



Position Paper

Brussels, 23 September 2024

Sustainable Tourism

1. Introduction

97% of CO₂-emissions generated by an overnight stay at a hotel are caused by the arrival and departure of the guests¹. That shows that mobility is the key to sustainable tourism. Rail travel, with its lower carbon emissions compared to air and road transport, is the greenest way to travel longer distances. Trains emit significantly less CO₂ per passenger kilometre than cars and airplanes, making them a more attractive option for tourists who are conscious about their carbon footprint. By using electricity, the ecological impact can be reduced even further. For example, SNCF, Deutsche Bahn, ÖBB and SBB among others already operate with low carbon electricity in long-distance travel today. Lately, the focus of the railway sector has also been on building trains that are made with recycled and recyclable material, which allows for materials to be kept in use. This way, no part of the train becomes waste, and the circular economy cycle is fulfilled. Trenitalia has focused a lot on this aspect when planning investments in its renewed fleet.

The inherent nature of train infrastructure also promotes sustainability. Railways often connect urban centres directly, reducing the need for additional transportation and the resultant emissions. Moreover, trains can accommodate a larger number of passengers in a single trip compared to cars, thus reducing the overall number of trips required, the space used and the collective emissions.

Moreover, the rail experience itself encourages sustainable tourism and a form of travel where the journey can be as important as the destination. While high-speed services make travelling by train a fast mode of transport on many routes – including cross-border ones, travelling by rail allows travellers to engage with the landscape, fostering a greater appreciation for the natural and cultural environments through which they pass. A slower pace reduces the rush and consumption pattern of typical tourism, aligning with the principles of sustainability.

2. How Railway Undertakings can support the EU's sustainable tourism targets.

The European Commission defines sustainable tourism as tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. Sustainable tourism strives to achieve a balance between economic, social, and environmental aspects, aiming to minimize negative impacts on the environment and local communities while maximizing benefits for all stakeholders involved. This includes promoting responsible tourism practices, preserving cultural heritage, conserving natural resources, and supporting local economies. A Eurobarometer survey from October 2021² indicated that a large portion of Europeans (82%) are willing to change their travel habits for more sustainable practices, including amongst others, travelling off-season or to less visited destinations and choosing transport options based on their ecological impact. As according to UN Tourism, 75% of CO₂ emissions in tourism are traffic-related, the switch to environmentally friendly modes of transport is of particular importance.

In a 2022 report³ on Transition pathway for tourism, the European Commission identified key strategies and related targets of sustainable mobility:

¹www.responsiblehotels.ch

²<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2283>

³<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/404a8144-8892-11ec-8c40-01aa75ed71a1>

- Passenger transport companies (aviation, water and land transport) should reduce greenhouse gases (GHG) in line with the European climate law goals to become climate neutral by 2050.
- Cities and regions should develop sustainable mobility for climate-neutral cities, thanks also to the use of EU data space and applications, with sustainable mobility plans and by doubling the highspeed rail traffic by 2030, following the sustainable and smart mobility strategy and the EU mission 'Climate Neutral and Smart Cities'.
- Improving the appeal of railways for visitors.

The objectives that were set out in the European strategy for sustainable mobility in 2021 are very ambitious in terms of increasing the modal share in favour of the train. It seems clear that, alongside a considerable organisational effort on the part of companies, these objectives must also make use of regulatory intervention to create a true level playing field amongst modes of transport. In addition, complementary measures should be taken in the target destinations, and an improved data basis for tourist mobility should be established. High-speed, international and night trains are sustainable alternatives to flights.

Railway undertakings can significantly support the goals of sustainable tourism through various initiatives and practices. With the obvious solution of providing a sustainable mode of transportation for tourists, railway undertakings help alleviate the negative impacts of overtourism. Railway companies collaborate with local authorities, tourism agencies, and communities to promote sustainable tourism practices and raise awareness among tourists about the environmental benefits of rail travel and the importance of adopting sustainable behaviours during their journeys. Railway undertakings are also increasingly integrating rail services with public transport, buses, bicycles, and other sustainable transport modes, facilitating door-to-door journeys that are efficient, convenient, and environmentally friendly. Travelling by train is always appealing when local mobility in the destination area is easy and convenient. This means there needs to be a focus on improving local mobility and ensuring easy accessibility (mobility on a guest card or passes). Transport providers, tourism, and regional policymakers must work closely together, view mobility in the region from the guest's perspective, integrate it into communication, and optimize quality.

Best practices of Railway Undertakings that support Sustainable Tourism Railway Undertakings (RUs) can play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable tourism. The question of how to reach a tourist destination is an essential part of any tourism related customer journey. Unfortunately, currently sustainability plays only a subordinate role in the choice of means of transport. The choice to travel by train should therefore not just be an environmentally responsible one but also the most convenient, comfortable, attractively priced, time efficient and enjoyable option.

To achieve this, one should keep in mind the steps of the customer journey in tourism: Inspiration, Research and Planning, the actual Booking, Pre-trip Preparation and finally the Travel Experience itself. Successful and tourism-oriented RUs tend to target each of these elements as the following examples show.

1. Inspiration (Raise awareness of the advantages of rail travel)

Departure and arrival usually happen directly in the city centre, with no need for drab trips to and from airports located often deep in the periphery. Rail is the most climate-friendly mode of transport – alongside non-motorized transport – and is even 90 percent more climate-friendly than the electric car. Long distance trains often offer dining experiences

in their restaurant coach and, in case of night trains, sleeping accommodation that makes long distance travel more comfortable.

The advantages of rail travel are obvious but still too rarely communicated. RUs should outline their efforts in sustainability more as for example:

- SBB is currently highlighting its commitment to sustainability and pushing more than 200 sustainability measures with their “Time to be better. Time to get greener” campaign.
- Deutsche Bahn’s cooperation “Fahrtziel Natur” between the three major environmental associations Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland e.V. (BUND), Naturschutzbund Deutschland e.V. (NABU), Verkehrsclub Deutschland e.V. (VCD) and Deutsche Bahn (DB). Initiative encourages visitors to travel and discover various national parks and UNESCO heritage sites in an environmentally friendly way by using public transport.
- PKP Intercity passengers can compare the amount of carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere per kilometre of travel by one passenger by the PKP IC train versus other transport means. Moreover, after selecting a given train, the online system provides information on how much carbon dioxide a given train emits and compares it to a car or plane emissions on the selected route. This information can also be found on the online ticket.
- In the summer of 2023, FS Group launched a new business venture entirely dedicated to slow and sustainable tourism, Treni Turistici Italiani (TTI), which integrates Trenitalia’s tourist offer and gives passengers the chance to travel through scenic routes while enjoying a number of high-quality on-board services. TTI has a complete tourist vocation and is aimed at offering travel packages with the train at the centre of the concept.
- ÖBB has launched various campaigns together with tourist regions like Salzburger Land or Wien Tourismus.
- Transilien (SNCF Voyageurs) launched an application called “c’est pas loin en train” (it is not far by train), to promote local tourism in Paris surroundings. The application lists the touristic attractions and provide the itinerary to reach them by train.
- MÁV-START works together with the major summer festival organizers to ensure a greener and safer travel to and from the festivals. The co-operations include: TravelPass (a 7-day ticket that can be used in the Balaton touristic region), that the trains operate with bigger capacity and the timetable is adjusted accordingly, especially at night with the “Bagolyvonat” services.
- Renfe offers a suburban service in Madrid region that runs across Guadarrama National Park. The so-called “Tren de la Naturaleza” is an electric train offering a renowned environmental educational program that promotes both natural and cultural values and get travellers closer to the heritage of the municipalities that are part of the Park.
- Deutsche Bahn, as a National Partner of UEFA EURO 2024™, has collaborated with UEFA to make the Interrail Pass EURO 2024 (managed by Eurail) available to match ticket holders only, offering a sustainable way to travel by train to and from UEFA EURO 2024™. With this Pass, football fans were able to travel by train to and from Germany to support their national team.

- DSB cooperates with the Danish Climate Forest Fund⁴, For the years 2022 and 2023, DSB has given over 3.5 million DKK for planting new forest along train lines across the country.
- UIC has developed a user-friendly online tool called [EcoPassenger](#)⁵, based on a sound scientific methodology, that provides a calculator for comparing the energy consumption, CO2 emissions, and exhaust atmospheric emissions of planes, cars, and trains for passenger transport.

Train journeys often are an experience in themselves. Many countries offer epic train journeys through spectacular scenery such as SBBs Gotthard Panorama Express and some of them even classify as UNESCO World heritage sites such as the Albula/Bernina line in Switzerland or the line running through Hortobagy National Park in Hungary or the Semmering railway in Austria.

2. Planning

Also in this phase, more communication is needed. RUs are doing a lot to allow for ecologically friendly and comfortable travel experiences. For example by offering seasonal direct trains to lake or seaside destinations, e.g. Lake Balaton in Hungary, or direct connections that take skiers to the mountains like the Verbier Express by SBB between Geneva and Verbier or the direct ICE trains from Germany to Arlberg, Zell am See and Kitzbühel in the Austrian alps. Also, tourists have to be made aware of services such as luggage transport that make the travel experience even more comfortable. Information about the availability of subsequent local mobility options can at this stage also be very valuable for the traveller. In an effort to support more conscious travel choices, Eurail has developed and made available to its community many travel itineraries focussing on less-travelled route and low-season travel, as well as ad-hoc blogs and social content with tips and tricks to shop more sustainably or reduce food waste while travelling.

Prices for train tickets need to be attractive. However with regard to low cost airline carriers, this is not easily achieved as long as air travel enjoys hidden subsidies such as VAT exemptions or no taxes on kerosene. One solution for rail would be to offer attractive rail passes that allow unlimited travel within a certain period or area and make them known to a broad audience. There is the Interrail Pass, which allows travellers to explore 33 European countries with one ticket. In 2023 alone, one million tickets were sold. For tourists from outside Europe, the equivalent Eurail Pass is available.

Key to attracting more travellers is having a better track record with regard to punctuality and reliability. Expanding and maintaining rail networks to ensure attractive connectivity to a range of destinations, including less-visited locations that could benefit from tourism is a necessity.

3. Booking and pre trip preparation

The booking process must be made as easy as possible. Major improvements in that field will come with the ongoing implementation of the CER Ticketing Roadmap. Tourists should also be given the possibility of combined tickets where the train ticket is sold together with

⁴[Welcome to the Danish Climate Forest Fund \(klimaskovfonden.dk\)](https://www.klimaskovfonden.dk/)

⁵At the time of publishing this position paper, it has already been successfully implemented by Trenitalia.

for example an event, or a hotel booking and other ancillary services. Destination or Hotel booking pages shall advertise the advantages of rail travel and should be supplied with a timetable widget so that tourists can easily check (and ideally book) their connection to the destination.

The extension of ticketing systems that work across multiple modes of transportation, as foreseen by the CER Ticketing Roadmap, will also increase the attractiveness of rail versus other modes of transport.

Prior to the actual trip it is important to keep travellers up to date with regard to eventual timetable changes and the like.

4. Travel experience

To ensure a positive travel experience investment in new rolling stock and high standards with regard to cleanliness, safety and punctuality is key. Train travel is often safer than other forms of transportation, which means it can offer a more reliable option for tourists compared to the private car or travelling by coach. But due to the seasonality of tourism and the growing demand for rail tourism, there is a lot of pressure on railway operators and bottlenecks are likely. Although rail operators are investing heavily in digital developments that can help tourists plan, book and manage their journeys, tourists often want personal assistance.

Seasonality is one of the most important features of tourism demand. One of the ways to cope with this growing demand is to provide more railway staff at the places that tourists prefer. The main role of these staff is to assist and navigate tourists before, during and after their journey. Unfortunately, railway operators do not have enough trained staff to deal with the seasonal nature of tourism. To ease this difficulty, railway undertakings introduced a system from which tourists, the railway company and students can all benefit. For example MÁV-START and PKP Intercity S.A. employs students at times when there may be bottlenecks. Students can work on board, at the railway stations and positions related to customer service support, mobile information service, etc.. The majority of the positions are available (mainly) during the peak summer season and during periods of temporary capacity restrictions.

On the flip side, in an effort to "deseasonalize" tourist flows, Eurail's Summer 2024 campaign «Summer is a mindset » aimed to inspire travellers to experience the magic of a European Summer in the off-season. The promotion entailed a 20% discount on all Eurail Global Passes and selected One Country Passes, valid for traveling from September onwards. Thanks to this initiative, almost 1 in 2 surveyed customers declared to have shifted their travel plans from high-season to off-season because of this promotion.

Informing our passengers is key to ensure customer satisfaction. That applies even more to tourism, with people travelling on trains that are not as familiar with country-specific railway systems as commuters for example. Therefore, railway undertakings across Europe implement extensive measures for comprehensive customer information before, during, and after the journey through e.g. digital channels, screens at stations, on-site advisors.

3. Recommendations for RUs

By adopting these best practices, Railway Undertakings can not only improve their sustainability credentials but also significantly contribute to the development of sustainable tourism. These efforts require commitment and investment but offer

substantial benefits in terms of environmental conservation, social responsibility, and economic viability in the long term.

In summary CER recommends RUs to:

- Exchange best practices with other railways and collaborate
- Raise awareness on convenience, comfort, overall time efficiency and attractive prices of rail travel outside of the rail (user) community – more budget for marketing
- Cooperate with regional and local communities to offer special fairs to the tourist sites for the visitors coming by public transport.
- Simplify booking process – implement CER Ticketing Roadmap
- Communicate the availability of local mobility options (e.g. the mobility offered on guest cards that many regions provide)
- Cooperate with tourist destinations/hotels to support digital applications and to form packages where rail tickets and/or information are combined with tourist activities (skiing, museum, hotel etc). ideally with a financial discount.
- Provide solutions for luggage
- Do regular customer surveys to check for tourist needs and satisfaction
- Reach tourist destinations without having to change trains (direct trains)
- Have traveller friendly stations that cater to travellers specific needs like luggage storage, toilets, food, etc
- Have family friendly offers and spaces on the train
- Have attractive group travel options
- Be able to deal with seasonality of tourism

4. Policy Recommendations

As previously mentioned, railway undertakings have the potential to substantially contribute to the objectives of sustainable tourism through a range of initiatives and actions. To amplify their impact, railway undertakings could enhance the implementation of new services in the realm of sustainable tourism. However, it is not all in the hands of the RUs. To this end, we have compiled a series of policy recommendations aimed at improving the current situation.

4.1. Level playing field

Creating an equitable framework for intermodal competition should be a priority for rail in general. Night trains specifically should become more economically feasible to be competitive vis à vis air travel on long distances. In contrast to the track access charges imposed on rail operators across Europe, numerous Member States either do not impose tolls on road transportation or apply charges solely to certain vehicle types and sections of the road network. To compete against this system, in the short term, we need grants and incentives and in the long term a pricing policy that makes rail more affordable and road use more expensive.

- Policy measures for the abolition of VAT on international train tickets in all Member States (as is already the case for international plane tickets) and equal treatment in energy taxation should be implemented. Standards for international rail ticketing

distribution should be put on equal footing with aviation by allowing the sector to use its own established standards.

- It is also essential to fully internalize environmental externalities with a smarter approach on pricing that is based on the 'user-pays' and the 'polluter-pays' principles. The outcome will help cleaner transport modes such as rail to compete with others, thus contributing to a shift from air to rail for up to 800 km in Europe.

4.2. Infrastructure

Sustainable mobility and leisure activities that are widely utilized by citizens, are usually also largely favoured by tourists. Investments in communal infrastructure, for leisure and mobility, will ensure use all year around and reduce dependency of tourist ecosystems on travellers from abroad. Europe needs better rail connections to tourist destinations, improving on-site sustainable mobility and development of multimodal transit hubs.

- Railways need fair, long-term, comprehensive financing and Multiannual Contracts with Member States must be drawn up and applied correctly. To meet the huge infrastructure investment needs of the sector, rail will need a bigger CEF budget line in a scaled-up MFF.
- There should be a European Master Plan for Connecting European capitals and major urban nodes through high-speed rail services as an outstanding tool for railways to better compete with short-haul flights.
- Next to international connections, well-functioning regional and local public transport systems are of central importance. Thus, public investment must be injected into the revitalization and restoration of existing local and regional rail infrastructure.

4.3. Night Trains

Night trains represent an eco-conscious option for travel within Europe. The European Union should enact supportive measures for this environmentally friendly mode of transport to foster the development of a robust European night train network. Using public funds for night train service can be a way to offer less expensive night train connections and encourage more people to use climate-friendly travel options.

- Enabling and encouraging cross-border PSO and/or cooperation to help the promotion of night trains. Although the European Union's PSO regulation (1370/2007) allows public contracting entities to treat cross-border train connections as PSOs, the option is not often used. Regulation 1370/2007 could be amended to expressly permit public service contracts for new night train connections.
- Consistent EU-wide introduction of a dedicated and cheaper Track Access Charges segment for night trains, especially in combination with a waiver of mark-ups, would be an element in favour of night train development. Finding a way to reduce Track Access Charges that are revenue neutral for infrastructure managers would encourage international services in general.
- Railway undertakings can face financial difficulties in acquiring passenger rolling stock for night trains. To remedy this, the Commission should propose supporting financial means for internationally deployable night train rolling stock and the Railway State Aid Guidelines' rules for the financing of rail rolling stock should make it easier for Member States to support rail transport, by providing clearer and more flexible provisions on funding for the purchase, renewal and retrofitting of rolling stock. While CER fully supports the aims of the EIB Green Rail Investment Platform, such instruments are not always sufficient.

4.4. Ticketing

CER members realise that, while national journeys are easily arranged, booking a train ticket for an international journey today, for business or leisure, can leave much to be desired, which is why CER committed to improving ticketing in 2021 in the CER Ticketing Roadmap. We appreciate any support that the Commission can provide to help us implement it.

- The CER Ticketing Roadmap aims to achieve seamless international rail ticketing experience. On the European level the CIT Agreement on Journey Continuation (AJC) should be recognised as the solution for journey continuation, while OSDM should be laid down in the respective Technical Specifications for Interoperability and become the EU wide rail ticketing standard for both the sector and regulators to simplify distribution and make it more cost effective.
- Stronger focus is needed for incentivising behaviour change. With the CountEmissionsEU Regulation, the Commission has proposed a common methodological approach for companies to calculate their GHG emissions. Informing passengers on the climate impact should be integrated in travel booking sites to prioritise sustainable transport modes.
- In order to boost rail attractiveness, the sale of tickets in combination with events, hotels and other ancillary services by operators shall be encouraged. To this end, it is important to strike a balance between customers' protection and operator's liability, ensuring that European legislation takes into account the reality of combining different travel services and avoids placing unnecessary burdens on operators.

4.5. Research to identify barriers to develop sustainable travel mobility

Identify barriers to develop sustainable travel mobility. Currently, in the EU (and in Switzerland), tourist mobility of both domestic and international travellers is not being tracked and therefore the database is currently very limited or non-existent. The absence of data on tourist mobility across all modes of transportation hampers the planning and evaluation of transportation services. Closing this knowledge gap is crucial for identifying measures that can contribute to modal shift. If such data were available down to the level of tourism regions, it could serve as a foundation for assessing the success of measures aimed at shifting towards environmentally friendly modes of transportation (bus, train, bicycle, walking). It is also essential to identify best practices for improving collaboration between the tourism and mobility sectors.

About CER

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) brings together railway undertakings, their national associations as well as infrastructure managers and vehicle leasing companies. The membership is made up of long-established bodies, new entrants and both private and public enterprises, representing 78% of the rail network length, 81% of the rail freight business and about 94% of rail passenger operations in EU, EFTA and EU accession countries. CER represents the interests of its members towards EU policy makers and transport stakeholders, advocating rail as the backbone of a competitive and sustainable transport system in Europe. For more information, visit www.cer.be or follow us on Twitter [@CER_railways](https://twitter.com/CER_railways) or [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cer).

This CER document is for public information.

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this document, CER cannot be held responsible for any information from external sources, technical inaccuracies, typographical errors or other errors herein. Information and links may have changed without notice.