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better services over  
a bigger railway

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## Briefing for Railfuture Members

### Railfuture European Passenger Group - Progress Update (October 2018)

*Original briefing written by Ian Brown CBE FCILT, Chair of European Passenger Group (EPG), in September 2018 and subsequently revised to add further updates.*

#### **Background**

The European Passenger Group was set up by the Railfuture Board as a sub-group of its Passenger Group with a well-defined remit designed to support Railfuture's campaigning in Britain by being aware of European best practice as well as campaigning for improved links from Britain to the European Mainland (and also Ireland) principally by Eurostar and air. We will continue to upload "Go and Compare!" articles to the Railfuture website where quoting best practice can strengthen our arguments for improvements in Britain.

Like all of Railfuture's groups, the European Passenger Group complies with Railfuture's improved governance procedures and financial controls to ensure that members' money is spent wisely. The general method of working is by email and topic-specific one-to-one meetings. This works well and is cost effective, which is important for our members, allowing the group to operate on a reduced budget.

International travel from Britain is catered for by new booking systems including the Man in Seat 61, Loco 2 and the rapidly developing DB website, now including more information on travel from Britain. We will therefore not be producing paper leaflets as this information is available in seconds. Railfuture is not a sales outlet for international rail travel but aims to provide better information to foster increased travel into Britain, important owing to the complexity of the rail structure in Britain. We will be producing a comprehensive guide for inward travel with a view to linkage with travel websites such as Interrail and Eurail.

#### **European Passenger Group meetings**

The EPG's Terms of Reference, set by Passenger Group, focus on two areas. The first is evaluating best practice to strengthen Railfuture's arguments when campaigning for a bigger better railway in Britain, particularly in terms of fares comparisons, passenger facilities and information. The other role in support of Passenger Group, is to campaign for improved links and travelling conditions to and from Britain and Mainland Europe essentially through Eurostar and the European Passengers' Federation. There is another group that calls itself the European Advisory Group (EAG). Members should be aware that this group is neither "advisory" nor part of Railfuture's governance structure.

#### **The first meeting of EPG group**

Passenger Group require EPG to hold a minimum of one full meeting of the team per year. The first full meeting was held on 13th March 2018 to ensure we have addressed coverage of the itemised remit of the group with named sponsors within the group. The top priorities were a clear need to address Eurostar liaison and respond to the concerns expressed by the European Passengers' Federation about Railfuture's input.

#### **The second meeting of EPG group**

A further full meeting was held on 5th October 2018. This focussed on maximising potential benefits from newly established senior level relationships with Eurostar and on providing competent input to the European Passengers' Federation. We can provide extremely useful customer feedback to Eurostar and

indeed contribute to EPF given the intense interest in the British rail scene at the moment with industry changes and Brexit.

## **Eurostar**

Railfuture's former International Group had not established a direct liaison with Eurostar, despite the fact that Eurostar was the main reason for its existence. Eurostar had refused to meet directly with Railfuture. It is not surprising therefore that Railfuture had made no impression over the years with Eurostar.

Following a discussion with the COO of Eurostar, Jerry Alderson had a 140-minute meeting with Eurostar at their London HQ which has resulted in Railfuture working with them to address the matters raised. We now have a proper senior level direct liaison with Eurostar and a continuing dialogue with them on the many issues of concern to Railfuture members, particularly in the area of the passenger interface such as information, travel purchase and ticketing and the station the journey experience.

In terms of service development, Eurostar are quite clear about what they are going to develop in the medium term and what they are not. They see Amsterdam as the key market, the largest market in Europe after Paris, from London and everything rides on the success of the recently introduced one way Amsterdam service. They have taken a gamble on eventually being in a position on operating a return service. Eurostar sees Brussels as the key development hub, given capacity limitations at Lille. EPG members have seen for themselves how popular the Amsterdam service is (taking a direct London-Amsterdam service and the Amsterdam-Brussels return in October 2018, comparing it with air travel), and Railfuture is pleased that Eurostar has announced its intention to launch a third daily service in June 2019. Eurostar have no intention of providing a German service and DB has also dropped the idea. They do see, however, a move towards better integration with Thalys services, also principally owned by SNCF. Railfuture believes that Eurostar welcomes our constructive feedback as useful consumer information.

A meeting was also held with Mark Smith of 'Man in Seat 61' to understand his views on connections between Eurostar and train services on the European Mainland.

## **The European Passenger Federation (EPF)**

Railfuture has been a long-standing member of EPF. Discussions have taken place in London with EPF's Management Board with a view to improving Railfuture's input into and relationship with EPF, now facilitated by the election of a new EPF President. EPF see its future, as does Railfuture, as being more professional, shrinking non-core activities and equipping itself better to undertake a broader range of paid consultancy work, currently mainly from the EU.

## **Railfuture's representation at EPF**

During discussions with EPF they requested that we also upgrade our own input into EPF discussions. They want informed, intelligent input into their discussions. They also want better feedback on the British scene, both positive and negative, as seen from an independent group such as Railfuture. Dennis Fancett is our new representative to EPF. Dennis attended the 2018 EPF AGM and in June 2018 Jerry Alderson attended the EPF conference in Aachen, as EPF had asked for Railfuture to produce a presentation on Delay Repay, which is a scheme where Britain is leading the way for the rest of Europe. The slides can be viewed at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display1753>. Railfuture's revised representation has been well received by EPF's Management Board as participating fully and knowledgeably into the discussions.

## **Interrail**

Following a presentation by the General Manager of Interrail at EPF's Aachen conference, a dialogue has been opened with both the General Manager and Marketing Manager of Interrail and Eurail. They would like to see us promote the use of Interrail and Eurail, especially encouraging visitors to Britain using their passes. They also wish to focus their investment on smart phone apps, not "offline" (i.e. paper) advertising. It is vital that any work done by Railfuture must speak to the smartphone-using generation. They would like to engage with us on this basis and a meeting between Railfuture (Ian Brown and Jerry Alderson) and Eurail Group management was held at their HQ in Utrecht on 22nd October 2018 in which common interests were identified. We subsequently wrote to them, prior to their meeting in London with the Rail Delivery Group, with proposals on how Railfuture and Interrail could collaborate in the future.

Dennis Fancett has done some preliminary work on explaining to foreign visitors how the rail system works in Britain entitled "Britain by Rail". It would be a significant achievement if we can persuade Interrail and Eurail to incorporate or link this into their app and electronic promotional material.

## **ALLRAIL**

An initial meeting was held in Brussels with the Secretary General of ALLRAIL which represents the Alliance of Passenger Rail New Entrants in Europe, and a follow-up meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> October is planned. Railfuture wants to understand the workings of railways on the European mainland so we can feed back to Passenger Group on dealing with new operators. Similarly we have been asked by EPF for input on the British open access performance and developments, given moves, particularly in France to open up the system to new players.

## **Rail/air links**

This is largely in the domain of Passenger Group nominees who have specific assigned Train Operating Company (TOC) liaison responsibilities. The most significant one, the link to Heathrow, has been transferred out of the EPG as the rail service will in future be managed by Crossrail and GWR. However, the EPG retains an interest in promoting rail/air ticketing through provincial airports.

EPG will be reviewing whether Railfuture should be members of a professional rail/air association. Any recommendation will be put to Passenger Group. It may be preferable to review air links generally and put best practice to those holding TOC responsibilities as they have the contacts.

Similarly we will be reviewing rail/ferry links to Ireland and the European Mainland.

## **Succession – a plea to members**

The EPG needs to connect with and understand the market for international rail and we are looking for new members with an understanding the needs of today's travellers and familiar with using social media, as apart from wanting to recreate an earlier age. We are therefore looking to attract more diversity into the EPG. It is essential, however, that we attract younger people, more women and a better ethnic mix as new members join, with a better grasp of the potential of social media and indeed experience on how people actually travel to the European Mainland and use social media. Please would any Railfuture member in these categories with social media skills let us know if you would like to join us. You can be assured of a warm welcome.

## **Review of the EPG**

We are required to review the performance of the EPG at the end of the 2018. The aim is to make the group as successful and relevant as possible, in assisting with our campaigning in Britain, including our efforts to sharpen it and properly engage with industry players, prior to a recommendation to the Railfuture Board at the end of the year.

## **In summary**

- *EPG is now set up, working cohesively and addressing the TORs provided by Passenger Group*
- *EPG will comply with the Board's Governance and financial control regimes*
- *effective liaison has been established with Eurostar*
- *the interface with the European Passenger Federation has been improved with the changes at EPF and Railfuture's representation to EPF*
- *effective liaison has also been established with the Eurail Group (Interrail and Eurail) and Railfuture has proposed ways in which we can promote Interrail to Britons and an initiative whereby their new smart-phone app based can link to information produced by Railfuture for visitors to Britain*
- *we will be discussing how best to support improved rail/air links in conjunction with TOC liaison officers*
- *we will be discussing how to address the remit of making the group more diverse better representing the needs of those who travel internationally from and to Britain*
- *we will provide the required performance review at the end of the year.*

## EPG Contacts

The current composition of the European Passenger Group, with portfolios is

- *Ian Brown - Chair*
- *Jerry Alderson - Board member and Eurostar*
- *Dennis Fancett - Branch SENRUG and EPF liaison*
- *Trevor Jones (EPG Secretary) - representing continuity with the former International Group (now replaced by the EPG)*
- *Chris Irwin - Railfuture Vice President and member of the EPF Management Board (also with expertise on various inter-governmental issues)*
- *Vacancy – one or more younger people with an understanding the needs of today's travellers and familiar with using social media*

*Simon Hope, who was a member of the former International Group, has decided to pursue his personal interests, which are beyond the scope of Railfuture, as an "Independent Researcher" and is no longer a member of EPG.*

Last revision: 30/10/2018 with Ian Brown's revisions following the Railfuture meeting with Eurail Group on 22nd October 2018.

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