

Outline for an Initiative
“Save our motorail and night train services”
Campaigning for the expansion of intra-European rail links

The following outlines *16 elements* for a campaign to save night train and motorail services and to optimise Europe-wide rail links. These points emerged from discussions at meetings of the rail expert group *Bürgerbahn statt Börsenbahn (BsB)* (“Rail for the people not for the stock exchange”) in Fulda on 5 July 2014, a number of discussion rounds with works councils from DB ERS (“Deutsche Bahn European Railservice”), inter alia in Hamburg and Dortmund, and in meetings of the *Bündnis Bahn für Alle*, an alliance against rail privatisation, at the end of July and the beginning of August 2014.

1

The starting points for the project are the long process of creeping cutbacks to night trains on the German and European rail networks and recent internal decisions by the railways, either made public or of which we are aware, which will lead to the virtually complete phasing out of night train services in Germany and, where cross-border night trains are concerned, in Europe too. One special aspect here is the current decimation of Deutsche Bahn’s motorail train services, compounded by ongoing cutbacks to traditional European rail links.

2

These developments are counterproductive in *three respects*.

Firstly they are out of line with the goals of *climate protection and a sustainable transport policy*. Official transport policy at federal level in Germany and at EU level confirms rail to be the most sustainable of all forms of motorised transport. Calls come from all sides to expand rail transport. Yet the opposite is happening – particularly glaringly in relation to night trains and Europe-wide rail links.

Secondly these cutbacks are in striking contrast to the officially declared goal of the EU and its Member States to establish closely meshed transport links and transport flows to help Europe to “grow together”. What is happening in the rail sector is in actual fact leading increasingly to the *division of Europe*.

Thirdly this policy of slashing services in this area runs counter to the aim of helping to put rail companies on the road to recovery at European level. It is a policy which threatens to eliminate a key component of rail transport, a segment which has been a symbol and trademark of this mode of transport for a good 150 years. One only has to think of the legends created around great European trains in general and night trains in particular (The

Orient Express, the *Golden Arrow*) and see how rail travel is reflected in literature (*Night Train to Lisbon*). The wholesale cuts in this area are **detrimental to passengers** and **harmful to business**. **Surveys** of the users of night trains and motorail services indicate that if Deutsche Bahn proceeds with its plans, it will lose large numbers of its customers for good: 100% in the case of motorail services and 75% with respect to night trains. The fallout from the discontinuation of whole divisions such as motorail and night train services, not least for Deutsche Bahn's operating results, will ultimately be far greater than what are claimed to be the current negative results for these divisions.

3

These new cutbacks in Europe-wide transport links in the motorail and night train sectors need to be seen *as part of the general policy of radical cutbacks in European rail services*. In recent decades segments, many of which have been fundamental elements of a unified rail system for more than a hundred years, have been dismantled virtually "train by train". Taking railways in Germany as an example (Bundesbahn/Reichsbahn and Deutsche Bahn AG), these cuts include: ending of mail train services (1994/95), ending of general cargo services (second half of 1990s); discontinuation of Interregio trains (2001/2002); shifting of remaining baggage services to road transport (end of the 1990s); ending of staff presence and manned ticket offices at thousands of rail stations (an ongoing process since the mid 1980s, accelerated since the rail reforms of 1994); ending of rail-based transport such as Lake Constance shipping and the sale of shares in shipping lines to Scandinavia (Scandlines; 2005); hiving off inter alia of goods transport (since the end of the 1990s); dismantling of networks particularly with respect to regional branch lines (feeder lines; between 1994 and 2013 the operating length of the network was cut by 7000 km).

If night trains in particular disappear totally or largely, the rail system will suffer a further blow to its quality and its already niche existence will be weakened yet again.

4

The cuts to rail services outlined here are in notable contrast to the systematic **expansion of intra-European aviation** and also to the increase in domestic flights in most of the larger EU Member States. In Germany domestic aviation grew by around 70 per cent between 1994 and 2013, while long-distance passenger rail transport stagnated. The growth in aviation has been promoted and subsidised in large measure by a specific transport policy (kerosene is tax-free; international flights are exempt from VAT; the vast majority of airports are subsidised by the state).

Yet alongside private car transport and road haulage, aviation is the mode of transport which contributes most to greenhouse gases.

5

It is not primarily “the market” (lack of demand etc) which explains why night trains are being shunted into the sidings. ***It is also to a considerable extent the policy of Deutsche Bahn’s management which is contributing to the harsh cutbacks in this segment.*** In recent times this management has systematically cut night train capacity. Rolling stock is outdated and inadequately maintained, the latter leading to premature wear and tear (as in the case of double-decker cars). ***In recent years there have been many decisions and “incidents” which have led to hundreds of thousands of users of night trains and motorail services staying away.***

There is a list of embarrassing questions in this regard: Why were dining cars removed from night trains systematically and, following the transition from Mitropa to DB ERS, at an increasing rate, thereby compromising the quality of the service?¹ What noticeable impact did this have on demand? Why has it been impossible for a long time to book Deutsche Bahn motorail trains from Scandinavia?

6

The aim is to ***launch a broad-based campaign against this policy of radical cutbacks*** in the second half of 2014 and to develop an alternative pro-active rail policy in these areas. The ***sponsors of such a campaign*** at this time are: the works councils and other employees of the Deutsche Bahn subsidiary DB European Railservice (DB ERS), *Bürgerbahn statt Börsenbahn* (BsB) and *Bahn für Alle*.

Further members could be: NGG (Food, Beverages and Catering Union), members of EVG (Railway and Transport Union) and the EVG-affiliated *Bahn von unten* initiative, possibly supplemented by individual (other; except BsB) partners in the *Bahn für Alle* alliance, e.g. the branch committee of the railway engineering division of the IG Metall Union.

It would be desirable for initiatives and individuals from other European countries to be incorporated in this campaign from the outset. The first informal contacts have been established with Italy, Austria and Denmark. It would be a good idea to invite interested parties to a meeting in autumn 2014 in order to get coordination off the ground.

7

On 24 September 2014 a ***protest is to be staged in Berlin in front of DB’s Bahn Tower against the termination of motorail and night train services***, organised by the works councils and other employees of DB ERS, with broad support from the groups mentioned under point 6. This action will provide a highly visible start to the desired campaign.

¹ There were grandiose plans announced to replace the dining cars with what were to be called paninotecas (1/3 of couchette space converted into a bistro). But instead of the envisaged 30 paninotecas, only two of them were built and have become permanent guests in the repair workshop.

8

Plans to date at **parliamentary level (Bundestag)**: The Bundestag Transport Committee will be meeting to discuss the subject of motorail and night train services. By the end of August the Left Party will have produced a Bundestag motion on the same subject, which will be tabled in the Bundestag in September and placed on the agenda for a plenary debate in the same month. This should encourage other parties – such as Alliance 90/The Greens and possibly the SPD – to introduce their own parliamentary initiatives. Further parliamentary initiatives should be examined.

9

There is also a need to examine to what extent comparable motions can be tabled in the **European Parliament**. Approaches should be made in this respect to Michael Cramer, chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism, to ask for his support in the campaign to retain overnight train services and to expand Europe-wide rail links.

10

Efforts are being made to identify **prominent individuals who are willing** to comment on the subject and lend their backing to the initiative. These include people from the areas of art, theatre, politics, etc. Some persons from Germany are already on the "shortlist". Pascal Mercier (*Night Train to Lisbon*) is a possible international name.²

11

Particular efforts are to be made to establish **good media contacts** and to place articles in the media, including in the supplements, in support of the initiative and related concerns. The first articles on the subject have already appeared, although some, for example in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* at the beginning of July, strike a somewhat destructive note. It is important to bear in mind that the project "No more ICE dining cars" announced by Mehdorn, the then boss of Deutsche Bahn AG, around twelve years ago had to be halted in the end. One reason was the outcry in many media reports and in the supplements of major newspapers. On that occasion, too, the rail management presented "studies" which purported to show that dining cars were fundamentally uneconomical.

² Manolis Glezos is a case in point. In Greece Glezos is something of national hero. He is famous for his actions on 30 May 1941, after the Nazis marched into Athens, when, as a young man, he tore down the swastika flag from the Acropolis. In May 2014 Glezos, who is now 91 years old, was elected to the European Parliament from the list of Syriza, the Coalition of the Radical Left. For health reasons he is unable to fly. Because of the discontinuation of earlier night train connections and the cutbacks to internal European rail links, it will now take him two to three times longer to travel from Athens to the sittings of the European Parliament in Strasbourg than would have been the case in the 1950s to the 1970s.

12

Colleagues from DB ERS have already begun producing campaign material. **Further high-profile actions** need to be planned, for example marking the last trip of a particular train (similar to actions in 2008 which were ultimately successful). Acting earlier would naturally be better. Spectacular **“inspections” of night trains** before their departure or arrival; distribution of flyers to passengers?

13

The subject of **jobs** should be a central issue of such a campaign. In Germany alone around 1000 jobs are at stake (550 at DB ERS; the others on the periphery – all in the service sector). There are also jobs in maintenance and in vehicle manufacture. Everything should be done in the campaign to counter the salami tactics being employed by the management of Deutsche Bahn and to show solidarity with colleagues in DB ERS who are currently affected. For example the Dortmund branch of DB ERS is to be closed at the end of 2014, a move which is to be resisted by the staff. This struggle should be supported by the initiative.

This whole affair should moreover be seen as part of a comprehensive massive job-cutting exercise which *Deutsche Bahn* has been pursuing since 1994, halving the number of employees in the rail sector. Efforts should be linked in this respect to the “good work” concept developed by IG Metall and DGB, the Confederation of German Trade Unions. It is a term which is completely appropriate in this area.

14

The future lies in part in the past: **there was once a very good network of night trains** – for example still in 1994 when the reform of the railways started. Andreas Kleber already assembled impressive material on this. At that time those responsible in the *Bundesbahn* and *Deutsche Bahn* respectively came up with interesting marketing ideas, including an attractive pricing structure. This produced positive results.

This material should be worked up and used in the present campaign. The argument “But we had all this once – and it worked” can often be more convincing than proposals devised around a drawing board.

15

What this is about in essence is the **pro-active development and presentation of an alternative Europe-wide concept for night train services** and Europe-wide rail links taking into account current technical and transport policy conditions. There is considerable potential for the rail segments in question. This is also documented by a new study by UIC on

the opportunities for night trains.³ Unlike 20 and more years ago, the new high-speed lines can now be incorporated in part in a new concept, although it is important that such a concept, particularly as outlined in the UIC study, is intensively examined in terms of its feasibility. The authors of this study assume inter alia that the infrastructure costs for this type of night traffic – using the high-speed tracks – will account for up to 70 per cent of overall operating costs. We should bring pressure to bear in the first instance to ensure that traditional night train links are retained and optimised or reactivated. Furthermore there is a need to examine the scope for rail track charges to be reduced for night trains. The European Football Championship to be staged in 13 countries in 2020 could provide an interesting fixed point in time for the establishment of such a Europe-wide night train system.

16

The editorial team at Lunapark21 has offered to produce a special **LP21 extra edition on night train services** – the history of the service, Deutsche Bahn’s radical cutback policy, the alternative concept.⁴ We need to investigate whether there is an alliance partner (or several) for such a publication.

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9 August 2014*

³ UIC-Study Night Trains 2.0 – New Opportunities by HSR? Full Report by UIC-International Union of Railways, no year (spring 2014). See also: Heinz Högelsberger, Reisebericht: Nachtzüge in Europa – Status quo. Viel Raum für Verbesserungen, in: Regionale Schienen 5/2013.

⁴ See the current edition of Lunapark21 Extra08-09 on “20 Jahre Bahnreform – 20 Jahre Stuttgart 21”; produced in line with a comparable model in association with the initiatives and organisations which organised the conference in Stuttgart at the end of April 2014.