

EPF Conference in Swindon, England

EPF held its 2025 Annual Conference on 13-14 June at the prestigious STEAM Museum in Swindon, UK. The two-day event brought together representatives from across the public transport sector to exchange knowledge, debate key topics, and reflect on ongoing challenges and opportunities for public transport in Europe.

This year's programme focused on four central themes:

- Back to state operated public transport? From deregulation back to regulation particularly drawing on the British experience
- Ticketing and information from regional to crossing the channel
- Women in transport
- Focus on the passenger? The work programme of the new EU Commission

Day One – Opening & Keynotes

The conference was opened by EPF Chair Josef Schneider, followed by two keynote addresses.

The first keynote was delivered by Pierpaolo Settembri (Deputy Head of Cabinet for the European Commissioner in charge of Sustainable Transport and Tourism). In his intervention Mr Settembri focussed, amongst other things, on the importance on cross border railway traffic in Europe, and on the cross border dimensions of local train services and high speed train services.

The second keynote was delivered by Elisabeth Kotthaus (Head of Unit, DG MOVE, European Commission) who provided an overview of several ongoing and upcoming legislative initiatives by the European Commission. These included proposals on multimodal travel, air passenger rights, a fact-finding study on buses, and a review of the Package Travel Directive. She also raised the issue of transport poverty, which the Commission aims to address, and introduced the EU Network of Ambassadors for #DiversityInTransport.

Day One – Panel Discussion: Women in Transport

This session featured contributions from Bryony Chetwode (TravelWatch SouthWest), Florida Di Ciommo (Director, cambiaMO),

Marjeta Benčina (Sustainable Mobility Expert, Focus), and Ashley Bray (HR Director, Great Western Railway). The discussion highlighted how transport poverty disproportionately affects women, particularly those working part-time or managing family care responsibilities. Speakers pointed to the mismatch between public transport schedules and real-world needs, especially outside peak hours. Other key issues discussed included harassment on public transport and the lack of effective bystander support. Floridea Di Ciommo also shared insights from her work as an Ambassador for #DiversityInTransport under the EU programme.

Day One - InclusiveSpaces Workshop

This workshop was organised by EPF Project Manager Katie Bulanowski and EPF Project Officer Wandí Chivaura, together with Floridea Di Ciommo (Director, cambiaMO). The InclusiveSpaces project specializes in the inclusive design and evaluation of urban spaces, focusing on accessibility and social cohesion for people with disabilities and older adults. The EU-funded project aims to develop innovative solutions that embrace universal design principles and climate-friendly practices. The key tools include travel demand data and accessibility evaluation, comfort-based accessibility mapping, routing for visually and mobility-impaired individuals, digitised accessibility audits for buildings and public spaces, and a Universal Design Manual for the Built Environment. Additionally, the project will provide advanced assistive technologies such as shared electric wheelchairs, beach accessibility devices, upright tricycles, and other indoor and outdoor assistive tools. Six European cities will be the testbeds, with findings shaping actionable policies for a more inclusive, climate-friendly future. The session focused on two specific InclusiveSpaces tools: the universal design manual and the accessibility routing tool. Workshop participants discussed various aspects of the project, from lighting of dark spaces to seating arrangements. The outcome of the workshop will be considered in the further development of the InclusiveSpaces project.

Day One: Panel Debate: Focus on the Passenger? The Work Programme of the New EU Commission

Panellists included Elisabeth Kotthaus (Head of Unit, DG MOVE, European Commission), Jakop Dalunde (Member of the Swedish transport association Resenaererna and former Member of the European Parliament), Margarida Marante (EU Public Affairs Manager, Ryanair), Martin Schiefelbusch (Berliner Fahrgastverband IGEB) und Graham Parkhurst (Professor of Sustainable Mobility and Director of the Centre for Transport & Society at the University of the West of England). The discussion focussed, amongst other things, on the role of intermediaries in ticketing, associated challenges, the need for

legislative solutions, and the growing role of digitalisation in shaping the passenger experience.

Day One: Presentation: The importance of meaningful and inclusive communication channels with rail customers – A case study of the Cross Country Trains Access Panel and Customer Experience Auditing Programme

Jon Harris MRTPI FCILT is a transport planner with over 35 years' experience in sustainable transport, including rail, integrated transport and travel behaviour change. Jon shared some of his insights around engagement mechanisms. For most of Jon's career, he has worked actively in the area of 'access for all' in local authority, consultancy and community settings. He shared examples from his extensive experience of working with rail operators in the UK on this subject. In his presentation, Mr Harris explained, amongst other things, experiences with testing passenger assist services with mystery shoppers, i.e., passengers using passenger assist services who rated the services received by scientific criteria. Additionally, Mr Harris reported from a pilot project introducing "station neighbours", i.e., shops or small businesses located inside or close by stations, which offer passengers a safe space to wait, with or without a purchase. Further, he reported from his experiences with access panels, i.e., panels intended to involve passengers of diverse backgrounds into the planning and operation of public transport services. He pointed out that regarding needs of passengers with special needs, it is important to listen to the passengers and ask them to describe their needs, rather than to just work based on assumptions regarding their needs.

Conference Dinner

The first day of the conference concluded with a dinner at the award-winning restaurant Jewel in the Crown, a social highlight and an opportunity for continued networking in a relaxed setting.

Day Two: Presentation of Jan Deman (Executive Director, Busworld Foundation & Secretary General, BAAV)

Mr Deman focussed, on advantages and disadvantages of privatisation and nationalisation of public transport. Advantages of a privatised public transport may include increased efficiency and innovation, along with low levels of political interference. On the other hand, he stressed the advantages of a nationalised public transport system which may include more frequent services and a better coverage of the public transport network. However, Mr Deman pointed out that

both privatised and nationalised public transport schemes can provide value for the passenger, and the outcome for the passenger depends on the details of the contracts involved. Mr Deman also extended an invitation to the Busworld 2025 EU Congress, to be held in Brussels in October.

Day Two: Panel: Back to the State Operated Public Transport

Panellists included Christopher Irwin (Advisor, EPF), Alberto Mazzola (Executive Director, CER), Anthony Smith (Chair of Independent Rail Retailers), and Barclay Davies (UK Director for Wales, Bus Users UK). Christopher Irwin started the discussion with a review of previous nationalisation initiatives and privatisation initiatives regarding railway services in the UK. He pointed out that views of the general public and of political decision makers on this topic in the UK had changed various times. For instance, while the 1980s and 1990s were marked by a strong focus on the advantages of privatisation, the UK government is now re-evaluating those past decisions and exploring whether re-nationalisation could deliver better outcomes for passengers. Alberto Mazzola pointed out the importance of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) and expressed disappointment because, in his view, the ERTMS implementation is progressing too slowly. Mr Smith focused in his intervention, among other things, on research on British railway passengers. The research showed that the service quality in the British railway system was negatively affected by a lack of accountability. For example, many passengers reported situations where several companies were involved in a negative rail service experience, and the passengers felt the companies would rather blame each other than provide a solution for the passenger. Mr Davies reported that in Wales, public transport services tend to be excellent in large cities but insufficient in rural areas. He also mentioned that congestion is a problem affecting public transport in Wales.

Day Two: Panel Discussion: Ticketing and Information When Crossing the Channel

The sessions featured Anthony Smith (Chair of Independent Rail Retailers), Jan Vávra (Expert at Passenger Transportation/CIT), Alex Nelson (Director, National Rail Bishop Auckland Ltd), and Alberto Mazzola (Executive Director, CER). Anthony Smith started the panel by explaining that independent rail retailers offer services that railway operators cannot provide in certain situations, for example, selling a through-ticket for a route consisting of different legs operated by different operators. Mr Smith also pointed out that technology, in particular, provision of real-time ticket data, is crucial for rail retailers. This was followed by an intervention by Mr Vávra who mentioned, amongst other things, the agreement on

journey continuation (AJC). The latest operator to join the AJC was the Swedish Snälltåget. Mr Vávra mentioned the importance of digitalisation. He introduced the electronic ticket control database (eTCD), which is essential for inspecting tickets under the AJC, and the flexible content barcode (FCB), which enables the display of several related tickets in one barcode and hence makes it easier for passengers to present their tickets to ticket inspectors during journeys. Alex Nelson continued this discussion by introducing his work for the Association of European Rail Agents (AERA). Further, he took the audience through the process of booking a domestic UK split ticket, and he explained how UK passengers can achieve substantial savings by booking split tickets. This was followed by an intervention of Mr Mazzola, who explained the importance of the CER Ticketing Roadmap.

Closing Activities

The conference concluded with a guided tour of the STEAM Museum, offering insights into the rich railway heritage of the UK, followed by an optional excursion to Avebury, allowing participants to connect informally and enjoy the local culture.

Acknowledgements

EPF extends its heartfelt gratitude to TravelWatch SouthWest for their collaboration, as well as to all our speakers, participants, and hosts for making the 2025 Conference a success. Presentations and pictures from the conference will be available on our website: www.epf.eu