

£400m city rail link for Leipzig

By Philip Bisatt

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The annual Railfuture group visit to the Continent was to Leipzig, formerly in East Germany and now reviving as a major business centre, 18 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Communist era.

Our group of 22 took the 12.40 from Waterloo International to Brussels on a Monday – knowing that their next Eurostar journey would probably be from St Pancras.

After reaching Brussels Midi at 16.07, the next leg was by Thalys 9445 to Cologne, leaving at 17.22 and arriving at 19.45.

We spent a comfortable night in Cologne before resuming our journey east at 09.05 on Tuesday. This involved one of DB's ICE trains, which most agreed were excellent.

The trains had sufficient leg room and luggage space, reclining seats even in second class, a glazed "family room", seats for second class passengers in the buffet car with table service, and printed details of the arrival time at each station and connecting services.

Dare we hope for such features in Britain's intercity express programme, also known as HST2?

En route (via Dusseldorf, Essen, Hamm, Kassel and Erfurt), we observed an interesting variety of rail freight not seen in Britain, such as steel tubes, combine harvesters and "hi-cube" two-axle vans.

At 15.46, we reached Leipzig's vast Hauptbahnhof – the largest station in Europe before 1930 – and went by tram to our excellent hotel.

In the evening, we were met by Wolfram Leuze of the German rail campaign group Pro-Bahn.

Herr Leuze is a Green Party city councillor, and gave us an interesting walking tour of the centre before a meal at the Ratskeller, in the basement of City Hall.

On Wednesday we visited Leipzig's city tunnel project which aims to connect two stations via a tunnel under the city centre.

It was first mooted in the 1890s and actually started in 1910-11. After the hiatus of the Great War, plans were revived in the 1930s and again in the 1970s, but it was not until 2000 that the project was finally resumed in earnest and it is now set for completion in 2009. Some of us considered the chances of a rail tunnel in Manchester to link Picc and Vic!

Leipzig is similar in size to Bristol or Nottingham, which gives some idea of the scale of investment that is being made. The tunnel is costing around £400million, of which 30% is coming from the European Union, 33% from the German government, 34% is being met by the regional government of Saxony and only 3% from German railways. Perhaps there is a lesson here



CROSS-CITY LINK: Railfuture members in Leipzig to see work under way on Leipzig's new rail tunnel

Picture: Philip Bisatt

for England regarding regional rail funding. In places, the Leipzig city tunnel will be over 70ft below ground level owing to foundation and water table issues.

There will be two underground stations in the city centre, and we were taken to see work in progress on one of these, Station Markt. As well as having what was once Europe's largest railway station, Leipzig also boasts one of the largest tram systems in Germany, with 100 route miles radiating far out

into the suburbs. The Communist German Democratic Republic may have had its problems but it got one thing absolutely right. It kept its tramways.

The remaining days of our visit were spent in Berlin, including its superb new Hauptbahnhof, Dresden and an excellent guided tour by Stefan Jugelt of Pro-Bahn and another impressive Hauptbahnhof, Colditz (not a one-way ticket!) and the Fichtelbergbahn, a 750mm gauge steam line linking Cran-

zahl and Kurort Oberwiesenthal. I was amazed to be able to return to Taunton from Leipzig *in a day*, leaving at 09.08 and taking ICEs to Frankfurt and Brussels, then successively Eurostar and a First Great Western HST.

Don't believe people when they say there is no alternative to flying.

Thanks to Trevor Garrod and Peter Cannon for making the pre-visit arrangements, to Wolfram Leuze and Stefan Jugelt of Pro-Bahn, and to Jim Walker and Michael Leppard for leading the group in Germany.

Next year we are visiting Bordeaux for seven days in April or May.

■ After annual general meetings in Namur, Leipzig, Strasbourg, Maastricht and Munich, the European Passengers Federation will be coming to London on Saturday 15 March for its AGM and conference.

We will be able to celebrate the opening in full of the Channel Tunnel high-speed line. The theme will be Sustainable Urban Transport.

Details will be in the next *Railwatch*; but to receive them by post please send a SAE to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ

November 2007 and a new era for international travel

By Trevor Garrod

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I met managers of the Association of Train Operating Companies managers in September to discuss how to encourage international rail travel after St Pancras International opens on 14 November.

Four operators, GNER, Virgin, First Capital Connect and Midland Main Line, will be offering through tickets to Paris, Lille and Brussels from about 85 of their stations.

Initially this will be done through the Eurostar call centre, but by January customers will also be able to book these through tickets online. South East Trains of course already offers through ticketing from stations in Kent, while a ticket to Brussels is also valid for onward

travel to anywhere else in Belgium. ATOC is confident other TOCs will become involved in the scheme.

Some concern has been expressed by Railfuture members that when passengers have to make their way from Euston to St Pancras encumbered with heavy luggage, this could be a disincentive to using Eurostar.

ATOC has said it will monitor this but that alternatives such as through ticketing from Manchester to St Pancras via Sheffield are possible. ATOC sees a "huge new market" coming into existence. It believes the "niche market" for longer distance travel (such as to Poland) will be best served by the internet and by specialist travel agents. The Rail Team consortium

of high speed operators could also open up further opportunities, for example, in promoting more rail travel between London and Frankfurt.

Discussions are under way with SNCF about through ticketing from major French provincial cities to similar destinations in England. It would then be a logical step to start similar negotiations with Dutch and German Railways.

There are still issues to be addressed, such as pressing other European train operators to provide information about international travel; but we can look forward to easier travel to the Continent from Cambridge, Peterborough, Leicester, Milton Keynes and Birmingham in a few weeks' time.



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