

EPF Conference 2023: Connecting Europe through Public Transport

The Picasso Museum in Barcelona set the stage for the highly anticipated EPF Conference held on 2nd and 3rd June 2023. This annual event brought together prominent figures from European passenger organizations, public transport operators, politicians, and officials from regional, national, and EU levels. With over 60 participants coming from 15 European countries, the conference provided a vibrant platform for seminars, workshops, and social events.

The conference commenced with a joint opening ceremony featuring Oriol Martori, DG for Transport and Mobility at the Generalitat de Catalunya, Elisabeth Kotthaus, Head of Unit for Social Affairs, Passenger Right and Equal Opportunities at DG Move/European Commission in Brussels, and Adrià Ramirez Papell, President of PTP/Promoció del Transport Públic/Barcelona. In their inspiring speeches, they emphasized the significance of public transport and the need for robust legal frameworks that safeguard passenger rights, especially in cross-border travel. The opening was followed by a captivating keynote address delivered by Jon Worth, who shared his personal experiences traversing various cross-border routes across Europe mostly by train. However, at many occasions, Jon also had to rely on his folding bike which he took along on all his train rides to cover many of the missing rail links he encountered, usually from one side of a border to another, and sometimes bridging mere meter gaps in the railway network. Jon concluded there was lots of room for improvement of cross-border train connections in Europe.

Throughout the conference, esteemed speakers including Carles Casas (FGC), Elmer van Buuren (European Sleeper), Przemek Ben Paczek (Nevomo), Pau Noy (AIF), Christian Perrot (FNAUT Occitanie), and Blaž Pongračič (Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies) showcased their respective projects aimed at improving public transport and fostering cross-border connections in Europe. The morning session concluded with Dorien Rookmaker, Member of the European Parliament, introducing the Voice of Citizens initiative, which aims to establish high-speed railway connections between all European capitals.



The afternoon of the first conference day was dedicated to exploring the concept of free or discounted public transport. Engaging discussions ensued with the participation of Miquel Lamas (ATM Barcelona), Beat Mueller (Trans-missions), Monika Wiktorja Maciejewska (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Javier Asensio (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), Mercedes Vidal (PTP), Antoine Belaieff (FAIRTIQ), and Montse García (PTP). They explored temporary and permanent examples of free or heavily discounted public transport implemented in different European cities and regions, highlighting the advantages, disadvantages, and varying factors influencing their success. Some of these factors include, geographic location, target groups, current car traffic policies and expectations of passengers.

The conference dinner held at the renowned "La Pomarada" was undoubtedly a highlight of the event, where participants relished the delicious cuisine and exquisite Catalan wines.

The second day of the conference focused on knowledge-sharing among EPF members, centered around campaigning and influencing the transport sector. EPF Chairman Josef Schneider emphasised EPF's role in facilitating mutual learning and improving lobbying efforts for public transport in different countries and communities. Wolfgang Sprick (VCD-Hessen), Dennis Fancett (Railfuture/SENUG), and Freek Bos (Rover/EPF) presented real-world examples of successful lobbying, inspiring participants to reflect on strategies for influencing political decisions and engaging with the public. In workshops moderated by Montse García (PTP) and Wandi Chivaura (EPF), participants reflected further on strategies to influence political decisions, possibilities to engage with the general public, and ways to bring forward change to our communities. The conference ended with a superblocks guided excursion through Barcelona.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our hosts, PTP, as well as the EPF and Picasso Museum organizers, for orchestrating a truly successful conference. Special thanks to our valued sponsors from Ajuntament de Barcelona, Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona (AMB), Autoritat del Transport Metropolità de l'àrea de Barcelona (ATM), Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona (TMB), Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya (FGC), European Sleeper and FAIRTIQ.