

Open Letter – Trains to Kaunas

kaunas.trainsforeurope.eu | kaunas@trainsforeurope.eu

To:

Adina Vălean, *European Commissioner for Transport*

Mariya Gabriel, *European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth*

Marius Skuodis, *Minister for Transport and Communications, Republic of Lithuania*

Simonas Kairys, *Minister of Culture, Republic of Lithuania*

Andrzej Adamczyk, *Minister of Infrastructure, Republic of Poland*

Piotr Gliński, *Minister of Culture, National Heritage & Sport, Republic of Poland*

Talis Linkaits, *Minister of Transport, Republic of Latvia*

Nauris Puntulis, *Minister of Culture, Republic of Latvia*

Alberto Mazzola, *Executive Director, Community of European Railways*

Artur Martyniuk, *General Director, Polregio S.A.*

Linas Baužys, *CEO, LTG Link*

Rodžers Jānis Grigulis, *Chairman of the Board, AS Pasažieru vilciens*

Agnis Driksna, *CEO, Rail Baltica*

Virginija Vitkienė, *CEO, European Capital of Culture Kaunas 2022*

We, the undersigned, are very happy to see Kaunas 2022 has made a wonderful start to its year as European Capital of Culture. Indeed the opening events this month have motivated us all to try to travel to Kaunas at some point by the end of the year.

But it is exactly this travel point that concerns us, and is the subject of this letter.

International passenger railway connections between Lithuania and its EU neighbours Poland and Latvia have essentially been cut since 14 March 2020. That means that the greenest and most comfortable way to get to Kaunas from Berlin, Warszawa or Riga - the train - is not available.

Re-opening these cross border rail services is vital for the EU's policy coherence - to show that travelling in an environmentally sustainable way is available for all, and building on 2021 that was the EU Year of Rail and 2022 that is the EU Year of Youth.

It is some irony that the only passenger train to cross the Poland-Lithuania border in 2021 was the European Commission's "Connecting Europe Express", a train that no member of the general public could use. Yet throughout the past two years flights and buses to Lithuania continued more or less uninterrupted, demonstrating that it is possible to travel to and from Lithuania safely even during the pandemic.

Trains to European Capitals of Culture can have a lasting impact. The Kulturbedrijf that was organised to allow a green means to reach 2016 European Capital of Culture Wrocław from Berlin and still runs to this day, such was the success of the service. It even prompted long term improvements to EuroCity services between Berlin and Wrocław.

We demand that the daily train service between Białystok in Poland and Kaunas be reinstated by the end of February 2022, thereby allowing reliable connections from Kaunas to Warszawa, and onwards to Berlin,

Praha, Wien and Bratislava. This connection has particular symbolic importance as it is the first part of the future Rail Baltica route, and the only rail connection between the Baltic States and the rest of the EU. A train to the European Capital of Culture could be a first step to showing rail's potential at this border.

We understand that restoring services to Riga in Latvia could be more complicated, but extending at least one service each day from Šiauliai via Jelgava to Riga would offer the opportunity for connections to Kaunas. This should likewise start at the end of February 2022.

We look forward to your response, and likewise look forward to taking the train to Kaunas 2022!



Jon Worth

*Initiator of the Open Letter,
and Founder, Trains for Europe*



Sebastian Wilken

Editor, traintracks.eu blog



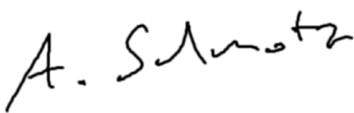
Josef Schneider

*Chair of the Management Board,
European Passengers' Federation*



Iwona Budych

Chair of the Board, Wykluczenie Transportowe



Anja Schmotz

*Head, Initiative deutsch-polnischer
Schienenpersonenverkehr / Inicjatywa polsko-
niemieckiej kolei pasażerskiej*



Lukas Iffländer

Deputy Chair, Fahrgastverband PRO BAHN e.V.



Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg
Member of the European Parliament,
Greens/EFA, Germany



Nicky Gardner & Susanne Kries
Editors, Hidden Europe Magazine

hidden europe

Exploring European lives and landscapes

Mark Smith
The Man in Seat 61



Łukasz Janeczko
Policy Advisor, Instytut Spraw Obywatelskich

**INSTYTUT
SPRAW
OBYWATELSKICH**

Vincent-Immanuel Herr & Martin Speer
Founders, Free Interrail Campaign



Annegret Wulff
Director, MitOst e.V.



Oliver Spatz
Art Director, Kulturtzug Berlin-Wrocław



Jaroslav Rudiš
Author, "Gebrauchsanweisung fürs Zugreisen"

Moritz Krähe
Railway activist