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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT

Directorate B - European Mobility Network
The Director

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Mr Simon Field
World Carfree Network
Steering Committee
c/o Nadace Partneství
Krátká 26, 100 00 Praha 10
Czech Republic

Dear Mr Field,

Thank you for your open letter of 7 December 2012 drawing my attention to negative developments in the market of international rail passenger transport services. The Commission is following intensively the evolution of this market and takes into account this experience when finalising its proposal for the Fourth Railway Package to be published in the coming days, the objective of which is to offer more choice and better quality in rail services.

Indeed, a high-quality European railway network is crucial for the development of a Single European Transport Area and the Commission maintains the targets of the 2011 White Paper you are referring to in your letter. TEN-T priority projects have been focused on rail: the Øresund rail link you mention as an example of "good practice" is just one concrete result of this policy. This trend will even be strengthened under the new TEN-T guidelines for which the Commission presented its proposal in 2011. According to this proposal, improving cross-border connections will have first priority when deciding about European co-financing. Another important aspect is multimodality (connecting all core network airports to the rail network is another important target of the White Paper). According to the Commission's proposal, this policy will be supported by a dedicated investment fund, the Connecting Europe Facility.

As for the internalisation of external costs and the adoption of 'user pays' principles which you request, the Commission has been following this policy for several years. Its strategy was published in the Greening Transport Package in 2008. Moreover, the latest amendment of Directive 1999/62/EC on the charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures (the 'Eurovignette Directive') in 2011 was an important step in this direction.

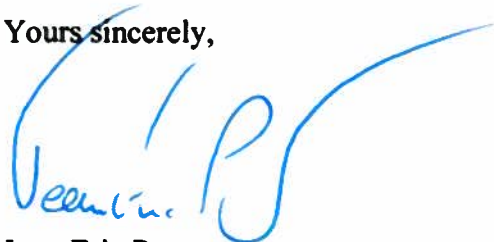
The Commission is determined to push for practical implementation of the 'polluter pays' principle, but the final outcome of its legislative proposals heavily depends on Member States' commitment in this direction.

The Commission encourages Member States and railway undertakings to improve international rail connections but this activity is a market segment where operators base their decisions on business cases. While several services have indeed ceased, other international services between major economic centres are flourishing and the numbers of international passengers do not seem to confirm general negative conclusions. As for local and regional cross-border services, while criticising the "rigid" prescriptions of EU law, you are listing several positive examples in Appendix III of your letter bearing evidence of real progress in this field. Finally, the Commission and the European Railway Agency are working intensively on integrated ticketing in the framework of Regulation (EU) 454/2011 on the technical specification for interoperability relating to the subsystem 'telematics applications for passenger services' (TAP TSI). The international timetable negotiation process should remain an exercise for railway undertakings and infrastructure managers.

Liberalisation and unbundling ("fragmentation") you point to in your letter as the main reasons for international services disappearing are in fact policies progressing quite slowly (at the moment, there are still 12 infringement cases before the European Court of Justice for inadequate transposition of the First Railway Package and the Commission sent reasoned opinions in similar cases to 4 other Member States). In liberalised markets like the UK or Sweden, rail passenger transport is increasing rapidly (including strong cross-border passenger flows). It is precisely to give the needed boost to rail that the Commission will propose liberalisation of domestic rail passenger markets in the framework of the Fourth Railway Package in the coming weeks. In the case of the rail freight market, this liberalisation had a positive impact on international freight services as well.

Your opinion is valuable to us and we appreciate this exchange of views.

Yours sincerely,



Jean-Eric Paquet