

ROVER Presentation

Good afternoon. My name is Rian van der Borgt and I'm representing ROVER, the public transport passengers' organisations in the Netherlands. I'm a member of the international committee of ROVER.

As time is short, I will mention in this presentation, what we find the most important issues concerning international passengers' rights and what we find is missing in the Commission's proposal.

General provisions

A year ago, at the hearing on 15 October 2001, I mentioned that railway companies generally don't consult consumers organisations when they change the timetables, the fares or the conditions of carriage of international services. In the Netherlands, consultation is obligatory for domestic services, but railways can pretty much do what they want with international services without having to justify their actions, as ROVER often finds out. That's why consultation should be regulated.

And railways should publish certain performance indicators themselves, for instance punctuality, the percentage of missed connections, and the percentage of cancelled trains. These service indicators should be presented in the same way throughout Europe, so that they can be compared. Today, these indicators are either not available at all, or they can't be compared because every railway company or country has its own standards.

Passenger rights before the journey

Getting information is often a problem. The biggest cause for this are the railways themselves: every year, more and more fare types and conditions are introduced and consequently, it becomes increasingly more difficult for a ticket clerk (let alone for the normal passenger) to oversee what's available and choose the right ticket, especially if a journey involves several changes. The railways would do themselves and the passengers a favour if they would cooperate and streamline the big forest of fares and conditions.

For timetable information, railways should also cooperate more. They all want to develop their own system, but as a consequence, no system is even close to being perfect or good. The best system, which most people say is the German HAFAS system, still has a lot to be desired and little improvement has been seen in the last few years, with respect to international travel. With today's technology, it can't be **that** difficult to develop a timetable system that contains all trains in Europe and information about those trains. In such a system, each participating railway should maintain its own data and also add temporary changes due to engineering works, including replacement services.

Announcements for temporary timetable changes are often still made only locally. It can still happen that you plan your journey carefully, but that you encounter temporary timetable changes that were only announced locally, and that may have affected your planning if you had known them before

(especially for PRM's). This should be avoided. Railways should make every effort to make such changes known to the public.

Service quality

A remark about intermodality: as has been mentioned before, it should be possible to buy through tickets even if you have to connect between two railway stations using another means of transport such as the metro. This eliminates the need to buy a new ticket for the connection and, more importantly, the whole trip will be considered as one journey and not as two separate ones, which is important in case of delays and missed connections.

Passenger rights after the journey

In the draft contract conditions of the CIT and now also in the Commission's proposals, I read that consequential damages will be limited to those cases where the railway is responsible. This is more than today but this will still leave passengers stranded in the middle of the night when something goes wrong, which is not the railway's fault. In our opinion, passengers should never be left stranded; a hotel or a taxi (whichever is more convenient) should be provided. Moreover, the railway staff shouldn't be left to decide on the spot if a delay was the railway's responsibility or not, and if a passenger should therefore get a taxi ride or hotel room, as this is often not easy to determine.

Something that is clearly missing, is a refund after non-delivery. This can happen when there's a strike (or a hurricane) or when the continuation of the journey doesn't make any more sense after having missed a connection. In these cases, the ticket price should be refunded entirely.

Passenger obligations

In principle, every passenger should indeed have a ticket. This is, however, not always as easy as it may seem. A station may have no ticket window or working ticket machine or at the ticket window, it may prove impossible to issue a ticket to the wanted destination or via the wanted route. Or it may have been impossible to obtain a certain reduction. In these cases, a normal ticket should be sold on the train, without any surcharge.

These were our most important issues. Thank you for listening.