



MUNICH: Delegates at the Euro get-together Picture: Trevor Garrod

Euro passenger conference

By Trevor Garrod

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Seventy public transport users from 14 countries gathered in Ismaning near Munich for the fifth annual general meeting and conference of the European Passengers' Federation.

Participants at the 10 March event – including several Railfuture members – were welcomed by Stefan Jugelt from the German association Pro Bahn, who emphasised the need for a Europe-wide policy for attractive public transport as part of a strategy to deal with environmental problems.

Alexander Freitag, president of the Munich Public Transport Authority, described its operations in serving a population of 2.6million in the city and surrounding area.

"It's cool to own a BMW but use public transport in Munich," he said, pointing to the increase in public transport usage from 358million journeys per year in 1973 to 591million in 2006.

Future plans included a second east-west rail tunnel under the city centre to relieve the present one.

Christopher Irwin (EPF vice-chairman) traced the work of the federation in responding to European Commission consultations and identified its principles as "putting



passengers first" and "thinking co-modality".

EPF was also involved in EC initiatives to identify passengers' needs and improve information and booking systems for international journeys.

Alberto Gallo of the Community of European Railways, representing 62 operating and infrastructure companies, supported the need for a "level playing field".

CER has introduced the website www.railpassenger.info to improve information on trains and ticketing and is now working on a timetable co-ordination project.

Klaas Hofstra of Pro Rail, the Dutch rail infrastructure company, said it was investigating a range of measures to improve punctuality, such as shorter station stops, tighter

schedules and avoiding conflicting movements on the approaches to stations.

Giles Fearnley of Journey Solutions described the eight-year development of PlusBus in the UK. An add-on fare was now available for rail travellers to 195 towns and cities, including nearly all those with over 80,000 population, giving bus travel from the destination station to the town centre and sometimes surrounding area as well.

Delegates split into two study groups to discuss such issues as harmonising train information and reservations, local public transport and help for people with reduced mobility. This included an infor-



mative account by a blind member who had travelled by train in several European countries.

Short reports were then given by Paul Arents of De Lijn, the Flemish public transport operator, on the project for a European bus of the future and Martin Schiefelbusch of the NEXUS Institute, Berlin, on its customer services project.

In terms of customer charters, service guarantees and complaints handling, the UK came out best among the European Union countries, followed by Sweden, France and Germany.

Herr Peter Faross of the European Commission described the progress of consultation, formulation and implementation of Europe-wide rights for air, rail, bus-coach and maritime passengers.

For train passengers, legislation on information, ticketing, compensation and liability was likely to come into force in 2009.

Frau Beate Czerwenka of the German government said that under the German presidency of the EU, it was hoped to have constructive debate and a compromise, with a fair balance for all interests involved in the third railway package.

A fuller account of the speakers' presentations, is available at www.epf.eu or, for a paper version, send a large stamped addressed envelope to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.

North East

By Peter Kenyon
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■ ■ Tyne & Wear Metro

The bid for funding to refurbish the Metro was raised in the Commons at Prime Minister's Question Time. Additional support has come from the Institution of Civil Engineers.

The possibility of an extension to Blyth has been raised by MP Ronnie Campbell who recently hosted a visit to the constituency by Junior Transport Minister Tom Harris.



■ ■ Reopening plans

The North East Assembly study into reopening the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line is progressing and the South East Northumberland Rail Users' group has initiated an online petition in support of it: <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/ABTreopening>.

The branch study paper relating to the reopening of the Leamside line has been submitted to Nexus. It is supported by a photographic record of the line and detailed appendices. It could be used by freight, diverted main line trains and local passenger services. The value of the line was reinforced on 10 May when a freight train derailment on King Edward Bridge, Newcastle, led to many cancellations and disruption. This could all have been avoided if the Leamside route via Pelaw and Tursdale junction had been kept open. It could have been used as a diversionary route to the East Coast main line south from Newcastle.

■ ■ Consultations

Having submitted detailed observations about the proposed franchises for Cross Country services and the renegotiated East Coast main line service, branch representatives have been attending stakeholder meetings with the bidders. My local MP, Peter Atkinson, has been kept informed. Railfuture North East chairman Martin Murphy attended a meeting of the North East Rail Forum on 11 May organised by David Clelland, MP for Tyne Bridge. The bidders explained their plans and answered queries from the "stakeholders".

Coastliners, the users' group, is engaging in consultations with Northern Rail about the Durham coast route, and Alan Beith, MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed, has arranged a meeting between the Belford Rail Users' Group and the Minister to discuss the provision of a platform at Belford. The branch chairman has been invited to attend.

■ ■ Tyne Valley Line

Community Rail Partnership funding has been restricted, but the Partnership Officer is still working one day a week. Northern Rail reports a 20% increase in passengers since its tenure of the franchise began two years ago. The users' group request for additional stops at Prudhoe is likely to be realised in the next timetable.

■ ■ Overcrowding

The 07.59 Trans Pennine service from Durham to Newcastle featured in the Transport 2000 Sardine Man campaign, with branch members contributing to the subsequent publicity.

■ ■ Rolling stock

Branch members have calculated that the class 158 two-car sets can carry 40% more passengers, and the class 156 sets 50% more passengers than the Pacers they are replacing, which should alleviate some overcrowding.

Difficulties in obtaining power cars for the refurbished 125 trains is causing further delays to the Grand Central plans for a Sunderland-London service. Trains imported from China are reported to be a long-term solution.