

## AGE SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE RIGHTS OF INTERNATIONAL RAIL PASSENGERS 22 November 2002

On behalf of AGE, I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to share a few thoughts on what could be done to better protect the rights of international rail passengers. AGE – the European Older People's Platform groups more than 100 organisations of older people or working for older people at European, national and local level.

AGE welcomes the Commission's proposal to adopt a regulation on rail passengers rights and obligations and its initiative to encourage the development of voluntary service quality commitments by railway undertakings.

Because older people compose a significant percentage of captive passengers, they feel particularly concerned by all aspects of rail services, quality, safety, security, accessibility for people with reduced mobility, etc.

AGE agrees that international rail services should be considered as services of general economic interest given the important role they fulfill in meeting the mobility needs of groups of people who have no other means of transport.

We feel that a EU regulation on rail passengers rights and obligations would help promote mobility, not only of older or captive passengers, but of the population at large. There is a obvious need to harmonise passengers's access to information, measures related to safety and security, measures related to accessibility of people with reduced mobility, measures targeted at people with special needs in case of delay, etc. The lack of coherence between existing national legislations on rail services constitutes a barrier to free movement of older people.

AGE supports the Commission's proposal to set up a EU monitoring scheme whose role will be to monitor passengers' feedback on services, to handle complaints and to promote quality standard.

As representatives of older users, AGE would like to insist on the importance of taking the needs of people with reduced mobility seriously, not only in terms of accessibility of rolling stock, but as a mainstreamed issue: The needs of People with reduced mobility should be taken on board in the design of railway stations as well as in all services. For example, contingency plans should be designed to provide the necessary support to people with special needs in case of major service disruptions. Luggage services should be reimplemented for people with reduced mobility, including families travelling with young children. Legislation is needed to improve intermodality between rail and other modes of transport, otherwise older people and people with reduced mobility will still not be able to travel by rail if they are faced with barriers when stepping down from the train.

On the issue of complaint handling, we believe that a co-ordinated one stop shop would improve passengers's ability to report problems tremendously. Consumer organisations or citizens groups should be entitled to file and monitor complaints handling if a passenger wishes so.

Finally we agree that the scope of the proposed regulation should not be limited to international services only but should also apply to national services as domestic services can be part of an international journey and minimum standards should apply to protect passengers's rights.

AGE would be interested in submitting more detailed responses to the specific questions listed in the consultation paper, should the Commission wish so.