

Euro allies with winning ways

By Mark Booker

Railfuture is a corporate member of the European Association for the Development of Railway Transport (AEDTF) which developed organically out of a 1980s association to promote a TGV high-speed rail line between Lyon in France and Turin in Italy.

It is a tribute to that association's focused activities over many years that this project finally received political approval by the two states concerned some three years ago.

Work is now proceeding on tunnels and alignments which will be necessary to make the project a reality in a 15-year timescale.

The original composition of the AEDTF was mainly French, Italian and Swiss but since 1997 it has been seeking to develop its membership in other countries and now has representatives in European states as far apart as the UK, Belgium and Romania.

AEDTF has as its principal object the development and promotion of rail passenger and freight transport in Europe, broadly the same objectives as Railfuture.

It has direct dealings with the European Union, its members

and neighbouring states and respective local and regional administrative structures as well as with rail operators, builders of railway equipment, transport user associations and railway support groups and all others relevant to the objects of the association.

It publishes a regular newsletter which is sent to all members and has an active website at <http://www.aedtf.org> containing practical and technical and historical information on railways.

Several hundred individuals including national politicians and local and regional councillors of all political persuasions (such as Turin Region, Rouen PTE, City of Grenoble), as well as representatives from trade unions, business and individual users, the rail industry (such as Alstom and Bombardier) and railway associations, such as the French user group FNAUT, the Association of Swiss Railway Engineers and European Association of Railway Journalists, take part in or support these activities.

The association is determinedly apolitical and is maybe the only forum in Europe where such diverse interests are able to meet and exchange ideas and develop

common positions on railway development matters.

This has proved invaluable in gaining support for controversial schemes such as new rail and tram routes where benefits must be demonstrated to all political persuasions to overcome possible hostility and political polarisation.

The chairman of AEDTF is William Lachenal, of French-Swiss descent and its executive board has vice presidents from a number of different states, including Mark Booker, who joined RDS (RIS as was) in 1978 and is a member of the international committee.

There are no paid staff but the organisation is fortunate in having the support of the Grenoble city council which provides its council chamber for the AGM and of the French Bank Caisse d'Epargne.

AEDTF is an umbrella organisation complementary to national or sectoral railway development and user associations, including the recently formed European Rail Passenger Conference in which Trevor Garrod plays a leading part.

It welcomes such organisations as members and was delighted Railfuture became affiliated.

It recognises that only certain individuals and groups have an interest in railway matters outside their own countries but that it is essential to its future health that it should have broad membership support across Europe for its activities.

Because of its legal status as a French-registered non-governmental organisation it is unable to accept advertising in its publications or to conduct any commercial activities so it also needs a wider membership to finance any increase in its lobbying work.

It appreciates the opportunity, via *Railwatch*, to invite any interested members of Railfuture (individual or corporate) to enquire about membership.

The AEDTF was established under French law.

Annual subscriptions for individuals range from 22 to 55 Euros.

Membership for companies and other organisations varies from 55 to 750 Euros.

For full details contact: AEDTF, Caisse d'Epargne des Alpes, 10 Rue Hebert F38000 Grenoble, France.

DISABLED

More consideration

By Clara Zilahi

As Officer for Disabled Travellers, I wanted to draw members' attention to a problem which seems not to have been appreciated by the rail industry.

The industry has made great strides in facilitating travel for disabled passengers, at least for wheelchair users and others with a clearly recognised disability.

What is not appreciated is that a great number of people, in particular the elderly, while not actually disabled, do have slight mobility problems.

So of course do even perfectly fit people when encumbered by luggage or in charge of young children.

If something unexpected happens, such as a platform change, or the train stopping further down the platform than expected, they are at a disadvantage and liable to miss their train.

A frequent traveller who has slight walking difficulty was caught out by a platform alteration when changing trains at Birmingham New Street. He was unable to negotiate the stairs with his luggage in time, so missed the train, arriving some two hours late at his final destination.

He wrote to Central Trains and was told that, if he was disabled, he should have booked help in advance. Can we imagine what would happen if everybody who is unable to sprint fast enough in these circumstances booked

help in advance? Clearly, the system would be swamped. His suggestion, which I put to a spokesman of the Strategic Rail Authority was that there should be a general policy that in such circumstances a message is put out advising anyone who has difficulty in effecting the platform change to report to a member of staff and be offered help. At the very least, ample time should be allowed.

The SRA person replied that complaints should go to the train operator or Network Rail, whichever is in charge of the station. In other words, complaints should be made after the event. An occasional rail traveller thus affected would probably be put off using rail again.

Our contention is that the SRA, or the Association of Train Operators, should have a policy on helping travellers in such circumstances. That is where members can help by raising the question of the mildly or temporarily disabled with the rail industry when these are invited to speak at branch or rail user group meetings.

While the lot of severely disabled people has improved, the greater number with minor handicaps face extra difficulties caused by fewer staff and the policy of imposing fines for delays, even if this is caused through allowing extra time for boarding in case of need.

RAIL USER EXPRESS

Friends like these

By Tony Smale

Railfuture user group liaison officer

Rail user groups often go under a name such as *Friends of the Barset Valley Line*, and befriending the line is what most user groups are about.

If you come across a rural station with a welcoming atmosphere, neatly tended gardens, good information displays and helpful signing, it's a fairly safe bet that there's an active user group keeping an eye on things.

The trick is to extend a sense of ownership to the whole community, perhaps through arts projects, live music on trains and rail-based excursions.

Large user groups even manage to charter their own trains - this has the added benefit of encouraging a strong rail-charter market, thereby ensuring a pool of trains for special events in the region.

Country walks centred on a particular station, or from station to station, are a popular way to introduce young and old to rail travel, and some user groups publish their favourite walks for others to enjoy.

It's a good idea to approach the leisure-page editor of a local paper to see if he or she might print a series about rail-based days out.

The hand of friendship can extend well beyond the immediate corridor served by a rail line. For example, the Penistone Line Partnership in Yorkshire sponsors a community bus project which gives outlying villages a handy link to the railway at Shepley Station.

At the very least, it's worth checking that bus stops near a station are easy to find and bus timetables are up to date.

Friends of the railway will notice details like this and get something done!