

# From the night train conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, which took place the 10.9. 2020

*The conference was about the experiences with night trains in other countries and the reasons for expanding the current network of night trains to also include Denmark.*

*These short notes have been prepared by Jacob Thommesen and Poul Kattler and are not an attempt to make an actual report. For all the details, we refer to <https://baeredygtigtrafik.dk/nattogs-konference-i-koebenhavn/> where there is a video of all presentations and where all the presentations on pdf can be seen.*

## THEME A

### **Night train in other countries**

Night trains can run at night, in `peace` for the daily trains:

- Passengers can `sleep all the way`
- There is better `space` on the rails - but perhaps in competition with freight trains
- May risk bumping into the morning rush hour at important railway stations
- Is a complicated product and is not easy to get profitable
- The concept of night trains fits with a desire for *direct connections*, ie, few stops during the journey, a peaceful night, no worry about losing connections

The conference began with various initiatives to bring travelers via night trains through Europe.

The Swedish SJ told about the plans for an upcoming night train through and co-financed by Denmark, and Austrian Railways about plans for future night trains in Europe, after which two private and commercial operators told about their plans and their perspective as private operators.

### **From Sweden via Denmark to Brussels and onwards The**

Snalltoget: The purchase of night trains, such as the Swedish-Danish to Brussels, is not offered in a free tender at this time, and politicians risk paying too much. The urgency of course has something to do with the forthcoming Swedish election, one would like to be able to present concrete environmental results.

### **The transport policy environment in Scandinavia and in Europe:**

- Can Denmark, Sweden and Norway join forces in a **pool of new night train carriages**, so that it becomes easier to secure new lines with carriages of the quality that Scandinavians can wish for? The Swedish Transport Administration has proposed it (political test balloon), and it naturally requires Nordic political cooperation, also preferably European cooperation.

## **Austrian Railways invests heavily in night trains**

Austrian railways are again investing in night trains to several destinations

- Different carriages with different comfort categories, the new carriages will for example accommodate couchette compartments for families (four people) and the new 1-person economy room, which ÖBB looks forward to offer.
- ÖBB pays attention to different privacy requirements, but generally higher privacy requirements are observed.
- Austria is geographically `in the middle of it all`, and has a solid domestic market.

## **Private / commercial operators**

There are also plans for private initiatives for international trains across borders in the EU. They have a different perspective than the state railways.

Private / commercial operators such as Snälltåget criticize state operating aid. Snälltåget points out large costs in connection with operations to cross national borders:

- signal systems
- Language
- Safety regulation
- Access to tracks
  - Snälltåget highlighted Denmark as expensive when, for example, the Great Belt has to be crossed 😬. The Baltic Sea ferry from Trelleborg - Sassnitz was cheaper, but has stopped, so they will run through Denmark. But also travelers from Copenhagen are of course interesting.
- Working time rules, especially for night trains
- Infrastructure charges for night trains should be reduced to an absolute minimum for maintenance.

ÖBB: We should not focus on this `fight` between state and commercial operators, but on the common interest: to create a better balance (`level playing field`) between aviation and rail.

- The low air fares are actually based on covert state aid, primarily through tax exemptions on fuels and VAT exemption.

## **How to ensure a fair division between different operators?**

Maybe it is unfair to leave (secure) profits to private actors? They can thus "skim the cream". But the market is large - just look at the many airline routes...

An "incumbent" operator (the name for the old, large operators) will typically secure a line, preferably every day throughout the year, while a commercial operator will probably focus on days and holiday periods with a good customer base, and not interested in the low season.

Both incumbent and private do market research and ensure that there is demand for their products.

- As a user, you just want the connections to be there and `available`
- ALLRAIL (the association of private operators):“ In the absence of competition on the national network, railway undertakings had no / not enough incentives to reduce their operating costs and develop new services ”

### **What lies ahead that will create clarification and knowledge?**

- Snälltåget will start running night trains to both Austria (winter 2021) and to Berlin via Denmark (from March 2021), and soon they will have considered whether they will receive state money to set up an all-year service Stockholm-Hamburg-Berlin.

The tender for the Brussels night train will soon be ready and in place, which will certainly mean a lot for the choices that ÖBB / Nightjet will make about driving to / from Copenhagen.

- How is the relationship between seasonal trains intended for travel agencies and families on ski trips and summer trips to the Alps and northern Italy - and the regular night trains that run every night for the benefit of big city tourists and business travelers? What different comfort requirements will travelers have for these trains?

The EU is also launching initiatives for pools of rolling stock that are interoperable across the EU and that can be made available for purchase / rental / leasing to operators. We will soon see if it can lead to anything - will be highlighted at the Back-on-Track webinar 16.10.

- ALLRAIL will reasonably ensure private access to various pools of `Rolling Stock`, e.g. purchase or lease in order to help the sector grow.

Today, there is not the same opportunity for this as, for example, is by buses and planes.

National railway companies should rent inactive secondhand night train equipment and / or put it up for sale to allow a market to grow.

### **Is the political will really present?**

What potential do politicians see in letting trains start replacing planes? Is there a political will to save CO2 by backing up night trains in a volume that really matters?

ALLRAIL: The Single European Rail Market must be based on competition. The aviation industry would never have been so successful if it had only been run by state-owned companies.

ALLRAIL highlighted success in Italy, where private operators have caused prices to fall and many more to take the train.

## THEME B

### **Night trains through Denmark**

*The framework and preconditions for the reintroduction of night trains on the Danish railway lines*

DSB and Banedanmark told about their perspective on the Swedish plans for night trains through Denmark to Brussels.

DSB is very positive about entering into collaborations on night trains. Reference was made to an already known note from the month of May. But as such, nothing new was revealed.

<https://baeredygtigtrafik.dk/optimal-night-train-routes-from-copenhagen-odense-kolding-southbound/>

Where near to Copenhagen should night trains from Sweden stop?

- Kastrup?
  - Only two tracks to the platform (yet)
  - Not much time to stop, and night trains require more time to board than other trains
- Ny Ellebjerg?
  - Trains from the airport can not stop here, because there is simply no platform! SJ was not aware of that ...
- Central Station?
  - Busy and heavily loaded, requires circulation of the locomotive or an extra locomotive is needed
- Høje Taastrup?
  - Several tracks and a relatively good hub for parking, buses and trains

There is only one track just north of the border with Germany

- It will take several years to get the short distance from Tinglev to Padborg built. It will hardly be completed before the Fehmarn connection
- The Fehmarn connection will be very attractive also for night trains that can reach approx. two hours longer in one night and reach destinations in northern Italy, Paris, etc. Equally good for both goods and passengers from Sweden.
- And by that time, the new investment in Southern Jutland might be less relevant?
- The Fehmarnbelt connection may continue to take a long time with ongoing German complaints and nature concerns, but is expected to be ready in 2029.

International trains have just slipped out of focus for European infrastructure operators. European co-operation on freight train corridors can inspire co-operation on international trains and night trains. For one lacks some structures to work under to promote international passenger trains and night trains.

## THEME C

### **Charter travel by night trains**

*What measures are needed if travelers and the charter industry are to make use of night trains as an alternative to passenger transport by air?*

Spies tried to arrange a journey by train last summer (at very short notice):

- Too many shifts: too cumbersome to lug suitcases from one train to the next (there was track work via Fehmarn)
- Only two registered - had to cancel - it was perhaps a media stunt?

Spies have very much experience with what guests want:

- Service from door to door, it should almost be like to be taken by the hand through the entire holiday experience
- changing trains and baggage handling is a huge challenge (just think if luggage could be checked in?)
- Would like to see tourist season trains (direct train for family audiences) be reintroduced

RUBY is a special travel agency for active travelers, a segment that wants to travel green.

RUBY thinks the time is right to switch from plane to train, but perhaps without making a big deal out of it.

- Would like to be able to book a year in advance - not possible today with NightJet night
- Would like to be able to switch between comfort classes; when travelers choose differently than pre-booked
- Can very well use Interrail as a ticket, an extra advantage if there are seniors among the travelers
- Have both individual travelers and group travel who can all find the train relevant

The travel agencies have difficulty establishing reservation and purchase conditions that are similar to what they can achieve with airlines. Not at least reservations in better time than now. There is a great need to talk together so that products and terms fit the industry better than now.

## TOPIC C

### **Can trains and planes coexist?**

Air France / KLM replied:

Yes, short-haul airlines do not necessarily make money to the industry and European airspace is very full. Then passengers can take the train to the airline's HUB, it will be an advantage. The night trains, on the other hand, are more of a direct competitor with typical flight routes.

KLM has been able to feel the green wave and has marketed itself as more green than other airlines. There seems to be nothing to suggest that they are; in any case, in the Netherlands they have lost a case against them for false marketing.