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European Commission
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Zurich, 26 April 2016

Open letter on the retention of night trains

Dear Commissioner Bulc,

In recent years, more and more European overnight rail services have been abolished. Deutsche Bahn (DB) was the latest company to announce bad news – on 16 December, its Supervisory Board decided to abolish night train services and replace them with night-time ICES. This change has a great impact on travellers from Switzerland, as it affects services to Berlin, Hannover/Hamburg, Dresden/Prague and Cologne/Amsterdam. This means that Swiss passengers will no longer be able to travel to far-away destinations in a sustainable way. The same applies to people travelling to destinations in Switzerland.

At the beginning of 2015, Swiss transport organisations launched a petition against the abolition of night trains. Within six months, it was signed by more than 11,000 people. This petition was submitted to the Swiss Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC). Unfortunately, to no effect so far.

By writing this letter, we, eight organisations with 300,000 members, are expressing our failure to comprehend DB's decision and are calling for your support in retaining overnight rail services. These services must on no account be discontinued.

At the Paris Climate Summit, 196 countries, including Germany, committed themselves to reducing their carbon emissions. Transport accounts for 20% of Europe's overall carbon emissions. This means that transport offers a significant reduction potential. It is all the more important that environmentally friendly travel options should be increased, not decreased. It is up to the European Union to play an active part in achieving this goal.

A survey by umverkehR shows that passengers who can no longer use night trains will fly instead and not, as hoped, use faster day-time rail services. The disappearance of night trains would therefore entail a further increase in air travel. This, in turn, would lead to an increase in carbon emissions. Long-distance bus services are also booming and represent significant competition for rail links.

The decision to abolish overnight rail services also has an influence on anyone who wants to travel in an environmentally-friendly manner. Night trains are a proven, efficient and frequently used means of transporting bicycles across Europe. On many routes, they are the only remaining option for passengers with bikes.

Rather than abolishing overnight rail services, they should be made more attractive. Existing demand would thus be increased. Many people don't have a viable alternative to night trains. With night trains, they can travel while they sleep, therefore saving valuable time. This means that meetings can be held in the mornings, while at the same time saving carbon emissions.

However, this is also about making rail travel more attractive in general and it is also about freedom of choice. Overnight rail services form a fundamental part of the rail provision. umverkehR, Pro Bahn, VCS, SEV, Pro Velo, Fussverkehr Schweiz (Pedestrian Mobility Switzerland), Greenpeace Switzerland and IGöV therefore regret the abolition of night trains and the associated travel options they provide.

We ask the European Commission of Transport to support the retention of overnight rail services. We also call for a level playing field between rail and tax-privileged air carriers. In particular, we ask you to support our aspirations for the Europe-wide and worldwide introduction of a carbon tax on kerosene.

Best wishes



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