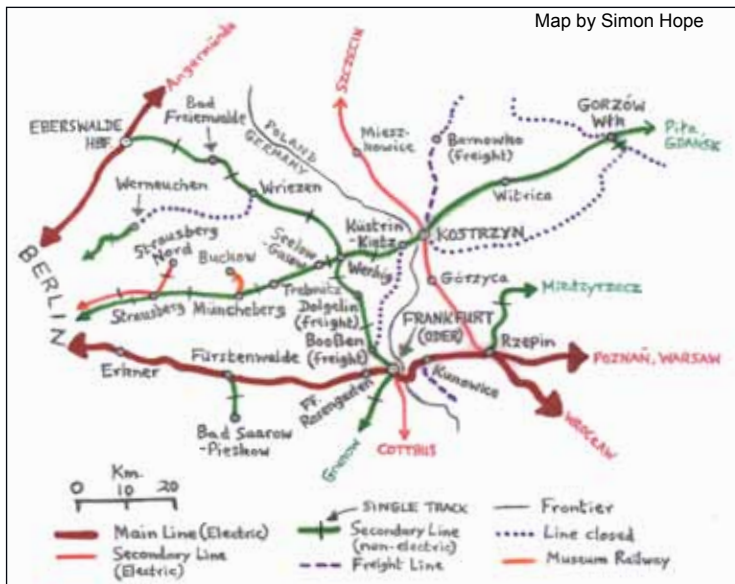


Trains across borders



By Trevor Garrod

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We can drive, cycle or even walk across the borders of most countries in continental Europe with no difficulty, thanks to the Schengen Agreement which is now 24 years old.

By train, some borders are easier to cross than others. The European Passengers' Federation (of which Railfuture is part) is working hard to spread good practice and point to possible solutions to problems.

Already on the EPF website (www.epf.eu) there is a list of cross-border services, published in October 2007 and now being updated.

After spending all day on Saturday 17 October ensconced in their business meeting in Berlin, several EPF colleagues, joined by members of one of our German sister organisations, used the Sunday to make a cross-border trip to Poland.

We left Berlin-Lichtenberg station in a modern low-floor diesel multiple unit of the Niederbarnimer Eisenbahn – the company which, since December 2006, has had a franchise to operate the route.

The NEB managing director joined us for part of the journey and explained the process of obtaining permission for their trains to operate on Polish tracks, albeit currently only for the one mile from the border to Kostrzyn station.

This enabled a much better service to operate than previously. Although the border crossing had long been used by freight trains, passenger workings were not reintroduced till 1992.

We were then joined by Karl-Heinz Bossan, chief executive of the Interessengemeinschaft Ostbahn Berlin-Gorzów, which is comparable to our community rail partnerships, bringing together public authorities, companies and individuals to promote the line (www.igob.eu).

The hourly train service brings commuters into Berlin and also gives city dwellers and visitors the

chance of attractive and interesting day trips into the Mark of Brandenburg and into Poland.

The trains terminate at Kostrzyn, on the Polish bank of the River Oder, from where there are onward connections to Gorzow.

The line continues to other important Polish cities, including Gdansk and on to Kaliningrad in Russia. There is potential for longer-distance services.

At Kostrzyn station we were met by Mr Jakubowski of Polish State Railways, who explained the history of the 131-year-old two-level station. We then walked to the town hall to meet the mayor, Dr Andrzej Kunt, in the beautiful wedding room.

Kostrzyn has a population of 18,000 and, with financial help from the European Union, is promoting itself as an attractive town in which to live, to run a business as well as to visit as a tourist.

Dr Kunt explained that, while a bypass road was being built for heavy lorries, the council also encouraged full use of the existing rail infrastructure.

We came away with a lasting impression of a town which has not always had a happy history but now sees itself as European and is looking to the future.

Kostrzyn is exploiting its potential now that it is more accessible from western Europe, with the railway having an important role to play in its development.

For more information, log on to www.tourist-info-kostrzyn.pl

Send your letters to:

The Editors, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU
 Email: editor@railwatch.org.uk
 Railwatch also welcomes articles and pictures
 Please use email if possible

Thames Valley

By Chris Wright

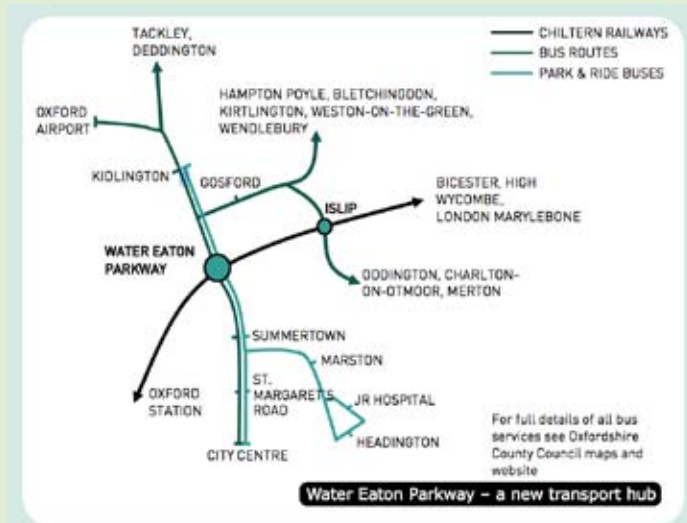
Chriswrightmk@aol.com

Positive action

Outline design work for East-West Rail is making progress with further site investigations of the infrastructure and a geotechnical report. Evaluation work of the local, regional and national role of the route is also under way. A meeting with Lord Adonis is reported to have been positive. Construction is being deferred to 2014 with services starting in late 2015. Funding remains an issue which has been affected by the downturn in the housing market. Bedford and Central Bedfordshire councils have confirmed support for East-West rail while Bedford Renaissance has suggested using a route alongside the A428 to reach the East Coast main line for Hitchin and Cambridge.

Oxford progress

Chiltern Railways continues to work on the Evergreen 3 project to increase capacity on the Bicester-Marylebone route next year and to provide a service from Marylebone to Oxford. The most dramatic upgrade will be at Bicester Town which will be completely rebuilt, with two platforms, a ticket office and a coffee shop. Oxford Station, which has been through various transformations since it first opened in 1844, will get two new platforms. These will be created from what is currently a disused parcels depot, thus removing a significant eyesore.



In its latest newsletter, Chiltern Railways said: "If ever there was a good example of joined-up transport, it's the proposed new Evergreen 3 station at Water Eaton Parkway. A brand new station to serve north Oxford, Water Eaton Parkway will be the pivotal link in a chain of bus, cycle, taxi and car links to the new Chiltern service."

Chiltern Railways chairman Adrian Shooter said: "Reinstating the East-West rail link from Oxford to Milton Keynes is being promoted by all the local authorities along the route. Evergreen 3 will deliver most of East-West Rail between Oxford and Bicester, including 80% of the track and earthworks and 100% of the buildings and bridges, designed to make it simple to install extra track later. This will result in less public funds being needed if the EWR project goes ahead."

Milton Keynes developments

Milton Keynes Central gains extra Virgin Trains in the December timetable change. Milton Keynes Rail Users continue to press for extra services. Network Rail has published plans for its new headquarters which could see 3,000 jobs based at Milton Keynes. The London Plan has proposed that Crossrail be extended to Milton Keynes.

More improvements

The Great Western rail utilisation study draft has been published which includes many aspirations of Railfuture, including Reading redevelopment, Oxford station capacity improvements, Evergreen 3, East-West rail, Heathrow links, North Downs Line improvements and completion of Cotswold line enhancements.