



PRESS RELEASE

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Civil society group raises alarm over EU cross-border passenger rail cuts

— Berlin — As new rail timetables come into effect across Europe this Sunday, the World Carfree Network [1] has today issued an open letter [2] to the European Commission warning of the increasingly drastic cuts to EU cross-border passenger rail services, and calling for immediate action to maximise rail's potential and reach the EU's own transport and climate policy goals.

This weekend all direct trains between Barcelona and Milan and Zurich, Bucharest and Belgrade, and Brussels and The Hague will be lost, while severe cuts will affect other international routes to/from: Belgium (23 trains), Bosnia (all except 2 to Croatia cut), Croatia (34 out of 56 international trains cut or part-cut) and Serbia (14 out of 24 international trains to other capital cities cut).

These new blows to cross-border rail come on top of cuts in recent years which have already seen the loss of all international passenger trains to and from Greece, together with all direct trains – among others – from Brussels to Berlin, Venice to Budapest, Verona to Berlin and Hamburg, Vilnius to Riga and Tallinn, and Paris to Vienna – a route immortalised in the 1977 Kraftwerk release *Trans-Europe Express*. [3]

“The EU's Transport White Paper rightly prioritises rail as the transport mode of choice for medium-distance passenger traffic in Europe, but unless urgent action is taken, ever more people – particularly in the bloc's outlying countries – will be denied the opportunity to travel with this pleasant and environmentally acceptable mode of transport,” commented Simon Field, a campaigner with the World Carfree Network. *“In recent years not only has Greece been cut off completely from the rest of the EU by rail, but now we have a situation where drastic cuts to cross-border services mean that many parts of south-east Europe are going to be much harder – and in some cases almost impossible – to access by rail.”*

The World Carfree Network calls on the European Commission to undertake ten measures [4] in order to maximise the potential of rail. These include interventions to ensure the better coordination of timetables and ticketing, as well as strategic policy changes such as speeding up the introduction of road user charging and reviewing aspects of liberalisation that have led to increased costs for operators of cross-border rail services.

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Notes for editors

[1] The [World Carfree Network](http://worldcarfree.net) is the hub of the global carfree movement, which promotes alternatives to car dependence and automobile-based planning, and works to improve quality of life for all.

[2] The letter, including annexes with exact details on services that have been cut, are about to be cut, or are threatened with closure, is available at:

http://worldcarfree.net/press/WCN_rail_cuts_letter_EC_FINAL_121207.pdf

[3] *"Rendezvous on Champs-Elysees
Leave Paris in the morning on T.E.E.
Trans-Europe Express
In Vienna we sit in a late-night cafe
Straight connection, T.E.E.
Trans-Europe Express"*

[4] The ten recommendations are:

- 1) Push politically unpalatable but crucial policies such as road user charging, in line with the oft-stated aims to 'internalise external costs' and adopt 'user pays' principles.
- 2) Consider environmental impacts and unintended effects on the railway first and foremost when assessing applications for infrastructure funding, consistent with the White Paper's stated aim to "ensure that EU-funded transport infrastructure takes into account energy efficiency needs and climate change challenges";
- 3) Urgently review and mitigate the consequences of the requirement for trains and infrastructure management to be separated beyond the level of accounting transparency;
- 4) Urgently review and mitigate the consequences of the requirement for a single operator to be commercially responsible for international trains from end to end;
- 5) Take immediate steps (most logically by attaching pro-rail conditions to funding/aid) to ensure that countries do not isolate themselves and/or otherwise make strategic international rail routes difficult or impossible to use;
- 6) Review EU-level restrictions on operating subsidies for cross-border passenger trains;
- 7) Consider setting up a dedicated funding stream to modernise cross-border railway routes and provide operating subsidies as necessary. We would expect this to deliver the following minimum standards as a condition of the funding:
 - a. Significantly faster transit of the border through:
 - i. Efficient operational procedures;
 - ii. Faster passport and customs controls at non intra-Schengen borders;
 - iii. Good connections;
 - b. An attractive service that meets the needs of users (rather than operators);
 - c. Through ticketing for local and long-distance cross-border journeys;
- 8) Participate pro-actively in the international timetable negotiation process that culminates in the annual European timetabling conference. DG-MOVE officers should make suggestions to national operators and infrastructure managers, with a focus on avoiding closures, preventing poor/broken connections and maintaining a constructive dialogue between players;
- 9) Disseminate best practice in terms of the efficient and passenger-friendly use of existing resources through high-level conferences and publications. These would be aimed at operators and infrastructure managers, national transport ministries and regional funding/tendering authorities (see also Appendix III of the open letter);
- 10) Support the development of online and printed [Man in Seat 61](#)-type information resources in all Member States, in order to provide impartial expert advice on international surface travel in an easy-to-understand way.