

# Europe third rail package

By Trevor Garrod

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The European Parliament and Council finally reached agreement on 20 June on the Third Railway Package. What does that mean for us?

Back in 2001, the European Commission held the first of two hearings in Brussels.

The railway industry, consumer bodies and rail users' organisations including Railfuture, Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch from the UK, were invited to have their say.

We focussed on rail passengers' rights and ways of making train travel easier.

Consultation continued with the submission of detailed written comments and discussions with EC officials and MEPs. This process also acted as a catalyst for the formation in October 2002 of the European Passengers' Federation.

The legislative package contains a set of regulations which enter force in 2010. An EPF press release stated: "This is good news for passengers. It will give them a better deal and, by making the railways more competitive, help ensure their future."

"The EU has taken on board a lot of what we have been saying on behalf of rail passengers. It must now extend these protections to all modes of public transport, including buses, coaches and ferries."

The rail passengers' rights regulations have already been preceded by rights for air passengers. Basic passenger rights will be intro-

duced on national and international trains, clearly defining the liability of train operators in case of death, injury or loss of luggage, obligations towards people with reduced mobility, availability of tickets, proper insurance and procurement of personal safety in stations and on trains.

Compensation for delays on international train journeys is due to be 25% of the ticket for one hour's delay, 50% for two hours.

There are guarantees of assistance and maximal accessibility to stations and trains for persons of reduced mobility, the possibility of transporting bicycles and the setting up of a complaints handling system.

EPF is satisfied with most basic and extended rights, though some items for which we had argued, such as passengers' rights to consultation when services are being planned, are still missing.

Lobbying by the railway operators has also led to the possibility of delays of up to 15 years in the implementation of passengers' rights on domestic services in some countries.

The press release concludes, "EPF urges all operators not to limit themselves to the scope of the regulation, but to improve actively the quality of their services in consultation with their passengers."

You can read more about EPF in its first bulletin, available from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ

## Rail fares unfair to passengers

Rail passengers face fare rises of at least 30% above inflation because of deals between the Government and train operators. Stagecoach and Arriva plan fare rises in the East Midlands and CrossCountry franchises of 3.4% a year in real terms. Go-Ahead intends to raise

fares by 3% a year on the London to Northampton route. By the end of the eight-year franchises, fares will have risen by 30 per cent. Rail union TSSA say passengers are being treated "like battery hens" by train operators who behave like "modern day highwaymen".

# BORDEAUX

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Group visit by high-speed trains from London via Lille

7-13 April

### RDS Group Travel

Details available after Christmas Send SAE to Trevor Garrod

15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ

## North West

LOCAL ACTION

By Trevor Bishop

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### ■ ■ Campaign win

The East Cheshire Line Users Group has managed to get a train restored in the new December timetable.

When the new timetable appeared on the on-line journey planner, the expected change to the 06.01 Birmingham New Street to Edinburgh was in place. This was the withdrawal of the Manchester to Edinburgh section following the transfer of this route to TransPennine Express. The journey planner also showed that the train left Birmingham and operated normally to Stoke-on-Trent, but then appeared to be non-stop from there to Manchester Piccadilly, not calling at Congleton, Macclesfield or Stockport. This was the first service from Congleton and provided the only arrival in Manchester for workers starting at 0800.

The 06.40 train from Stoke-on-Trent to Manchester calls at Congleton before the express, but is put into platform 3 at Macclesfield to allow the express to pass and doesn't arrive in Manchester until 07.57.

Enquiries revealed that the train was being diverted to operate via Crewe, Wilmslow and the Styal line, but without stopping at any station on this diverted route. The only reason given for the change was to allow CrossCountry drivers to retain their route knowledge of this often used diversion. It was purely an operational decision and the passengers' needs were ignored. The Congleton membership mobilised regular passengers to lobby Arriva to restore the service and this was helped by a petition started by another passenger with the same aims.

Fortunately, common sense finally prevailed and the train was restored to the current timings and will continue to operate. The withdrawal was illogical anyway as there were plans to restore it to its former route in the December 2008 timetable.

### ■ ■ Wrexham-Birkenhead electrification

Discussions are under way between Merseyrail and the Welsh Assembly Government about electrifying the Wrexham-Bidston line. Network Rail is assessing the likely cost which could be covered by grants from both English and Welsh local government finance. Ways of bridging the revenue funding gap are also being examined. New stations at Deeside and Woodchurch have been included in the Local Transport Plan.

### ■ ■ Mobile phone easy-pay option at station car parks

Virgin Trains is to introduce a mobile phone easy-pay cashless option for customers using pay-and-display car parks. Virgin says the new payment option will make life easier for customers parking at Stoke-on-Trent, Macclesfield, Runcorn, Warrington Bank Quay, Wigan North Western, Preston, Lancaster, Oxenholme, Penrith and Carlisle.

It says mobile phone or online registration is straightforward and requires only a simple text message to the service provider detailing the car park identification code, vehicle registration number and number of days parking required.

Attendants patrolling the car parks receive all details via Blackberry and customers can extend parking remotely by text message or online, view all transactions online and receive receipts by text or printed statement.