

## BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN RAIL TRAVEL 29

WELCOME *to the summer 2024 issue of the bulletin issued by Trevor Garrod to support campaigners for better rail services throughout Europe. You may also forward it to other interested people.*

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#### 1. MONITORING EUROSTAR TRAINS

The European Passengers' Federation and its affiliated national/regional associations are keeping an eye on Eurostar passenger experiences, especially if there are disruptions or other problems; but are also keen to hear when journeys go well.

Passengers' experiences will enable EPF to present a report in advance of its January 2025 meeting with this international train operator, which directly serves five countries and whose trains also carry the citizens of many others.

Some of EPF's affiliated associations already collect such experiences from their members. EPF's website ([www.epf.eu](http://www.epf.eu)) urges readers to report their experiences to their national representatives.

If you are travelling to or from the UK by Eurostar, you can visit the websites of the European Rail Campaign (UK) ([www.eurorailcampaig-nuk.org](http://www.eurorailcampaig-nuk.org)) or the Association of European Rail Agents ([www.aera.co.uk](http://www.aera.co.uk)) and fill in the questionnaire there.

## 2. THE EUROPEAN SLEEPER NOW LINKS FOUR COUNTRIES

Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and the Czech Republic have been linked by a night train operated by the co-operative The European Sleeper since the end of March, when this services from Brussels, Amsterdam and Berlin as extended to Dresden and Prague.

You can find out more on [www.europeansleeper.eu/en](http://www.europeansleeper.eu/en) and in the European Rail Timetable ([www.europeanrailtimetable.eu](http://www.europeanrailtimetable.eu) )

The sleeper now runs three nights a week in one direction and three nights in the other. It is planned to include a dining car this coming autumn. You can also reserve a bicycle space on the train. Seats cost from 39 euro return; couchettes from 59 euro and private cabins from 249 euro.

The operator is now seriously looking at operating a service from Amsterdam to Barcelona and one to Venice.

### 3. WONDERLINE NEXT YEAR?

The 173-km route from Bremen to Groningen links these two major cities on the TEN network, and the European Union has been investing to upgrade it. Often referred to as the "Wunderlinie" it has potential to link more effectively the German and Dutch Inter—City networks.

However, the key bridge over the River Ems was severely damaged in 2015 when it was struck by a freighter. Currently there is a replacement bus service across the border. It had been hoped that the new bridge would be in use by December 2024, but heavy winter rains have led to flooding on both sides and there have also been some delays in delivery of materials. The line is now scheduled to reopen in mid 2025.

### 4. LINKS ACROSS THE BALTIC SEA

Ferry services across the Baltic from the German island of Rügen to Danish Bornholm and to Trelleborg in Sweden, are very popular with holidaymakers. This is indeed the shortest route between them.

The north East region of Verkehrsclub Deutschland, which campaigns for greater use of environmentally friendly modes of transport has been calling for better marketing of the train and bus services to Sassnitz ferryport, on Rügen.

In the high season, from July 25<sup>th</sup> to August 24<sup>th</sup> there is indeed a railcar service on Thursdays to the harbour at Mukran near Sassnitz and the line is even electrified. The regional trains are sponsored by the Land of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

We understand that the authorities will review this season's usage and then design services for 2025-7.

You can find out more via [www.vcd.org](http://www.vcd.org)

## 5. BY TRAIN TO LAKE GENEVA

This is a shortened version of an article by Trevor Garrod for the website of the European Rail Campaign (UK)

([www.eurorailcampaignuk.org](http://www.eurorailcampaignuk.org))

In mid May I took a party of 15 people by train from London to Vevey, on the Swiss shore of Lake Geneva. We used Eurostar, the RER across Paris, TGV-Lyria to Lausanne and an SBB regional train for the final part, along the foot of the famous Lavaux vineyards, to Vevey. This small town proved an ideal centre for exploring this beautiful and fascinating region.

Our hotel, as usual in Switzerland, provided us with a free public transport pass for the urban area (including funicular and trolleybuses) as far as Montreux and Chinon; while some of us also bought a regional pass giving a number of days of free or half-price travel including on lake steamers and the scenic narrow-gauge line northwards as far as Zweisimmen.

One popular destination not covered by the pass was the 3-km heritage line between Blonay and Chamby, on which volunteers operate vintage electric and steam trains at weekends.

Another destination was the world-famous city of Geneva, where an orbital railway now carries the Lemman-Express cross-city services which then branch out across the French region of High Savoy (Haute Savoie) to serve Evian, St Maurice and Annecy.

One of the staff at our hotel asked if we were flying home from Geneva Airport (which is rail-served) but was amazed to learn we were travelling all the way back to London by train!

## 6. NEW LEAFLET ON NIGHT TRAINS

“Save Time - Go further, travel by night train” is the message of a new quality leaflet that has just been produced by the European Tail Campaign (UK).

It contains a map/diagram showing overnight services, which have increased since the first ERC(UK) leaflet was issued two years ago. Key connections are also displayed – for example, catch a Eurostar from London to Brussels and then travel overnight to Berlin, Brussels and Prague.

The leaflet also contains many travel tips and sources of further information, including how to book. It is available free of charge from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd., Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ, UK or from Simon Hope, 4 Doughty's Cottages, Golden Dog Lane, Norwich, NR3 1BS, UK

## 7. PROGRESS BY BACK-ON-TRACK EUROPE

In our last issue we referred to the moves by Back-on-Track, which has been an informal but very active network of campaigners for international night trains, to develop a more formal structure.

An important step forward took place on April 29<sup>th</sup> when a founding meeting by zoom agreed detailed statutes for an international non-profit association in accordance with Belgian law. This decision was signed by representatives of four associations, in Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and the UK, and is now going through the legal process in Belgium.

The next step will be to convene a General Meeting in person in this is expected to be held in the early autumn.

## 8. RAIL 200

September 27 2025 will be 200 years since the opening of the first public passenger railway in the world – between Stockton and Darlington in the northeast of England.

A website is being set up to publicise twelve months of events between June 2025 and June 2026. There will be an exhibition train touring Great Britain and local communities are being encouraged to organise events, looking at the future and not just the past, and promoting rail travel, especially for younger people.

The European Passengers' Federation is considering holding its 2025 conference in England – for the first time since 2008 – and one venue being considered is the railway town of Swindon, on the Great Western main line between London and Cardiff

## MORE EUROSTAR ISSUES

Campaigners in Kent, in southeast England, are continuing to press for some Eurostars to call at either Ebbsfleet or Ashford International stations. At present, residents in this county, and visitors to it from the Continent, have to travel in or out of London first if they want to catch a high speed train to Paris or Brussels.

The BBET group (Bring Back our Eurostar Trains) organised a petition and many local politicians (councillors and Members of Parliament) are supporting it. The European Rail Campaign (UK) has been in contact with them and had correspondence with Folkestone MP Damian Green.

Meanwhile, the Association of European Rail Agents is shortly to hold a meeting with the head of the International Rail Group at the Department for Transport concerning the EU's Entry/Exit System that is due to come into effect on October 6<sup>th</sup> and the longer controls likely to result from it. Other matters concerning travellers to and from the UK will also be on the agenda.

Eurostar's wheelchair policy has recently been in the news, after a passenger of reduced mobility, travelling between London and Paris, was told he must travel with a companion. Eurostar employ specialist agencies to do the work of assisting such passengers, and these staff finally agreed, after taking photos, to allow the unaccompanied passenger to board the train.

The incident was reported in the newspaper *The Observer*, whose editor also contacted the Office of Road & Rail, the order was revoked and the staff have now been retrained.

#### 10.FRENCH RESERVATIONS AND NIGHT TRAIN PLANS

All long-distance TER(FLU) regional services from Paris Est towards Alsace and Champagne now require compulsory seat reservations. However, the reservations will be provided free of charge when the passenger buys a regular ticket. The only reservations for which a charge (1.70 euro) is made are for Interrail / Eurail customers.

This travel tip is in the latest *Friday Flyer* which all subscribers to the *European Rail Timetable* receive free of charge by e-mail every week. That should help travellers.

Less helpful is the news that Rail Coop and Midnight Trains have decided to give up their attempts to run open access night trains in France. The situation has been criticised by ALLRAIL, the trade association of new entrants into the rail industry, concerned about the financial and other obstacles being put in their way. The French campaigners in Ouiautraindenuit have commented that night trains should not be denied public financial support.

Finally – have you checked the website <https://www.east61.com> The Man in Seat 61 is Mark Smith, his readership is international and he is a most reliable source of Information and advice.

Also worth a read is Nigel Perkins' monthly blog on the website [www.eurorailcampaig-nuk.org](http://www.eurorailcampaig-nuk.org) . Nigel is Chair of the Campaign and his latest blog has been about European Community transport plans, in contrast to UK policy.

*Trevor Garrod thanks all colleagues who have provided news and information for this bulletin. He has taken all reasonable steps to provide up-to-date and accurate information but cannot be held responsible for any errors or changes.*

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Bulletin number 30 is due to appear in early September.



