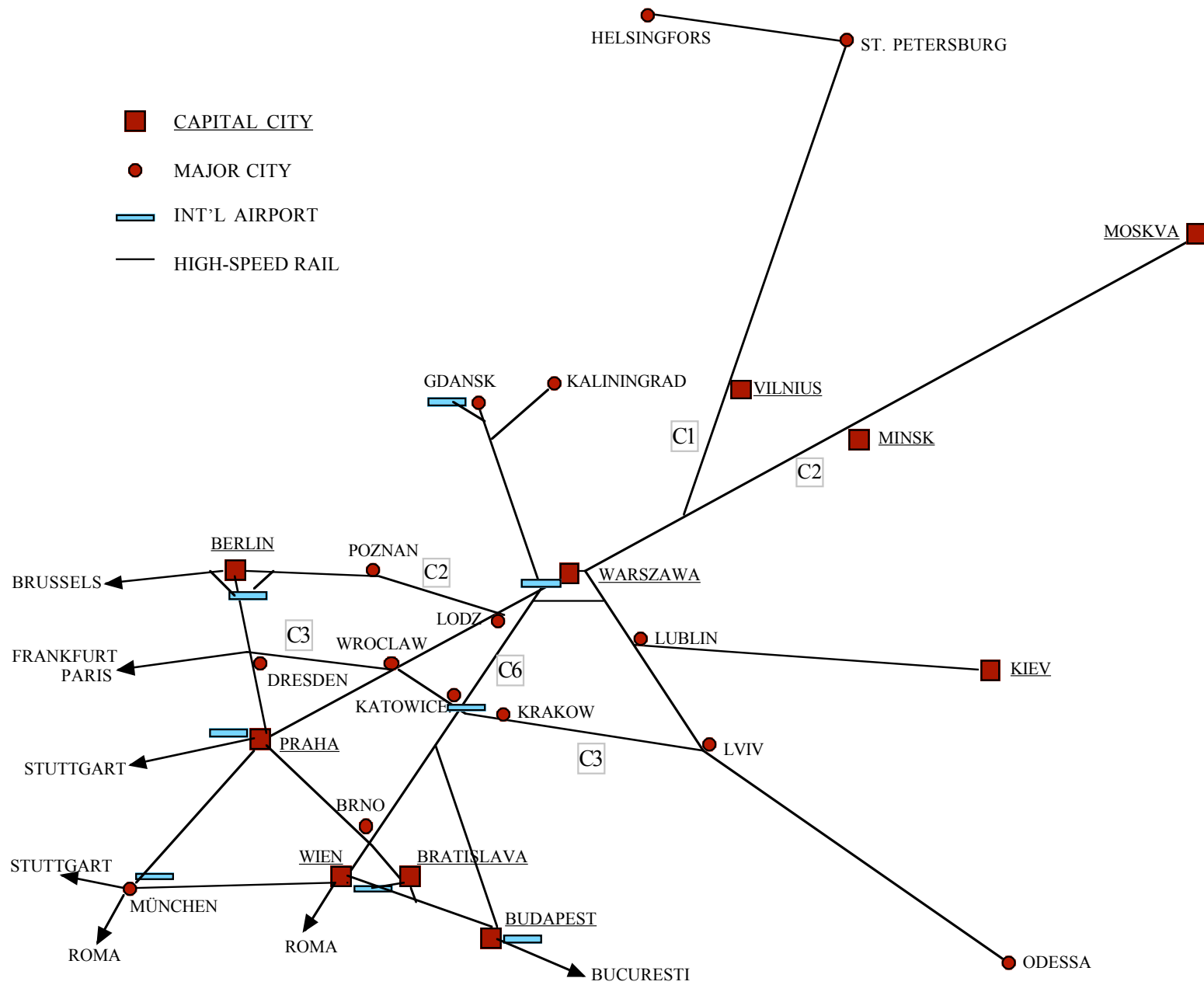


# AIR-RAIL INTEGRATION IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE



## **Why that vacuum in the middle of Europe?**

### **An integrative project**

#### *Abstract*

*In accordance with EU priorities (Rail over Road), the current TEN-T projects are aimed at covering Western Europe with high-speed railways. In contrast, the area beyond Berlin presents itself as a vacuum, because the two lines crossing the European plains, E20 (C2) and E30 (C3), are envisaged for 160 km/h only. The other eastward Rail Projects (6. 17, 22) bypass the European plains (i.e., Poland). The lack of initiative on the Polish part should not discourage EU planners from considering the advantages of the flatlands of Poland—a country expected to reach the present GNP level of Western Europe by 2030. Therefore, the time seems ripe for planning in Eastern Europe high-speed lines. Like in the West, these lines should be integrated with the major airports of the area. The ultimate aim is to secure all-round complementarity of Road, Rail and Air, also in the East.*

### **How to connect better the major Trans-European transport axes to the neighbouring countries and regions?**

The integration of the 25 member countries is a formidable task, laid out for at least one generation (30 years). cursory stock taking indicates that under the current TEN-T extension programme, the all-too-obvious vacuum in the geographic centre of Europe will persist even after 2020, or the year of the most advanced planning to date. Indeed, the current growth of the West European network will *make the contrast even more glaring*—as evident from all available maps of ongoing and oncoming projects.

The fact is that somewhere along the river Elbe, in any case just beyond Berlin, *runs a dividing line* between the bulging transport network of the West and the rickety network of the East.

This divide is reflected in the West-centredness of EU planning, as demonstrated in the official terminology of the EU, where, for instance, the fourth French LGV Paris to Strasbourg is designated "High-speed railway axis east". The "axis", in fact, reaches as far *east* as ... Mannheim, or a couple of miles beyond the river Rhine, and as such is a showcase of France-centred thinking. How deeply entrenched this mentality is, shows a slip of the tongue gleaned from a 2002-document, the TEN-Invest Final Report by PLANCO, covering the period 1996-2010, where on p. 38 we read: "The extension of a European high-speed network will continue, e.g. in Germany the link from Cologne to Frankfurt will become operational as a high-speed line and **in Central Europe** the connection between Paris via Brussels to Cologne and Amsterdam will be partially operational." [*our bold print*]. True enough, for core-Europeans, Central Europe extends precisely from Paris to Cologne!

## Where are the *neighbouring countries and regions* of EU-25?

The formidable task that underlies the title-question of the present public consultation has its roots in the inherent human drive to expand and transgress all past achievements, in other words, in the irresistible urge to test the limits of the feasible. As much as the founder members of the European Community strove to embrace all the regions of western Europe, from the polar circle to Sicily, and then immediately grasped the opportunity to extend the EU to the eastern states that had freed themselves from the grip of the morbid Soviet empire, so will the EU-25 seek to widen its sphere of influence to the rest of Europe, and beyond.

The further expansion of the EU cannot be accomplished, however, without *integrating the newly acquired territory*, particularly in terms of transport. Like an army that must consolidate its territorial gains, the affluent Western countries must shore up their new possessions and lay firm tracks for their future advances in eastern and south-eastern Europe. Leaving a vacuum anywhere behind the front lines, would spell disaster.

Assuming the obvious: that the term *neighbouring countries and regions* embraces the remaining territories of Europe, beyond the present borders of the Union, we must first look at what lies between the "old" EU and those borders, that is, at Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and the three Baltic states.

In particular, we are curious to see *what the EU is planning* in the way of better road and rail links to the (true) East, in the period covered by the *Trans-European Transport Network: Revised proposals on guidelines and financial rules 2004*, that is, up to 2020.

Of the new EU acquisitions, Poland makes up about 50 per cent, in terms of territory as well as in population. Geographically, the relative importance of this territory is greater than that, because Poland lies between the three Baltic states and the West. Also, much of the traffic along the eastern fringe of the EU, from Scandinavia to Austria and the Balkans, passes through Poland.

Can we expect the present pan-European corridors that cross Poland to *do the job*? These are: longitudinally, C1 and C4, converging into rail Project No 23, and C6 as motorway Project No 25, and latitudinally, C2 and C3 (no projects).

Admittedly, there is more *in the pipeline* [though marked *informal usage* in dictionaries, this happens to be the favoured English term of EU transport experts], but only *around*, not *through* Poland: Rail Project No 6 from Lyon via Trieste to Budapest and on, to the Ukrainian border, Rail Project No 17 from Paris via Stuttgart to Wien and Bratislava, and Rail Project No 22 Dresden - Praha - Wien - Budapest - Sofia - Athina. Incidentally, the 2004 revision of TEN-T projects has changed nothing in those plans.

The convergence of the three rail projects upon Budapest, from where No 6 progresses towards the Ukraine, suggests that Europe may be better served by *railway lines that cross mountains and hilly territory* than by those that run straight through the European plains (which extend, as we know from school manuals, from the Atlantic to the Urals).

**The conclusion** is that, in the face of a visible passivity of the Polish contributors and stakeholders, **alternative routes have been sought and found, by which Poland can be effectively bypassed on the way to the East.**

No matter how dubious the rationale behind this strategy might be, there is obviously not enough strength behind the common-sense truth that *straight routes mapped across flat* (and relatively less urbanized) country are to be preferred to circuitous ones running over viaducts and through tunnels.

### **How is it that intermodality does not embrace air transport?**

Whereas the term *intermodality* is current in the EU Transport business, nowhere amongst the 29 TEN-T projects do we come upon *any reference to airports*.

Clearly, the perennial departmentalization of officialdom has found a comfortable domicile in Brussels. The recently established Air-Rail Intermodality Facilitation Forum seems not to have affected EU Transport planning yet.

Though insiders do know that Rail Project No 2 is supposed, among others, to interconnect airports (PBKAL) and that the (completed) Öresund fixed link runs through and *under* the Kastrup airport, there is still no direct reference to airports in those plans.

Likewise, EU Transport planners seem to have overlooked the dramatic shift in the *modal split* between Rail, Road and Air, brought about by the growing popularity of high-speed trains en route between Madrid and Sevilla, Brussels and Paris, Paris and Marseilles ..., that is, places as far apart as 750 km.

Fortunately, for the past ten years it has been an established policy of the EU to favour Rail over Road, and there is, hopefully, nothing in sight that might derail this policy.

Under the circumstances, a strong boost should be given to the set of projects for Poland (as the centrepiece of the new EU territory), outlined in the web site <[www.airport-on-rails.org](http://www.airport-on-rails.org)>. Essentially, it is one project, though it seeks to integrate airports with high-speed railways and motorways. On the time scale, it proposes that planning should start in 2006, the first high-speed rail line (laid 30 years ago!) should open in 2010, and the other, the trans-European railway, in 2015. The same year should see the first module of the Central Poland Airport enter service.

Why has this project not been submitted by Poland to the appropriate EU body yet? Because the *Ministry of Infrastructure in Warsaw* received the project only last November, and the aforementioned departmentalization makes the necessary coordination of appraisals a Herculean task.

### **Airport with central terminal accessed by high-speed trains from all four sides**

To have high-speed trains stop under an airport terminal is a recent development. The pioneer in this respect was once again France, where a TGV station was inaugurated *under* the Charles de Gaulle airport in 1994 (though its advantages are diminished by the scattered distribution of the 14 terminals). If all goes well with the BBI project, Berlin will have the first airport in the world where high-speed trains stop right underneath a *central* terminal.

Two hours (by high-speed train) *further east*, Poland could inaugurate such an airport around 2015. Built from scratch in a perfectly flat location, only a couple of miles from the A2 (east-

west) motorway, the Central Poland Airport (CPL) could hold two intersecting high-speed railways in its belly: a south-north line (its southern section, E65 within C1, built nearly 30 years ago) and an east-west line (within C2), the first section of which would link Poland's two major cities, Warsaw and Lodz (the latter on the way to Berlin).

A future northern extension of the former line could have a similar underground station at Gdansk airport, on the Baltic coast. The existing southern section of E65 needs an extension across hilly country towards the Czech border, and on its way south it would intersect with the E30 (within C3) right between Katowice and Krakow, near a location where a third international airport could be built, again on top of the extended E65 and (a new, high-speed) E30, next to the A4 east-west motorway.

The details of the project are presented in the web site <[www.airport-on-rails.org](http://www.airport-on-rails.org)>, where a schematic map shows the high-speed lines as envisaged by Polish Railways 10 years ago: <<http://www.airport-on-rails.org/galeria/zooms/Szlaki%20PKP.jpg>>.

Here we find (in red) the future east-west railway, running more or less parallel to the E20. To the west of Warszawa, the new line intersects with the (red) extension of the (black) E65 as the south-north axis. At the southern end of the black line there is the proposed spur towards the Czech border. The Central Poland Airport is located (black dot) at the intersection of the two red lines.

### **All-round complementarity of Road, Rail and Air**

The *wider area of eastern Europe* can be seen on another map, which shows Berlin and Munich in the west, Moscow in the north-east, and Budapest and Vienna in the south: <[http://www.airport-on-rails.org/galeria/zooms/KolWEur1\\_6MB1222.jpg](http://www.airport-on-rails.org/galeria/zooms/KolWEur1_6MB1222.jpg)>.

Please note that Moskva, Minsk, Warszawa, Lodz, Wroclaw and Praha, are all strung on a perfectly straight line. And if the Minsk to Warszawa leg departs from C2, this is because the latter runs via Brest. Obviously, it would require some lobbying in Belarus to win them over for the idea of a truly straight high-speed link between Praha and Moskva. The so far undesignated segment from Lodz to Wroclaw and on to Praha would be a natural extension of the route from Moscow. The map does not show, however, the future C3 high-speed complement of the E30. Naturally, the new high-speed lines across Belarus, Ukraine and Russia would have to stick to the European gauge. As for border checks, these will have been abolished by 2030.

If those railways and airports are built by 2030, the eastern half of the continent will come to hold the most advanced Air-Rail-Road grid in the world.

Lying from 500 to 600 km apart, the major airports of eastern Europe will be only 2 hours away: Berlin, Warsaw, Minsk, Moscow along one axis; Moscow, Minsk, Warsaw, Prague along a second one; Kaunas, Warsaw, Vienna/Bratislava along a third one; and Warsaw from Budapest would be two and a half hours away (see enclosed diagram "Air-Rail Integration in East-Central Europe").

The suggested *time horizon: 2030*, has been adopted in view of the GDP forecast for EU-25: <[http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/energy\\_transport/figures/trends\\_2030/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/energy_transport/figures/trends_2030/index_en.htm)>, which says that along with the other new EU members, Poland will reach the *present* level of the "old"

EU countries by 2030. There is absolutely no reason to assume that this growth would exclude the sphere of (passenger or cargo) transport.

**To conclude**, a rhetorical question: Why should the burgeoning new EU members in the East not learn from the deplorable experience of the old members with the as yet unbridled expansion of road transport?

The *basic question* the EU faces is: When will the right conclusions be drawn from what is a dawning realization, that thanks to the expansion of high-speed railways, an *all-round complementarity of Road, Rail and Air* is within reach?

Evidently, the goal should be to provide the kind of facilities that would make the traveller as well as cargo carrier choose the mode of transport most convenient *and* most environment-friendly at the same time. Let us build high-speed railways fully integrated with the other modes of transport, *also* in Eastern Europe.

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