

Rail rights in Europe

By Trevor Garrod

The European Commission published a consultation paper on rights and obligations of international rail passengers last autumn.

Rail users organisations from all the member states were invited to a hearing in Brussels on 15 November to discuss the issues.

I represented Railfuture and made the following points:

1 An international journey does not always begin or end in an international train. A traveller from, say, Birmingham to Lyon needs to use domestic trains as well as Eurostar, and rights to information, reservations, connections etc. should apply throughout the journey.

2 All operators should be required to consult with representative bodies of users.

3 Monitoring of service quality is in principle to be welcomed on international rail and air services.

4 Information on international services should be available at larger stations, and in call centres, preferably with internet access and adequately trained staff.

5 It is essential to have computer reservation systems compatible with each other. At present it is not always easy or indeed possible to reserve on certain trains until you reach the country concerned.

6 There must be reasonable flexibility in ticket routing. For example, a customer should not be penalised because they want to travel from



This picture shows a narrow gauge works train fitting out the new Channel Tunnel rail link tunnel under the River Thames.

Soon Eurostars, high-speed commuter services from Kent and, with luck, an increasing number of trains from continental Europe will be speeding through it. Work began on the 1.5 mile-long tunnel in July 2002 and 265,000 tonnes of spoil have been removed.

Power has been turned on throughout the 46 miles of section one of the rail link from the Channel Tunnel to Fawkham Junction in north Kent to allow testing to take place. More than 300 Eurostar

drivers and traincrew from Britain, France and Belgium start route training runs on the line in July. The overhead electrical system and the track is all French-designed and the signalling is TGV-style.

The Thames tunnels are part of the 24-mile section two of the link from Ebbsfleet to Stratford and St Pancras.

Both sections should be open by 2007 when journey times from central London to the Channel Tunnel will be halved. Brussels-London will be possible in two hours while Paris-London will take an extra 15 minutes.

Picture: QA Photos Ltd, courtesy of Rail Link Engineering, project manager and designer of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link

London to Marseille via Marne-la-Vallee and return via Paris.

7 Special provision must be made for passengers who may be stranded short of their destination late at night

because of delays or missed connections which are not their fault.

8 All international trains should be able to carry bicycles, although it is realistic to expect some space

restrictions and pre-booking.

9 There should be standard rules on complaints and compensation which ought to be similar to those applying to airlines.

Representatives of EPF (of which Railfuture is a founder member) had a meeting with European Commission officials about the monitoring of train services.

Another meeting took place on 20 January with the Community of European Railways to discuss a charter for passenger rights. A major concern of EPF is how to encourage more long-distance

European Passenger Federation

international rail travel. The working party pursuing this consists of members from Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Luxembourg. It is hoped to publish a series of annual papers, of which the first should

be out to coincide with the opening of the first section of our Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

Any Railfuture member interested in helping the working party should contact Dr Albert F Lambert, 8 Enner Owend, L-9357 Bettendorf, Luxembourg.

The working party conducts its business in German and French but contributions in English will also be welcome.

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