

Strategic discussion on long-distance cross-border passenger services

Input paper

Europe's new growth strategy – the European Green Deal – calls for accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility, as transport accounts for a quarter of the Union's greenhouse gas emissions. To achieve climate neutrality, a 90% reduction in transport emissions is needed by 2050. In this context, the development of long distance passenger European rail travel becomes strategic as:

- international travel faces the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis and its likely sequels;
- long distance rail can be an environmentally friendlier alternative to short haul flights and an efficient link to outbound / Inbound long haul flights;
- the issues of interoperability under commercial, operational, technical and infrastructural aspects need to be addressed to make trans-European travel seamless and competitive.

In the past seven years, the EU has invested 70% of the €23.2 billion of the Connecting Europe Facility budget in rail infrastructure projects, often with a specific focus on cross-border links. The EU also supports international long distance rail services by harmonising the regulatory framework and making the national rail networks more interoperable. 2021 will be the first year of full implementation of the Fourth Railway Package: From December 2020, EU railway companies anywhere in the EU will enjoy the right to offer domestic rail passenger services on a commercial basis, where economically feasible.¹ This also opens up new opportunities for the provision of international connections.

There is a growing public interest in long-distance passenger services, including night trains. Railway operators are progressively (re-)opening night train routes or are planning to do so. This market segment can significantly contribute to the shaping of sustainable long-distance travel in Europe, in an interplay with other modes such as high speed trains, the private car and aviation.

A number of Member State initiatives aim at promoting the development of new cross-border passenger services. The Netherlands have set up a Member State platform, which will work on concrete measures to remove obstacles to such services. Germany has presented the so-called Trans Europe Express 2.0 concept, which aims at the development of a long distance cross-border high speed and night services network. Commission services are currently conducting a study into remaining barriers to long distance passenger rail transport and may subsequently propose related measures.

Against this background, we would like to discuss how infrastructure managers can support the emergence of long-distance cross-border passenger traffic. In particular:

- To what extent can capacity allocation (and timetabling) support the development of cross-border long-distance passenger traffic?

¹ With possible exceptions related to economical interference with existing Public Service Contracts

- What other tools, such as charges, could serve as incentives?

Different national experiences seem relevant as a basis for discussion during the plenary to show the challenges of an effective international offer identified as critical for the modal shift:

- the Spanish experience of competition in high speed services, and its potential impact on the development of the offer
- the outlook recently elaborated by the Dutch ministry on the future of mobility and challenges for the rail sector
- the French approach and challenges while developing international high speed services: interoperability, market development and charging.
- the Polish project on high speed links as connected to airports.