



European Passengers' Federation

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Report of 13th Annual Conference

“MEETING PASSENGER NEEDS”

**MARCH 20th/21st 2015
BALNA CENTRE, BUDAPEST, HUNGARY**

Over 70 members of 18 EPF affiliated associations from 12 European countries gathered in the Balna Centre, Budapest, on March 20th-21st for the 13th Annual Conference.

THE WORK OF TRANSPORT USERS' ASSOCIATIONS

The afternoon of Friday March 20th was mainly devoted to reports by member associations of the European Passengers' Federation and opened by Gabor Nagy of VEKE (Varosi es Elovarosi Kozlekedesi Egyesulet).

The association, for urban and suburban public transport was formed 15 years ago and had followed and influenced changes in public transport in Hungary. Increased car ownership from 1990 had led to more congestion and less income for public transport operators who, however, continued to use old methods. In 1998, internet forums were used to stimulate discussion of such issues and when VEKE was formed it campaigned successfully against proposed cuts, for a north/south cross-city tram service in Budapest and for all-night buses - which became well used. The association was also pressing for investment in the lines around Lake Balaton and for modest schemes in Budapest to reduce the need for passengers to change.

Janos Vincze of DERKE (Debreceni Regionalis Kozlekedesi Egyesulet) spoke of the work of that association in eastern Hungary following its formation in 2007. They had suggested an orbital bus route in the city of Debrecen. This was introduced in 2010 and was hugely popular. They had also supported the project for a second tram line, first proposed in 2000 and finally opened on 28th February 2014. DERKE also provided a web portal with public transport information and had persuaded operators to introduce combined real-time information displays.

An ongoing campaign by DERKE was for improved public transport links across the nearby Romanian border. There were no buses and very few trains, and so almost everyone went by car.

Yet the rail line from Debrecen to Nagykereki ended within sight of the Romanian city of Oradea / Nagyvarad.

Ian McDonald (Railfuture) introduced the discussion paper "Possible European International Eurocity Trains Network", which he and Michael Bienick (Pro Bahn) had produced in consultation with many other colleagues. They considered that a network of international services was needed, without surcharges and unnecessary delays, while the designation "Euro City" should be easily understood to guarantee a certain level of comfort. Such services would supplement the existing high-speed trains. The discussion paper would be sent to political and professional decision-makers for their comments and also be available on the EPF website.

Christoph Wachholder (proBahn Österreich) gave a presentation on the "GrenzBahn" study to restore passenger trains on the line to Oberwart (Burgenland) and then across the frontier to Szombathely. In 1930 there had been 11 rail lines crossing the Austro-Hungarian border; now there were only 6. Oberwart had lost its infrequent and inconvenient train service in 2011, and the 300,000 inhabitants of southern Burgenland now only had very lengthy bus services.

It was also necessary to upgrade the line from Sopron to Eisenstadt and Vienna and it was hoped that work would start in 2019, with part of the costs funded by the EU. The scheme would regenerate both sides of the Austro-Hungarian border and had a cost-benefit ratio of 1.65.

Jaroslav Nowicki of Friendly Flying explained that this association had been founded in Poland in February 2013 with the guideline "Monitor Confront = Change." Air passengers had EU rights, but from mid 2015 ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) would also be available as a friendly way of resolving disputes. It was necessary to give the airlines clear rules; and an economic incentive to comply with the law.

Friendly Flying had monitored the implementation of air passenger rights in Poland in 2014, via a survey of over 500 passengers, and had received an EU grant to fund this work. Of the respondents, 74% flew at least once a year, 60% experienced delay, 30% had a luggage problem but only 16% lodged complaints. This was partly because they were unaware of their rights, or because of the cost and time involved in making a complaint. Interestingly, 70% said that they would prefer to use an ADR process.

The best airlines replied to complaints within 1-2 weeks and they were increasingly willing to make goodwill gestures. However, the right to care was often not respected and "extraordinary circumstances" was all too frequently given as a reason for refusing compensation.

Friendly Flying recommended a 30-day limit within which airlines must reply to complaints and inform EU sanctions for those which did not comply with passenger rights legislation. Our speaker also referred to a new complaints website niceflight.pl

Peter Cornelius of Pro Bahn referred to EC theoretical papers (from DGMOVE, the European Economic & Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions) on information and ticketing, but also gave practical examples where it was not possible to book a through or multimodal ticket. Sometimes there was simply a lack of information about how to book an onward ticket.

The Committee of the Regions was calling for legislation and the European Parliament was due to receive a paper from Dieter-Lebrecht Koch MEP in May, with a plenary decision due in September.

The blog by Jon Worth (www.jonworth.eu) was cited as a good source of information. It was also suggested that EPF's working party on long-distance international travel might produce a position paper.

Campaigning in France was the theme of the presentation by Annemarie Ghemard, who explained that the Federation Nationale des Associations d'Usagers des Transport (FNAUT) was one of 18 consumer organisations approved by the French state and brought together 160 associations representing 35,000 passengers.

The TGVs (High Speed Trains) developed over the past three decades had won back business from cars and internal airlines and much had been invested in the 1900km high-speed network; whereas the remainder of the system was less well maintained. Since 1996, 532 route-kilometres had been closed but 73km reopened.

There was a legal procedure that must be followed in France if a line was to be closed and at each stage it was possible to prosecute RFF (Reseau Ferre de France - the infrastructure company) if that procedure was not correctly followed. In fact, since 2001 the courts had issued 150 sentences against RFF and in recent years the company had changed its policy, enabling it, for example, to rent out a rail trackbed as a cycle-way instead of selling it outright. This at least kept it as a transport corridor along which rail tracks could eventually be reinstated, the RFF still had to maintain the structures.

Kurt Hultgren of Resenarsforum explained how in Sweden the separation of rail infrastructure from operation started in 1988 and competition between modes and on the tracks from the 1990s had resulted in increased numbers of people using public transport. Indeed, rail passenger numbers had doubled since 1990.

Every region was now required to have a public transport plan and engage in dialogue with passengers. Most local and regional public transport was tendered and the need to provide a public service was the dominant criterion. There were problems owing to lack of maintenance on some rail routes, while private bus operators had sometimes introduced services which then vanished after 21 days.

Stockholm had successfully introduced a congestion charge in 2006 and was now planning new metro and tram lines; while four other cities were also proposing new tram lines.

However, purchasing a ticket was becoming a problem. SJ only now had four station ticket offices and only sold international tickets to Copenhagen and Oslo. Other international rail journeys had to be booked through a travel agency. The existence of different types of vending machine was confusing for passengers, while different regions had their "own currency" for public transport payments and so visitors from other regions were "made to feel not welcome." On the buses, trade union pressure had meant that drivers would not accept cash and this was seen as discriminating against some passengers. Interestingly, ten years ago public transport was not seen as a political issue in Sweden - it was now.

Miroslav Vyka of SVCD described the effects of rail liberalisation in the Czech Republic, which had a 9400-km network. On four main corridors, track was being upgraded to enable trains to run at 160 kph. Between Prague and Ostrava, thanks to open access, there were now 34 trains a day in each direction, of which 16 were operated by CD, the state operator, and the remainder by two private companies. In 1995 there had been just 6 day and 4 night trains in each direction. Passenger numbers were up in the Prague - Ostrava corridor, with lower fares, greater comfort, a stronger customer focus and a wide range of complementary services.

However, connections were not guaranteed for passengers interchanging between operators, there were different tariffs, 75% of trains had compulsory reservations and a delayed passenger could not simply "hop on the next train" if this was run by a different operator. There were now capacity problems, with the infrastructure manager under pressure to improve matters at bottlenecks; and there had been insufficient capacity for an additional commuter train required in the Prague area.

In discussion it was pointed out that passengers in Sweden could consult a single website for details of all trains and prices; there was nothing like this in the Czech Republic, where prices could also change from day to day. Regional cards also existed in some other countries - to what extent was their harmonisation a technical problem, and to what extent a political issue? The refusal of some open access operators to accept Interrail tickets was also a disincentive for tourists to use their trains.

On Friday evening, delegates enjoyed an excellent meal at the Van Hajo floating restaurant.

DEVELOPMENTS IN HUNGARY AND THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

On Saturday morning, delegates were welcomed by Dr Balasz Szeneczey, Deputy Mayor of Budapest, who explained the Integrated Development Plan for the city's 1.7 million inhabitants, giving more connections, attractive vehicles, a better service and efficient governance. 5 million public transport trips were made every day. The fourth metro line, with driverless trains, had been operating since March 2014 and there were 30 tram lines and over 260 bus services. Some of these had been reorganised following public consultation.

Dr Szeneczey said that by 2018 all buses should be low-floor, while 300 new automatic ticket machines were being installed, and five new customer service centres had been opened. A public bicycle scheme had been introduced, telebuses were providing an on-demand service in low-traffic areas and taxis were now regulated as part of the public transport system. EU funding had contributed up to 80% of the capital costs of improvements.

Mr Lothar Zeller, Senior Advisor at the European Investment Bank, started by saying that citizens needed to have a vision of the type of agglomeration in which they wanted to live. Planners needed to identify what was good and keep it, while identifying objectives, looking at alternatives and involving all stakeholders. Mr Zeller was concerned that rail and road public transport operators did not talk to each other, for example.

If employing private consultants, it was essential to give them the right remit. It was important to look at the reasons for mobility and a long list of expensive projects was not always the best solution. The EIB operated with 7-year plans and its remit was investment to reach a higher level of sustainability.

Mr Florian Szaloki, Assistant Secretary of State at the Ministry of National Development, explained the funding processes for the Transport Operational Programme 2007-20, pointing out that the amount of EU money available was now less than it had been. It had been possible to buy new public transport vehicles, including trams for Debrecen and rolling stock for the new M4 in Budapest, and all such expenditure had to be certified to the European Commission.

The current reduction in funding required a new approach in which the questions were asked: What do citizens need? Will it be sustainable or not?

The European perspective was continued by Mrs Olga Sehnalova MEP, who is a member of the European Parliament's Transport & Tourism Committee.

She described the evolution of passenger rights between 2005 and 2013 and referred to her own experience of being unable to catch a flight which had been overbooked and successfully claiming compensation.

Passengers in all major modes now had basic rights to information, mobility, accessibility and non-discrimination. Work was in progress on multimodal integrated ticketing, with a European Parliament report due shortly; and sustainable urban mobility, about which a progress report had been issued in December 2013.

Mrs Sehnalova drew attention to the public consultation which had just started on the implementation of the 2011 Transport White Paper and said that an initiative was also expected shortly on the Digital Single Market Strategy. The establishment of a European Consumer Centre was an important step forward in assisting passengers with lodging complaints or with Alternative Dispute Resolution.

Our speaker also drew attention to the rights of MEPs to ask questions of the European Commission - the answers to which must be published.

The conference then focussed on national developments in Hungary, with a presentation by Mr Marton Feldmann, COO of MAV-Start, the passenger operating division of the national rail system.

The 7000-km network had 14,300 staff and operated 3000 trains per day under a single public service contract. Its government grant was decreasing year on year. Only 18% of the income was from fares and the revenue had held up despite a recent reduction in train-kilometres. 70% of passengers were on the commuter services into Budapest, for which new electric multiple units had been ordered. It must be borne in mind that some 70% of Hungarians were entitled to some form of discount from the state, including free travel for over-65s.

MAV's carriages were on average over 37 years old, but there was a programme to modernise their interiors. MAV-Start was keen to attract people out of their cars and was investing in customer service which gave advice and information as well as selling tickets. A mobile app now gave real-time information about the trains. Mr Feldmann also looked forward to a time when all citizens would have just one card for everything - health, public transport, driving licence etc.

Mr Czara Ungvari, Deputy Managing Director of the Gyor - Sopron - Ebenfurth Vasut / Raaberbahn explained the operation of his company, which was owned jointly by the Hungarian and Austrian Governments, having been founded in 1872.

Their line from Sopron to Szentgottard had been reconstructed and modern FLIRT diesel trains introduced. Plans had also been drawn up for new trains on lines in Austria and a study into the possibility of electrification. The company also handled freight and had opened a container terminal in Sopron. A new Kombi season ticket had been introduced for train and bus in the Szombathy area and Kombi tickets were also used for public transport and entrance to major events and festivals.

Mr Andras Ekes, CEO of the Metropolitan Research Institute on Sustainable Urban Transport Plans explained the importance of these in central and eastern Europe.

Before 1990, some 80% of public transport had been within city boundaries, with an emphasis on quantity rather than quality. Industrial and economic restructuring plus lack of investment had caused public transport to lose its share of the market, but since EU accession in 2004 it had been possible to reverse that trend. Mr Ekes stressed that city boundaries must not be regarded as the limit of public transport services, since many people now commuted further.

A Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan needed to be "a planning tool for people", covering cars as well as attractive public transport and involving all stakeholders in the planning process. Some cities had published plans which were "a collection of dreams", but it was necessary to choose priorities: "not all you can eat, but a specific menu."

In discussion, delegates raised issues concerning the co-operation between different train operators; fare comparisons; the problems of relying solely on new technology for ticketing; and the infrequency of cross-border services on some routes.

THE TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

In the afternoon, conference heard again from industry professionals as Mr Franz Laczó of Stadler Rail described the company's experience in manufacturing interoperable trains for international services, starting with the TEE diesel trains in 1961.

For their modern products, it was necessary to design trains with a high standard of comfort, accessibility for Persons of Reduced Mobility and speeds of up to 240 kph. Attention must also be given to 21st century toilet requirements and differing platform heights in different countries. Luggage requirements could also vary from country to country - such as the need to accommodate skis on Swiss and Austrian trains.

Mr Attila Nagy, CEO of DKV, the transport company in Debrecen, described the development of public transport starting with a steam tram in 1884 and electric vehicles from 2011. Serving a population of 210,000 (430,000 in the agglomeration), DKV was responsible for 7.5 million passenger journeys a year, all of them now in low-floor vehicles. As well as 2 tram routes, there were 3 trolleybus lines. Consideration had been given to closing the latter, but for environmental reasons the city council decided instead to introduce more up-to-date vehicles, most of which could be run on hybrid power.

They also planned to move the central bus station to a site near the main rail station and establish a multi-modal transport centre there. Mr Nagy summarised, "We want a modern system, competitive with the private car but also affordable."

A further aspect of public transport was presented by Mr Peter Rehocski of Resysten Ltd, who described their protective coatings now being used in Hungary to improve hygiene in public places, including on trains and buses. Their coatings were effective for six months and even up to a year, and helped vehicles comply with EU regulations. The company was preparing to launch its "White Titan" product abroad. For details contact info@resysten.hu

Questions and discussion then covered the need for a level playing field in all modes of public transport; the requirements of disabled people; differing heights of seating within a bus, tram or train; and whether in commuter trains the speed is more important than the comfort. It was also stressed that everyone could sometimes be a "Person of Reduced Mobility"

The final session of the conference was devoted to the work of EPF at European level.

EPF'S WORK AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

Trevor Garrod introduced the Budapest Declaration which had resulted from lengthy discussion by the EPF Council and which summarised five points which we urged EU decision-makers to take into account in the forthcoming review of the Transport White Paper.

Willy Smeulders then gave a detailed report on the actions of EPF officers over the past twelve months. This included work in the European Rail Research Advisory Council (ERRAC) in which Member State governments also took a keen interest; and the forthcoming SHIFT2RAIL projects in which EPF planned to participate. These projects would, among other things, aim to double rail capacity and improve reliability. EPF had also continued to work closely with the European Railway Agency on the Telematics for Passengers and with the Community of European Railways on the Full Service Model which aimed to join up information, booking, payment, after-care and revenue-sharing.

Representatives of EPF attended events organised by RailForum Europe and we had ourselves sponsored one on cross-border services. We had also had discussions with Members of the European Parliament, international train operators, the Bureau Europeen des Unions des Consommateurs (bringing together national consumer bodies), DGMOVE and Transport & Environment; while at national level in Belgium our member organisation TTB was working on consumer issues with Test Achat, to our mutual benefit.

EPF had also been closely involved in discussions on the 4th Railway Package, with the proposals for interoperability, the structure of the railway industry, market opening and the need to maintain a skilled workforce.

Josef Schneider described our work with partners and sponsors, including our first summit conference in Brussels aimed at professionals and decision-makers. We might not always agree with industry bodies, but could still work with them - for example, our common statement with CER on Alternative Dispute Resolution. In our work with the European Railway Agency we sought to identify and emphasise those issues affecting passengers - such as booking international journeys.

Mette Boye, Director of the new Danish organisation Passagerpulsen, which has joined EPF, explained their work and how, in setting up their organisation, they had learned from the experience of Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch in the UK and ROVER in the Netherlands.

The Chairman, Trevor Garrod, thanked all colleagues for their contributions and efforts and also all the sponsors: Stadler Rail, the City of Budapest, the transport authority Budapesti Közlekedési Központ and the company Arriva for their support.

AFTER THE CONFERENCE

On Sunday most delegates took part in visits in and around Budapest by public transport - ranging from a vintage tram along the bank of the Danube to the ultra-modern M4 metro line.

22 then travelled by train to Debrecen, where DERKE members organised, on Monday March 23rd, a visit to the MAV regional control centre, an informative meeting with the Deputy Mayor, a tour of the tram and trolleybus network and a visit to the modern DKV depot; rounding off the day at the control centre next to the rail station.

The conference presentations can be found on www.epf.eu

After the conference, the Annual General Meeting of EPF was held. It received financial and activity reports for 2014, agreed the budget and work programme for 2015 and accepted changes to the statutes.

Trevor Garrod was then elected President and seven colleagues were elected to the new Board of Management: Annemarie Ghemard, Kurt Hultgren, Rian van der Borgt, Josef Schneider, Christopher Irwin, Willy Smeulders and Arrien Kruyt.

Report compiled by Trevor Garrod with assistance from Trevor Jones.

April 6th 2015