transdev (operating in the Netherlands as Connexxion) said that the company was a global mobility provider which also had contracts for transport on demand and ambulances. He described three challenges in the world of mobility – air quality in cities; “on demand” transport rather than fixed timetables; and automated vehicles.

Our speaker foresaw a trend towards “mobility as a service” but said that national legislation was focussed on “protecting monopolies rather than creating a better service.” Transdev had recently been awarded a “mobility as a service” contract for the Amsterdam region.

In discussion, he recognised that the Dutch OV Chipcard could be a hurdle for foreign visitors; and that there would still be a need for mass transit on some routes, but added, “On such routes you have to have shorter but more frequent trains.”

Nick Brooks added that Trainline saw trains as preferable on longer distances but would also consider other modes for the start and end of a journey.

USER-CENTRED TICKETING – Chris Milson of the Technical University of Delft described the smart card project which he had undertaken in London, Chicago and the Czech Republic. If the human, business, technological and social elements worked together, then operators had a good product.

He had interviewed users and staff and concluded, “Don’t force people to use a particular system, but offer clear benefits.” For example, in London passengers were urged, “Use contactless. No need to queue.” He advised, “Don’t re-invent the wheel. But don’t blindly copy others’ solutions.”

In discussion it was pointed out that smart cards were not suitable for groups of travellers, such as family parties. However, a contactless bank card could be a useful stand-by here. On some cards, such as the Belgian Mobib, it was also not possible to tell how many trips you had left – unlike on the paper ticket that it had replaced. A further problem could arise with combined rail and theatre or sports fixture tickets.

Our speaker agreed that further research was needed in these areas and said, “Please hire me!”

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRENDS INFLUENCING MOBILITY IN 2030 – Dr Imre Keseru (Free University of Brussels) outlined the work of himself and colleagues on the Mobility4EU project (www.mobility4eu.eu).

Key factors were an ageing society, automation, changing lifestyle and new business models, while social equity must also be taken into account.

There could be less demand for car parking in the future; younger people did not necessarily want to own a car; greater reliance on ICT could mean people making fewer trips and urban sprawl could be halted or reversed.

In the future, would Uber and Tesla and similar providers be integrated into public transport? There would certainly be a need to enhance public transport. In answer to a question, our speaker said that automatic cars could still cause congestion and would need to be managed, with priority given to walking and cycling in urban areas.

CROSS-BORDER INTEGRATED SMARTCARD TRAVEL – Arco Groothedde of the European Travellers' Club explained how a group of operators were currently working to solve the problem of how to integrate 6 different European e-ticketing schemes. A pilot project in Luxembourg had been successful and a similar scheme involving operators on either side of the German-Dutch border should make it easier to travel between, for example, Aachen and Heerlen. ITSO from the UK had also joined the project in early 2017.

In discussion our speaker said that issues to be resolved included – from what age can an account be set up for a child? Can an account-based chipcard be integrated with a long-distance train ticket? How do such systems cope with travel for a family visiting, perhaps, three different places on a day excursion?

For more information, visit www.europeantravellersclub.eu.

PNR AND SECURITY – Christopher Irwin explained EPF's position in discussions (for example, in LANDSEC meetings) on what the reaction should be to terror attacks on public transport.

PNR (Personal Name Records) had been intended essentially for airline passengers but was not necessarily appropriate for land-based public transport. EPF had argued for a proportionate and balanced approach and also warned that by tightening security on one part of the network, authorities could create new targets elsewhere.

EPF member associations in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany had warned against stringent proposals by the Belgian Government in January, while no such controls would be made of people crossing the borders by car.

In discussion it was stated that the Belgian proposal was still on the table but its implications still had to be worked through.

FORUM ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS – Wim van de Camp MEP, Dr Libor Lochman (Community of European Railways) and Josef Schneider (EPF) then formed a panel which responded to questions on this and other issues raised during the conference.

Mr van de Camp said that politicians were concerned about security on public transport and operators such as Thalys had to deal with popular emotions. Maybe the security measures taken in Spain on domestic high-speed trains could be a model for elsewhere.

Dr Lochman warned that disproportionate measures on trains would work against any modal shift. Checks on Oresund trains between Denmark and Sweden had led to a reduction in the numbers of train passengers.

Josef Schneider expressed similar concerns if, for example, such controls were to be introduced on international trains between Frankfurt and Brussels and some passengers would instead switch to their cars.

The panel were also asked about the 4th Railway Package and all agreed that it should now be implemented without further delay. Josef Schneider urged operators to think about the matter from the customer rather than the technical point of view.

There was also discussion of the need for EPF to have more resources for its work in putting forward the passengers' viewpoint. Josef Schneider expressed it thus: "In some ways EPF is a rich organisation in terms of knowledge and coverage of Europe. But the Management Board and other active players are all volunteers." However, the CER had invited its members to sponsor future EPF conferences.



During the Forum on European Affairs panellists listen to Marc Maartens: Josef Schneider (EPF), Dr Libor Lochman (Community of European Railways) and Wim van de Camp MEP.

CONCLUSION – EPF President Michel Quidort thanked everyone who had contributed to the conference and said EPF would focus in the coming year on developing passenger rights in all modes of transport and governance of all modes, multimodality and open data to ensure that there is a good service that gives value for money.

Thank were also recorded to the Rover team for the excellent organisation of this year's conference.

Report compiled by Trevor Garrod

