

EPF Conference in Maastricht, Netherlands

On 5 and 6 June 2026, 163 participants from across Europe gathered in Maastricht for the annual EPF Conference. Bringing together passenger organisations, policymakers, operators, infrastructure managers, researchers, students, and civil society organisations, the conference focused on one central question: how can Europe deliver a public transport system that is more sustainable, accessible, affordable and seamless for passengers?

The choice of Maastricht as host city was particularly fitting. Located at the heart of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine region, where Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands meet, the city provided an ideal setting for discussions on cross-border mobility, European integration and the future of rail transport. The conference was hosted at the Gouvernement aan de Maas (Provincial House of Limburg), a venue that reflects the region's longstanding commitment to European cooperation and cross-border connectivity.

Day One – Friday, June 5

Opening and keynotes

The conference opened with reflections on the importance of cross-border mobility in daily life.



Figure 1 - Wino Aarnink (Dutch Ministry) and Jasper Kuntzelaers (Province of Limburg) (left), Oana Gherghinescu (ERA) (right)

Jasper Kuntzelaers, Deputy of the Province of Limburg for Culture and Heritage, Mobility, and Agriculture, highlighted the challenges of providing affordable and accessible transport while ensuring that smaller towns and rural communities remain connected. He presented initiatives to tackle transport poverty, including a pilot providing free off-peak public transport for low-income households, as well as innovative on-demand mobility services.

Oana Gherghinescu, Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Railways (ERA), outlined the vision of a Single European Railway Area in which passengers can travel across borders seamlessly, safely and affordably. She stressed that regulation, interoperability and digitalisation should ultimately serve passenger needs and contribute to a rail system that is easier to use and more attractive.

The discussion continued with a keynote by Wino Aarnink, Director of Public Transport and Rail at the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, who pointed to the growing demand for international rail travel while acknowledging that major challenges remain. Ticketing fragmentation, infrastructure bottlenecks and limited interoperability continue to make cross-border rail less attractive than it could be. He called for stronger cooperation between Member States and a long-term vision for an integrated European rail network.

Public transport on the local and regional level

The late morning session focused on local and regional mobility. Henk Swarttouw, President of the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF), highlighted the close relationship between cycling and public transport and the importance of integrating bicycles into stations, mobility hubs and ticketing systems. Gunta Anca, President of the European Disability Forum (EDF), emphasised that accessibility must be considered across the entire travel chain and not treated as an afterthought.

Panel discussion

The subsequent panel discussion with Manu Lageirse (Transdev), Thomas Geier (EMTA), Gunta Anca (EDF), and Henk Swarttouw (ECF), explored how public transport systems can remain inclusive while adapting to emerging technologies such as autonomous and on-demand mobility.



Figure 2 - Panel with (from left to right) Henk Swarttouw (ECF), Manu Lageirse (Transdev), Gunta Anca (EDF) and Thomas Geier (EMTA)

Autonomous vehicles were seen as a potential tool to improve accessibility and first-and-last-mile connectivity, as well as road safety through reduced human error. Participants agreed the central role of public transport authorities and operators in steering this transition, agreeing that technological innovation alone is insufficient and that future transport systems must be designed around people, with accessibility, safety and affordability as key principles.

Funding and financing sustainable mobility



Figure 3 - Wouter Koolmees (NS) (left), Giorgio Travaini (ERJU) (right)

Following lunch, discussions turned to the funding and financing of sustainable mobility keynote. Wouter Koolmees, CEO of Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS), stressed in his keynote speech that resilient transport systems require both long-term investment and strong cooperation between stakeholders. Giorgio Travaini, Executive Director of Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking, highlighted the need to bridge the gap between research and deployment, ensuring that innovative solutions developed through European

projects can successfully reach passengers.

Panel discussion

Following the keynote speeches, a double interview took place with Stefan Grebe (Rijkswaterstaat) and Walter Ety (Rover and EPF).



Figure 4 - Stefan Grebe (Rijkswaterstaat) (left), Marc Maartens (moderator) (center), Walter Ety (Rover, EPF) (right)

The discussion focused on the investment and policy choices needed to accelerate the shift towards more sustainable mobility. Grebe emphasised the

importance of electrification and collective transport, while cautioning against framing transport debates as a choice between competing modes such as rail and aviation. Instead, he argued that different modes should be viewed as complementary, supported by fair pricing and a stronger focus on the wider societal benefits of infrastructure investments. ETTY stressed the urgency of accelerating investment in rail, driven not only by climate objectives but also by growing geopolitical and resilience concerns. He highlighted the substantial funding required to expand high-speed rail and improve international connectivity, while calling for immediate action to make rail a more attractive alternative to aviation.

Afternoon break-out sessions

The afternoon breakout sessions provided opportunities for more focused discussions.

Youth Dialogue on Sustainable Mobility

During the “Youth Dialogue on Sustainable Mobility”, students and young professionals engaged directly with representatives from ERA and DG MOVE. The session concluded with the signing of the “Getting Europe on Track” Youth Manifesto, which calls for fairer competition between rail and aviation, stronger passenger rights, seamless ticketing and increased investment in international rail services.

Through-ticketing

At the same time, Jon Worth led a session on through-ticketing and the challenges passengers continue to face when booking international rail journeys. He presented the European Commission’s legislative package on rail ticketing and passenger protection, followed by a discussion on issues such as booking horizons, minimum connection times, and the distinction between “single tickets” and “single journeys”.

Teaming up for modal shift – UPPER and Gemini projects

In a parallel workshop organised under the [GEMINI](#) and [UPPER](#) Horizon Europe projects, participants explored how public transport and shared mobility can work together to support modal shift. Discussions highlighted the need for cities to play a stronger coordinating role, the importance of integrated information and ticketing systems, and the potential for shared mobility to complement public transport, particularly in suburban and rural areas. Participants also stressed that shared mobility should support, rather than replace, public transport and that accessibility standards should be applied consistently across both sectors.

Doubling international passengers by 2030/2035?

The first day concluded with a session dedicated to the future of international rail. Josef Doppelbauer introduced the newly established Sector Delivery Group (SDG)

under the Platform on International Rail Passenger Transport (IRP), outlining the steps needed to create a truly borderless European public transport system.



Figure 5 - Josef Doppelbauer (IRP)

Doppelbauer argued that improving international rail does not only require major new infrastructure, but also better use of existing capacity, smarter coordination and targeted investment where needed, noting the long timelines of large infrastructure projects and the role of service improvements in driving demand.

RailNet Europe Presentation



Figure 6 - Mathieu Maeselle and Márton Spohn (RNE)

In addition, Márton Spohn and Matthieu Maeselle (RailNetEurope/EuroLink) presented initiatives supporting long-term European rail capacity planning.

Maeselle introduced the European Transport Market Study (ETMS), which forecasts rail demand to 2035 under different scenarios to support strategic planning. Early results indicate growing demand on several corridors and opportunities to improve capacity through better

use of existing infrastructure. Spohn presented EuroLink, a RailNetEurope working group developing non-binding "Capacity Concepts" for 2035–2050 to support coordinated, demand-oriented planning of cross-border passenger and freight capacity across Europe.

ALLRAIL & CER Interview

A double interview with Alberto Mazzola (CER) and Elmer van Buuren (AllRail) concluded the session and the first conference day. Mazzola framed mobility

around the principle of “freedom to stay, freedom to move”, arguing that local and long-distance travel should be seen as part of one integrated system. He highlighted progress in national ticketing, the need to improve international rail ticketing, and stressed that regulation should support rather than hinder technological progress. He also pointed to infrastructure as a major constraint, calling for continued investment through initiatives such as the EU High-Speed Rail Action Plan. Van Buuren emphasised “transparency for the passenger” and argued that ticketing systems should prioritise simplicity and usability. He raised concerns about market fragmentation and called for fair, cost-based access to ticketing systems for all operators, including new entrants. Both agreed on the need for better international ticketing and a more integrated European rail system, while differing on the balance between regulation and market-driven solutions. The discussion ended with a shared recognition that Europe’s rail future requires stronger cooperation, investment and a greater passenger focus.



Figure 7 - Elmer van Buuren (AllRail) and Alberto Mazzola (CER)

Conference Day 1 Wrap-up

Participants then continued discussions during an informal networking reception followed by a conference dinner at Maastricht’s historic Customs Hall, located within the city’s railway station.

Day Two: Saturday, June 6

EPF and its (new) members

The second day opened with an interview with EPF Chairman Josef Schneider, focusing on the role of passenger organisations, cooperation with consumer and user groups, and EPF’s involvement in EU policy and European rail research and innovation activities. Schneider emphasised the importance of resilience in the transport system, arguing that while technological innovation is essential, contingency measures are equally important to address unexpected failures.

Discussing EPF's influence and role, Schneider expressed confidence that the organisation makes a significant contribution to European transport policy through its engagement with the European Commission and cooperation with key rail sector stakeholders, including CER and AllRail. Reflecting on the future of rail and rail R&I, Schneider stressed that innovation should be assessed not only in terms of technological advancement but also through the benefits it delivers to passengers. He also observed that collaboration with EPF benefits railway stakeholders by encouraging them to better understand passengers' needs rather than being driven exclusively by technological considerations. Looking ahead, Schneider identified three key priorities: providing better passenger information, enabling simple and seamless ticketing, and ensuring reliable journeys. This was followed by Jon Worth's announcement of the newly established European Rail Passengers Union (ERPU), which aims to strengthen cooperation among passenger groups working on international rail issues.

Ticketing and Passengers' Rights

A major focus of the morning was the European Commission's new [Passenger Package](#). Elisabeth Kotthaus from DG MOVE presented the Commission's proposals on rail ticketing, multimodal booking and passenger rights. The package seeks to deliver a "one journey, one ticket" approach, making rail travel easier to book while strengthening passenger protection across multi-operator journeys.

Panel discussion

The subsequent panel discussion with Chiara Tomasi (Trainline), Georgia Whitaker (T&E) and Robin Loos (BEUC) broadly welcomed the Passenger Package.



Figure 8 - Panel with Robin Loos (BEUC), Chiara Tomasi (Trainline) and Georgia Whitaker (T&E)

Panelists highlighted the opportunities offered by data-sharing obligations and improved ticketing arrangements, while also discussing the need for stronger

provisions on booking horizons, refunds, compensation and modal shift from air to rail.

Cross-border public transport

The final thematic session focused on cross-border public transport. In his keynote, Michael Dejozé from the Euregio Meuse–Rhine (EMR) highlighted both the opportunities and challenges of cross-border mobility in one of Europe’s most integrated border regions, spanning Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. While strong economic, educational and labour links make efficient transport essential, cross-border services still face barriers such as fragmented ticketing, differing tariffs and regulatory complexity. He stressed the importance of pragmatic local and regional solutions alongside longer-term European harmonisation. Chellie Soons (Arriva) presented the “Three Countries Train”, linking the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, as an example of both the potential and complexity of cross-border rail. Operating under a multimodal contract in Limburg covering trains, buses and shared bicycles, Arriva faces challenges such as differing driver licensing, language barriers, and technical differences in voltages, signalling and safety systems. Ticketing remains a major issue, particularly with Belgium, showing that operational integration often moves faster than passenger-facing systems. The discussion highlighted that seamless cross-border travel still requires significant cooperation and investment.

Panel discussion

Speakers from the Euregio Meuse-Rhine region, Arriva Limburg, Aachener Verkehrsverbund, Réseau européen #enTrain, TreinTramBus and DG MOVE presented practical examples of both the opportunities and challenges associated with operating public transport across borders. Discussions covered differences in ticketing systems, tariffs, operational rules and technical standards, while also showcasing successful examples of cross-border cooperation. Participants agreed that passengers should be able to travel across borders as easily as they travel within their own country and that pragmatic regional solutions can provide valuable lessons for other border regions across Europe.



Figure 9 - Panel with Peter Meukens (TreinTramBus), Dominik Elsmann (AVV), Elisabeth Kotthaus (DG MoVE), Chellie Soons (Arriva) and Vincent Doumavrou (Réseau européen #enTrain)

Signing of the Maastricht Manifesto

The conference concluded with the signing of the Maastricht Manifesto for Integrated, Sustainable and Inclusive Mobility. The signing took place in the very building where the Maastricht Treaty was signed in 1992, adding symbolic significance to a document that similarly calls for stronger European cooperation, this time in the field of sustainable, accessible and passenger-centred mobility. The manifesto was developed jointly by EPF, BEUC and EDF and co-signed by CER, ALLRAIL, ProRail, Jonge Klimaatbeweging (Dutch Young Climate Movement), AGE Platform, Rover, de Wereld fietser (The Dutch Cycle Touring Association), Laboratorium Verantwoorde Mobiliteit, Arriva, International Federation of Pedestrians (IFP). In addition, a broader group of organizations expressed their support for the objectives of the Maastricht Manifesto and their intention to contribute to its follow-up. It calls for a fundamental shift in transport policy, advocating for public transport to become the first choice for mobility through improved service quality, integrated ticketing, accessibility, affordability and stable long-term investment. It also emphasises the importance of actively involving users in policymaking and service design to ensure that transport systems respond to real needs and expectations.



Figure 10 – Signing of the Maastricht Manifesto

Closing Activities

Participants were then invited to join a #CrossBorderRail walking tour exploring the future of the Maastricht–Lanaken–Hasselt railway line led by Jon Worth and Jan Lemmens. The excursion provided a practical illustration of many of the themes discussed throughout the conference.

Conference Reflections and Looking Ahead

Across two days of discussions, one message emerged clearly: achieving Europe's mobility, climate and social objectives will require greater cooperation, stronger investment and a continued commitment to placing passengers at the centre of transport policy. Maastricht demonstrated that while challenges remain, there is growing momentum across Europe to create a transport system that is more integrated, sustainable and inclusive for all.

The conference also provided an opportunity to look ahead. Participants were invited to the 2027 EPF Conference, which will take place in Zittau (Saxony, Germany), a unique tri-border region where Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic meet on the 4th and 5th of June 2027. More information, including the official save-the-date and registration details, will be shared in the coming months. To be among the first to receive updates, subscribe to the EPF newsletter [here](#).

Acknowledgements

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