

Euro rail under spotlight



By Trevor Garrod

trevorgarrod2000@yahoo.co.uk

A four-page leaflet in four languages has been produced by the European Passenger Federation to

introduce itself and to set out its 12-point manifesto.

This calls for rail to play a greater role in international and domestic travel in Europe, with easily accessible information about services, simple and comprehensive ticketing and seamless journeys.

Better rail access to airports and seaports is another key point of particular interest to British customers.

The leaflet is aimed especially at opinion formers and decision makers and potential new member associations of EPF, which currently has 14 member bodies, including Railfuture, in nine countries.

The leaflet is also available from Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ. Please enclose an SAE.

January's meeting of the EPF administrative council, held in London, expressed concern at the news that Dutch Railways plan to withdraw international ticketing sales from stations and telesales.

Passengers will be expected to use the internet or certain selected travel agents.

The issue will be raised with the Community of European Railways with whom EPF is in dialogue.

Not enough progress is being made with voluntary codes of practice on international rail passengers' rights (an issue with which we have been in contact with CER for some time), on matters such as compensation for delayed passengers.

However, Eurostar's proposals on this score were welcomed by the meeting.

Trevor Jones represented Railfuture at a meeting of EPF's working party on long-distance international travel, held in Basle.

■ A report of this meeting will also shortly be available from Trevor Garrod (address above) in French and German, hopefully to be followed shortly by an English version.

Eurotunnel wants more trains

The British and French government have an ideal opportunity to make the Channel Tunnel an integral part of the European rail network.

The tunnel operator went £1.3 billion into the red last year because of its crippling £6.4 billion debt.

Eurotunnel has rightly diagnosed that not enough people are using the tunnel and it needs to cut prices to attract more.

In return for help with its debt problems the Government could insist on changing the rules which the arch-capitalist Thatcher government forced on Eurotunnel.

The whole set-up needs to be examined again so that the tunnel provides a proper transport function and maximises its environmental advantages.

The current pricing structure encourages lorries to blast their way across Britain to be carried only from Folkestone to Frethun by train.

If lorries have to make long journeys across Europe there should be pricing incentives to encourage them to travel piggyback on trains for more of their journey. Better still, the

cargo should go into containers or swap bodies which can be delivered from any rail depot in Britain to any rail depot in mainland Europe – by train.

There should be more long-distance freight trains using the tunnel and fewer short-haul lorry-carrying shuttles from Folkestone to Frethun.

On the passenger side, Eurostar trains should be serving destinations throughout Europe not just shuttling back and forth from London to Paris and Brussels. And fares should compete with EasyJet and Ryanair flights which are subsidised with tax-free fuel and are incredibly damaging to the environment.

There should also be a raft of 100-mph local trains using the tunnel from various destinations in southern England to varied destinations in northern France and Belgium. Eurostars have third-rail pick-ups and could travel to more destinations in southern England.

As Railfuture member Lyndon Elias points out, suitable second-hand stock is now becoming available for services like these. Mark 3 air-conditioned coaches are coming off lease

and Class 92 locos are dual frequency. Some modification would however be needed.

Tickets for the journey could only be issued when paid for in conjunction with a passport.

Lyndon also points out that there is also a big demand for motorail services from London to the Continent.

Eurotunnel's monopoly on carrying cars through the tunnel could be amended if it sought Government aid.

Eurotunnel chief executive Richard Shirref wants to launch his own freight train services to Switzerland but from a depot in Kent!

He said the tunnel was under-used and he wants the charges for train operators to be reduced to generate more demand.

"You can see the prices we're trying to charge are strangling traffic growth," he said.

Ministers have warned Eurotunnel that it should not expect a handout from taxpayers.

If the Government was more flexible the tunnel could be made more useful for everyone.

Big changes in long-distance trains

By Trevor Jones and Bryan Stone

htjones@raildev.fsnet.co.uk

The European Passenger Federation is carrying out a study into cross-border and long-distance trains in Europe.

It has discovered that there are too many problems facing passengers who want to travel in Europe despite the efforts of the European Union to improve links between member countries.

With more private companies becoming involved in running trains, it is often very complicated and sometimes expensive to get from one country to another.

In the 1970s, it was common to see many trains passing through Switzerland with a multi-coloured collection of through coaches which were exchanged in key stations.

It was however slow and costly. The Trans European Expresses were very successful but the Euro City trains which replaced them were less useful. Now there are few through trains.

One major reason is the lack of inter-operable trains which

means that German ICs and French TGVs can only penetrate each other's territories to a limited degree.

The great European trunk route from Germany to Italy has lost almost all its through trains although InterCity Expresses from Germany now regularly go to Amsterdam and Brussels.

Despite vast sums of money being spent on infrastructure in Spain and Portugal, it is a problem for passengers to make good use of cross-border trains.

But Portugal is hoping to buy a Talgo train to introduce a through train from Lisbon to Paris.

Many international trains have been withdrawn but lack of marketing of the ones which remain is exacerbating problems.

There is a good train from Brussels to Italy via Luxembourg and Basle but few people know it exists.

Another train from Brussels goes to Budapest via Vienna.

Splitting a journey can work out significantly cheaper. For instance it is cheaper to buy a ticket from Vienna to the border

and another from the border to Budapest rather than buy a through ticket.

EPF has drawn up a list of questions about international trains which it wants answering.

But Peter Poschadel of Wiesbaden said: "The biggest problem is the lack of innovation and entrepreneurship at the railway companies.

"Each national company believes too strongly that its core business is domestic train services.

"We need pressure on the governments to stimulate and enhance international cooperation."

One welcome piece of news comes from Eurostar. It is to provide a wire free internet connection for passengers with laptop computers.

Being able to work while travelling is one of the train's big advantages over car driving and travelling by air.

At home, both GNER and Virgin are also introducing wi-fi technology on their trains to enable computer users to log on to the internet while on the move.