

MEETING ON CROSS-BORDER SERVICES IN ENSCHEDE

Enschede is town with ca. 160,000 inhabitants in the east of the Netherlands a few kilometres from the German border. Enschede is considered the most German town of the Netherlands. Thanks to the tenacity of a dedicated Alderman from Enschede train services from Enschede to Münster via the German town Gronau were resumed in 2001, the line having been closed since 1981. The train service is a great success and trains run these days every half hour from Enschede to Gronau. From Gronau one train continues to Münster and the other to Dortmund.

On 31st October the regional consultative organisations on public transport (ROCOVS) for the Provinces of Gelderland and Overijssel organised a meeting on cross-border services with Germany. The meeting was well attended with approximately a hundred politicians, civil servants and employees from public transport organisations from both sides of the border. Members of Rover and ProBahn took an active part in the debate.

Due to the fact that cross-border train services have improved greatly in recent years the discussion focused on bus services. Bus services crossing a border face different legislation, different tendering systems, different languages, different cultures, different tariff systems and different payment methods. All these problems can be solved if there is the necessary political will on both sides of the border. A good example is that the German bus from Cleve to Nijmegen is nowadays allowed to go beyond its former terminus at the railway-station to the university. The service has increased from an hourly service to a half-hourly service. Both German and Dutch methods of payment are accepted.

An interesting story came from the director of the German company Levelink. Levelink is a small company which runs busses from Meppen, a small town in Germany to the Dutch town Emmen. During the great influx of refugees in 2015 the German authorities resumed border control and asked the bus drivers to check passports, residence permits and ID-cards. The small bus company was treated like a big airline and was threatened with carrier sanctions if it failed. The bus drivers evidently lacked the competence to do the checks. Levelink considered suspending the whole service. The recent ruling of the European Court of Justice in Luxemburg that this is an unreasonable burden for bus companies has come as a great relief to them.

At the October meeting I proposed forming permanent cross-border lobby groups with participation of Members of the European Parliament who live in that region. The suggestion was appreciated.

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