

EuroCity network needed

The European Commission should develop and finance a coherent network of cross-border conventional passenger trains to replace the present long-distance international trains which are fast disappearing.

The new EuroCity services could be licensed to private operators, in line with fair competition rules.

This is one of the suggestions of the European Passenger Federation in a paper, which urges the commission not to restrict itself to a mere regulatory role.

The development of cross-border trains would be in line with long-term policies of the European Union, to improve communications between the constituent countries and to promote sustainable transport.

The EPF call is in response to current EU rules which are causing the slow disappearance of existing international trains.

The EU is making it impossible for railways to subsidise long-distance trains which cross the EU's internal borders, or difficult for operators in different countries to have joint agreements.

The restrictions are making it increasingly difficult for train operators to run profitable services.

A network of high-speed European trains is being developed but will not be complete for many years. And it has disadvantages over the current long-distance trains. High-speed trains are not as comfortable as conventional trains, often providing only airline seating, and they fail to provide proper facilities for carrying luggage like prams and cycles.

High-speed rail fares also take no account of social inclusion policies and are often not integrated with other railway operators. This is in conflict with the principle of the free movement of people throughout the European Union.

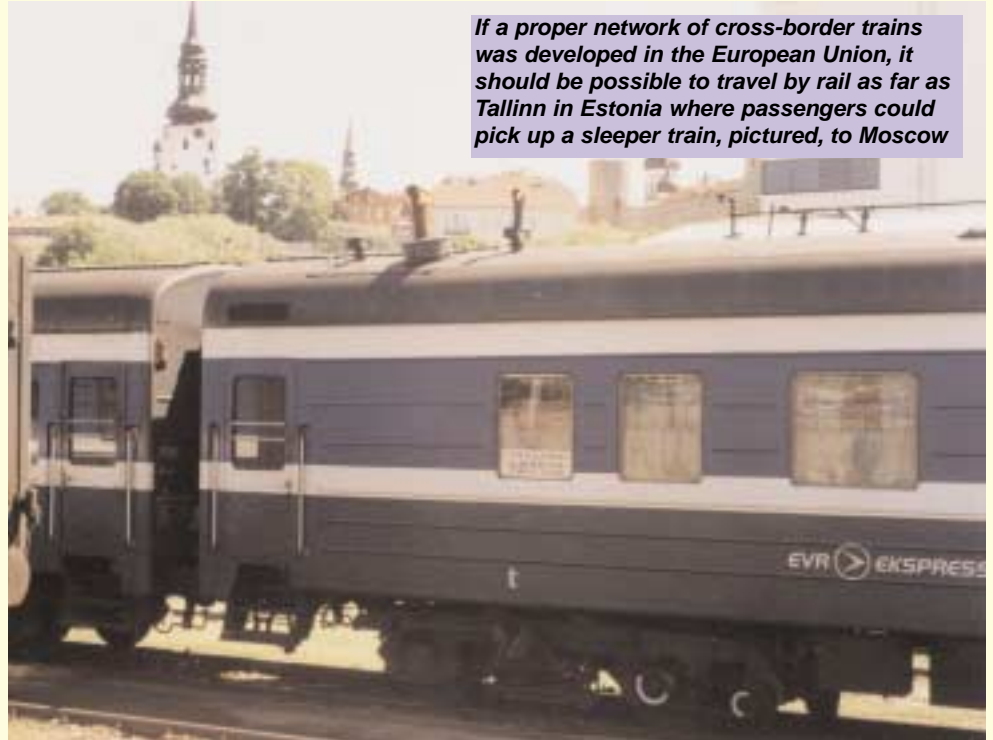
The EU therefore must empower its executive body DG TREN to guarantee the survival of a coherent network of trains and develop it to cover all EU countries, without interfering in domestic rail services.

Case study:

The former international train from Ostend to Köln gave major Flemish cities a direct connection with Germany and guaranteed a regional cross-border service for Belgian and German commuters in the Eupen and Aachen area.

Eurostar passengers from Britain could board it at Brussels without supplemental payments or prior booking.

Now the train goes only to Brussels and is partly replaced by an expensive and less customer friendly train from Brussels to Köln. Another replacement train from Liege to Aachen provides a regional cross-border function but runs only every two hours.



If a proper network of cross-border trains was developed in the European Union, it should be possible to travel by rail as far as Tallinn in Estonia where passengers could pick up a sleeper train, pictured, to Moscow

By John Saunders

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It is 52 minutes past the hour and a sleek, green train glides out of Liverpool Lime Street station, bound for Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Peterborough, Ely and Norwich.

Ten trains a day cover the route, while six more run to Nottingham and there are four morning trains from Derby or Nottingham, east to Norwich. This is one of rail's success stories, attracting three and a half million passengers in the past year.

Liverpool-Norwich are trains for workers, shoppers, for professionals avoiding the M1 between Sheffield and Nottingham, for councillors from Peterborough attending conferences in Manchester, for car salesmen from Norwich attending auctions in Nottingham and for granny in Stockport visiting family in Thetford.

Then there are day-tripping families and students.

With a youthful customer base, the train interiors are bright blues, greens and purples. Curl up with the personal player and enjoy the spectacular scenery of the Peaks or quieter landscapes of the fens.

Linking three passenger transport authorities, seven shire counties, three unitary authorities, four government

Central Citylink

regions and six university cities (plus Cambridge via Ely) Liverpool-Norwich epitomises inclusion, accessibility and modal choice.

Liverpool-Norwich is now one of four Central Citylink routes, together with Liverpool to Birmingham, Birmingham to Stansted Airport and Cardiff to Nottingham.

All use modern air-conditioned vehicles with comfortable seating, carpets, double-glazed tinted windows and accessible toilets.

Passengers seeking a bargain can book Central Value fares up to seven days before travel (the lowest price), up to three days or up to one day (costing a bit more) for off-peak trains.

This yield-management should help reduce Friday overcrowding. Alphaline and Virgin Cross County trains on Central Citylink routes have been withdrawn, representing "a huge vote of confidence in Central Trains management".

Many Central Citylink services have Xpress Catering trolleys selling drinks and light refreshments, with more planned from January.

On 9 October, Centro and the

Strategic Rail Authority formally announced the £457million two-year extension to the Central Trains franchise.

Some of the cash will provide improved communications when things go wrong -- more people in the control office, mobile phones for train crew, new kit for platform staff and improvements to passenger information systems.

As secretary of Peterborough-Norwich Rail Users, I was pleased to participate earlier in the year in a major commuter survey, the results of which determined the passenger benefits to be included in the franchise extension.

Most politicians recognise the value of London trains. Passenger Transport Authorities vigorously fight their corner. The Association of Community Rail Partnerships fulfils a fantastic advocacy role for rural railways.

I believe passionately that Railfuture and its members should support the promotion and development of Alphaline, Central Citylink, Virgin Cross-Country and Trans-Pennine Express routes, the backbone of the English regions.