

European Passengers' Federation Policy Speech,

ANNUAL CONFERENCE, BARCELONA

Christopher Irwin, Vice Chair, EPF

12th March 2011

Chair, Colleagues.

The EPF Annual Conference provides a good opportunity to take stock of our policy priorities and of the progress we have made in promoting them to the European Commission, the Parliament and the transport industry.

We have just heard from Ambassador Kuneva: it is clear that Vice President Kallas, the EU's Transport Commissioner, and his team are keen to listen to what we have to say.

This has been demonstrated by the good progress made over the last year in taking on board the suggestions that we have made on behalf of passengers – for example in ensuring that the European Railway Agency's work on a Technical Standard for Interoperability for Passenger Application Telematics is compatible with its ultimate extension both to domestic rail services and to other modes.

We have had particularly good access to the staff of the Commission concerned with passengers' rights and we appreciate the way in which Mrs Manfredi and key people in DG MOVE have been ready to hear our representations. The constructive relationship with the Commission is extremely important to EPF.

Those of you who were at last year's annual conference, in Malmo, may recall that we identified a number of issues under the general heading – Passengers' Priorities.

We made the point that the provision of public transport services was still characterised by 'the-provider-knows-best' attitudes. We emphasised the need for a cultural revolution where increasing passenger satisfaction is the bench-mark of success.

The recast of the First Railway Package, with its emphasis on greater market transparency and effective independent regulation should facilitate this. The Commission's decision to fund a regular Eurobarometer survey of passenger satisfaction will give us all – governments, the industry and passengers – an effective set of tools. Passenger needs must be at the heart of policy decisions.

Meeting in the weeks after the terrible railway accident at Buizingen, we emphasised the importance of safety and security to travellers. We noted the continuing lack of effective enforcement measures at the European level capable of cracking-down on years of systemic failings of the sort apparent to the Belgian Chamber of Representatives' Commission of Inquiry. But Belgium is not alone: passengers' groups have identified concerns in other member states such as Bulgaria and Greece. These must be addressed. We would note, however, that these are not just technical issues. We have pointed out that passengers' *perceptions* of safety are often shaped by whether there are staff to be seen.

We highlighted the need to make travel easier - for public transport operators to make a step-change in information provision, matching the user friendliness of GPS-based navigation systems, like Tom-Tom, with a public transport equivalent that operated across all modes. In the past year, Vice President Kallas has repeatedly trailed the case for developing passenger information platforms to facilitate co-modality, for deploying new intelligent systems on a continent-wide basis and for making greater use of intelligent traffic management systems in attacking congestion and ensuring greater reliability.

The Malmo Conference took place four weeks before international travel throughout Europe came to a stop under the shadow of the Eyjafjallajökull ash cloud and thirty-six weeks before unseasonal snow stifled travel through the continent's busiest airports. If ever justification was needed for our continuing demand for effective passengers' rights legislation, these events demonstrated it. And they demonstrated something else: the interdependence of the different transport modes. We can take some comfort from the extension of passengers' rights protections – however limited – from air (fixed wing aircraft only, as yet, no helicopters!) to rail and then to maritime and bus and coach.

But there is still much to do. There has been progress. But we still lack the assurance of seamless end-to-end journeys, in which different modes integrate with one another reliably to ensure an attractive and affordable, sustainable alternative, to dependence on the private car.

The vision of a modern public transport system is not an optional luxury. It is essential to the twin challenge of enabling economic growth whilst reducing deadly emissions of carbon and green-house gasses. It is good stewardship of our scarce resources. We need to rethink our land use, our spatial planning models: we need

design that plans around the sustainable efficiencies of public transport rather than the land-hungry demands of the private car.

Passengers' needs must be at the heart of the vision. And, in the transport sector, which is often dominated by a handful of very strong players whose skills have been honed on persuading governments to part with public funding, understanding consumer needs is seldom part of the culture. That's why continuing research that monitors passenger satisfaction is an invaluable tool. That's why our voice and the voices of our member associations and all those thousands of more local users' groups are so important. Passengers must make themselves heard. In the imperfect market conditions in which public transport is provided we can't rely on the forces of supply and demand to do it for us.

So what are passengers' priorities over the next year?

First, some over-arching themes:

- We need to persuade the EU, governments and industry to think in terms of the 'end-to-end journey' experience. We need to avoid the compartmentalised approach that fails to make the link between, say, high speed rail, the urban metro and the ability to leave a bike securely, or recharge an electric car in a station car park. An "end-to-end journey" approach recognises that High Speed rail needs to be complemented by efficient local connections across all modes, both at the start and the end of a journey. Our PTP colleagues have vividly illustrated the 'Tarragona syndrome', where the isolated high speed station at Camp de Tarragona leaves people of Tarragona largely dependent on a car to access it.
- We need to get away from accepting an implicit social hierarchy in transport provision – buses for the poor, high speed trains and airlines for the premium traveller and, for anyone without access to a car, 'classic' trains working routes that have changed little in fifty years, either in travelling style or in investment in maintenance and renewals.
- We need to find ways of extending interoperability and of applying its principles, not just to equipment – traffic management systems, power supply, vehicles and so on – but to passengers. It should be no more difficult for a Luxembourger to navigate public transport in Berlin, Paris or Barcelona than it is for them to do so in Luxembourg itself. Passenger information platforms have a role to play here. But so do best practice and common standards for signage, ticketing and orientation.

- We must continue to push for simplification of varying systems – whether between states or between modes – such as those relating to passenger rights and provisions relating to cancellations and delay. A forward-looking European system has a greater chance of being understood, and therefore used, than one that reflects the diverse policies built up by companies over the last 185 years – until 1976 London taxis were obliged to carry a bale of hay in the boot under a law introduced in 1831 to protect the welfare of their nineteenth century equivalent – the horse-drawn London Hackney Carriage.
- We must assert that an empowered passenger – one who knows what they want, having been informed of all the options – is a good passenger, both for themselves and for the transport provider. People have a right to know the detail of what is on offer – times, prices, facilities – before they part with their money. More passenger dissatisfaction is generated by lack of clear information – particular at times of disruption – than by all the other factors put together.

So what does this mean in practice? What should EPF be pressing for?

First, we need to maintain progress on passengers’ rights. The likely recast of the Air Passengers’ Rights legislation should provide an opportunity to make a start on developing principles that can be applied across all modes. This will make it easier for passengers to understand the protections available. It should help ensure the creation of a ‘level playing-field’ between modes. As legislation for each mode comes up for review it should be possible to develop a more coherent, and this more user-friendly framework.

Let me draw attention to one inconsistency that became apparent in the wake of the Eyjafjallajökull disruption. Air carriers were unable to argue successfully that the ash cloud was a case of *force majeure* which relieved them of their obligations. Yet rail operators throughout Europe have been reported to rely on alleged *force majeure* in refusing in adverse weather to provide the assistance and support required under the Rail Passengers’ Rights Regulation. We must continue to battle for consistency between modes – and improved and comparable levels of enforcement by National Enforcement Bodies.

Secondly, we need to pre-empt any attempts by any of the railway undertakings or the infrastructure managers to back-slide of the key principles in the recast of the First Railway Package. Greater market transparency and effective independent

regulation is vital – to the interests of passengers, taxpayers and – in the longer-term – to the rail industry. We must be vigorous in endorsing the plan to ensure access for all potential operators to station buildings and their facilities, including those for ticketing and travel information. It is a time-wasting and consumer-hostile nonsense that passengers should not be able to get impartial information from a single ticket office as those of you who have tried to buy tickets in Copenhagen on Malmo to cross the Øresund will agree.

Passengers need to be able to buy a ticket between any pair of stations, irrespective of operator. This helps ensure the benefits the integrated European railway area. The principles of impartial retailing are successfully enshrined in the rules governing Britain's diverse, privatised railway. Indeed, the principal of 'interoperability' – being able to buy a ticket between any two stations on the network go back to the high-point of British *laissez-faire* in 1842. New operators will succeed in challenging the old monopolies only if passengers can make informed choices without having to overcome unnecessary obstacles. As Ambassador Kuneva said, competent citizens need to be informed citizens if they are to make smart choices.

Thirdly, useful progress has been made in developing the European Railway Agency's Technical Standard for Interoperability on Passenger Applications' Telematics. Its publication as legislation is expected shortly. This TSI establishes a European standard for the railways' information systems about timetables, train facilities, ticketing options, information before and during a journey. Unfortunately it has not yet been possible to resolve all the issues on which Rian van der Borcht, our representatives in the ERA Working Party, fought. For example, the inclusion of how to treat data on domestic fares, in addition to international fares, is still unresolved – an 'open point'.

We are well placed to press this issue as we have now been invited by the Commission to nominate a passengers' representative to the steering committee which will oversee implementation of the legislation. But even that is not the end of this issue. In the longer term we need to ensure that there can be the appropriate data exchange with other public transport modes to enable passengers to have access to reliable end-to-end journey information, for timetables, ticketing and service characteristics. We should press for research funding to ensure that this can be delivered – a smart information platform for passengers, irrespective of

mode or territory. It was good to hear Mrs Kuneva reiterate that the Commission supports the creation of Europe-wide, multi-modal journey planners.

In parallel, we need to encourage EU action to promote common standards to enable electronic ticketing distribution. These standards need to take proper account of the readiness of potential users to adapt to different technologies – PDAs, mobiles, printing-tickets-out-at-home, etc.

I've just used the term 'to encourage EU action to promote common standards'. While it is possible that nothing will happen without legislation, I like to think that the industry would be willing to cooperate with EPF and other users' representatives, such as the European Disability Forum, in trying to find the basis for a voluntary arrangement. This would need to be capable of including data from other modes, facilitating interavailability and through ticketing across modes, to reflect the principles of transparency and impartiality that are essential to informed consumers and to address the acceptability of different distribution technologies to a wide range of users.

My initial challenge to CER is this: would you be willing to work with EPF in preparing the terms of reference for such collaboration? Do you think that the industry is yet ready to work with its customers in this way, possibly obviating the need for formal legislation?

We are clearly at a moment of transition. When the Chairman and I were addressing the High Speed Rail Conference in Amsterdam last October we were both struck by the strong representation of an entirely new interest group at such rail conferences – the representatives of the Global Distribution Systems who have grown up to service the air sector. They were positively excited by the potential attractions of High Speed Rail for their industry – and scathing about the old rail industry retail mind-set.

It is apparent to me that competent and powerfully motivated interests are ready to move in on the old-fashioned world of rail retailing. It is a powerful challenge which everyone in the public transport sector – passengers' representatives included – will need to weigh up. Are we reaching the point where measures should be put in place to open up the rail retail market to specialists – as elsewhere

in the travel sector? We no longer buy our food direct from the farmer; would consumers benefit from the emergence of the travel retail equivalent of a supermarket?

At the very least, we need to ensure that there are no legislative obstacles. Regulation 2299/89 established a code of conduct for computerised reservation system in the air sector. With TAP-TSI, is there not a case for a similar code for rail? As with the air sector legislation, its purpose would be to ensure easy access to up-to-date and accurate information. Article 16 gave the Regulation teeth: it provided for a system of fines where undertaking intentionally or negligently supplied incorrect information. We need something similar for the TAP-TSI. As I said earlier, the main driver of passenger dissatisfaction is the inadequacy of information.

And so I have come full circle: we are back to the primacy of passenger satisfaction. It is surely the best measure of all the European initiatives. Without a concerted attempt to increase levels of satisfaction with ground based public transport in Europe – and it presently performs near the bottom of the Commission's league tables – we are not going to achieve the willing shift of passengers to more sustainable modes of travel. And without that, we may be doomed.

Listening to passengers, understanding what they want, and explaining to their representatives how feasibly to achieve an attractive, affordable and sustainable alternative to reliance on the private car is vital.

EPF is ready to work with the public transport industry to help it achieve these things – fostering partnership for smart mobility.

And we are determined to press our case, with the Commission, the Council, the EESC and the Parliament, as well as in our home territories. Passenger satisfaction is the key to success.