

# Tomorrow's Railway Stations

Going places—German railway stations in process of change

Christian Steguweit

Deutsche Bahn AG (German Rail) is transforming its railway stations into prime addresses in the inner-city infrastructure. Combining the features of a high-tech traffic junction, service centre and communication forum, tomorrow's railway station will make full use of its central location, providing a wealth of surprising concepts.

The destination has been reached. The latest stock-exchange figures received at the computer, a brief click and the Internet goes offline. The young waiter takes the crockery with a friendly smile. We pick up our hand luggage and move to the exit. With a sonorous 'whoosh', the pneumatically-controlled doors open to reveal a view of a cool, air-conditioned platform bathed in light.

A fascinating change of scene: the finale of a high-speed journey that takes us to a centre of fashionable elegance striking a virtuoso balance between

hectic bustle and spacious calm.

Let us immerse ourselves in the modern multi-cultural world of a cosmopolitan public: tailored business suits vie with silk sarongs, a high-definition designer look with traditional textiles. Three bronzed children back from their holiday embrace the grandma they have missed so much; their mother, happy and pleased to be home again, gathers the cases and bags, the English setter, mad with excitement, almost bowls over the two ladies in their sporty outfits promenading past the boutiques on their way towards the glass lift that will take them to the gallery.

Past artistic video installations, gourmet points offering epicurean delights and the reception rooms of medical and legal advice centres, the traveler takes us to 'Distributor Level 1'. A glance at the electronic guidance system—and up the esca-

tor with its sophisticated glass paneling to the halls of the foyer which appear to be floating in the air. On the forecourt, our car is waiting for us, its doors wide open ready to receive us—once again, the 'private courier service' has worked surprisingly smoothly.

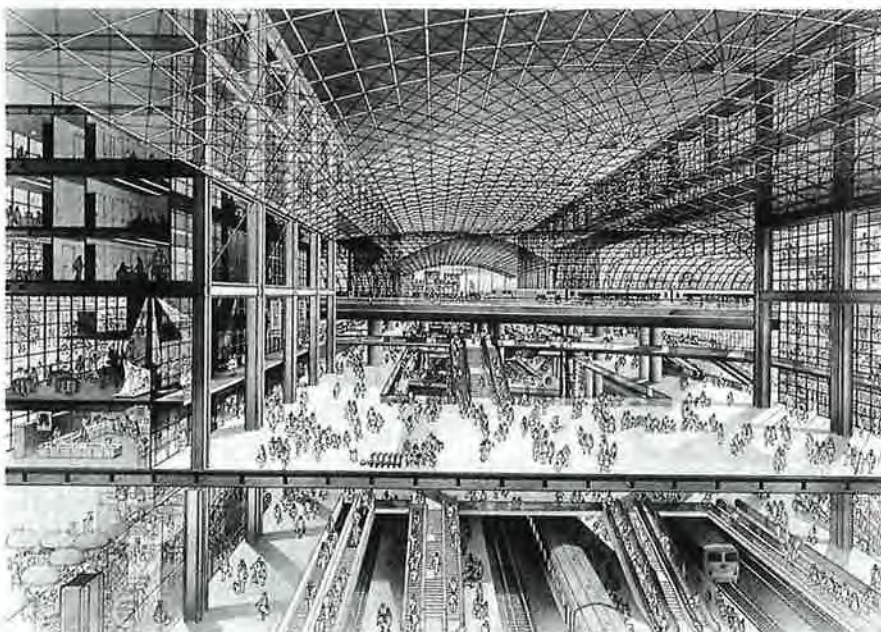
Are we at the International Airport? At the World-Wide High-Tech Centre? At Futurama? No—we are at one of larger of Germany's 6,476 railway stations—and a few years in the future.

A realistic vision? What today may seem like a utopia, will tomorrow be a part of everyday reality. Railway stations—gloomy, discomfoting places pervaded by the smell of steam engines? An unfriendly home to the eternally restless? Those days are over—the railway station is dead, long live the railway station!

## Modern Metamorphosis

Not long ago, these imposing 'Cathedrals of Technology' were the central landmarks of all the metropolitan cities, from Hamburg to Munich, from Cologne to Berlin, the glamorous symbols of an industrial society that was evolving at breakneck speed. The boom of the car and of mass aviation put a sudden end to this monopoly. Railways, and their stations along with them, fell into a gloomy, twilight existence. Rail travel was out. Railway stations are dirty.

But time flows on; the opening of borders, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the European idea. The collapse of private transport is close at hand; flying, with its repeated pattern of congested access roads, the obstacle course at check-in and take-off clearance, is turning out to be a time-consuming, uneconomical and failure-



■ Artist's Impression of Lehrter Station, Berlin

prone procedure on short and medium-range trips. And the insights we have been forced to acquire, namely that we have a renewed responsibility to the environment, are playing their part. So who is going to win the race for mobility in our modern society? The Deutsche Bahn.

On a long-term basis, the trend towards rail traffic is showing a clear upward tendency—the drive to extend the ICE high-speed long-distance network, the concentration of stops for local connections, higher numbers of commuters owing to the growing domination of conurbations in terms of employment policy.

This means there are good prospects for the railway station as a piece of real estate that will enable it to exploit its mostly central, unrivalled location. One thing is quite clear, the development of concentration in the inner city is leading to an extension of the required product range—and the development and acceptance of the latest communication technologies will bring about a change in consumer behaviour. The Deutsche Bahn will be ready for this. Will the railway station of the 21st century become an interdisciplinary hub around which an event-oriented, ecologically-minded information society revolves?

## New Railway—New Railway Stations

The road is long, but there is no stopping the new Deutsche Bahn! The starting signal came on January 1994, the structural reform of the German railway system, the merging of the Deutsche Bahn (West) and the Deutsche Reichsbahn (East), forming the Deutsche Bahn AG, or 'Company of the Future'.

The most obvious factor in the process of re-orientation along the lines of a free-market economy is the re-founding of the Passenger Stations Division. Its task is to re-define the new railway station as a modern traffic junction, service centre and place for communication. Enterprising ideas are called for, strict customer orientation, and a clear product profile.

The key phrase is 'Integral Responsibility'—right from the station

forecourt to the edge of the platform. The railway station as a self-contained world of experience—the way travellers and visitors perceive it. What until now was divided into different departments with diverging interests, is now united under a common denominator to combine all these efforts, and is supervised by a general railway station management: Deutsche Bahn—Company of the Future.

## Much To Do

6,476 railway stations, with an average age of 83 years, are waiting to be transformed from grey non-entities to shining stars among the inner-city traffic and business structures. There is a promising future in this—but also a great deal of work, meaning re-development on a scale of DM billions!

If these ambitious aims are to be achieved rapidly, the task must be formulated as a short equation: the new German railway station = quality = economy = branded product.

Quality. The first and primary aim is a perceived improvement in the railway station as a symbol of quality:

- Extensive rebuilding of structures and restoration of architectural expression.
- Noticeable improvement in cleanliness, safety and customer-oriented service.
- Wide range of varied services, provided by well-trained staff.
- Higher technical standards based on state-of-the-art transport and communication technology.
- Better integration of 'railway station as market place' into socio-cultural and economic infrastructure of cities and communities.

Economy. Second, it is important that the railway station concept is founded on a sound profitable basis. This means:

- Optimal provision of infrastructure for all railway transport companies.
- Station prices to be charged to separate divisions within company.
- Rent and lease revenue keyed to

new quality standards of railway station.

Branded product. This leaves the third task, positioning the railway station as a recognizable proprietary product:

- Integration of all services in local demand.
- Persuasive individual architecture/appearance.
- Distinction from conventional shopping centres.
- Coverage of whole service spectrum.
- Attraction of new customer groups (e.g. senior citizens/children).

No, the goal has not yet been achieved. Tomorrow's railway station is faced with today's challenges. The first perceptible signals must be given now, our futuristic intentions demonstrated, the decks cleared. So let us begin with the most obvious matters.

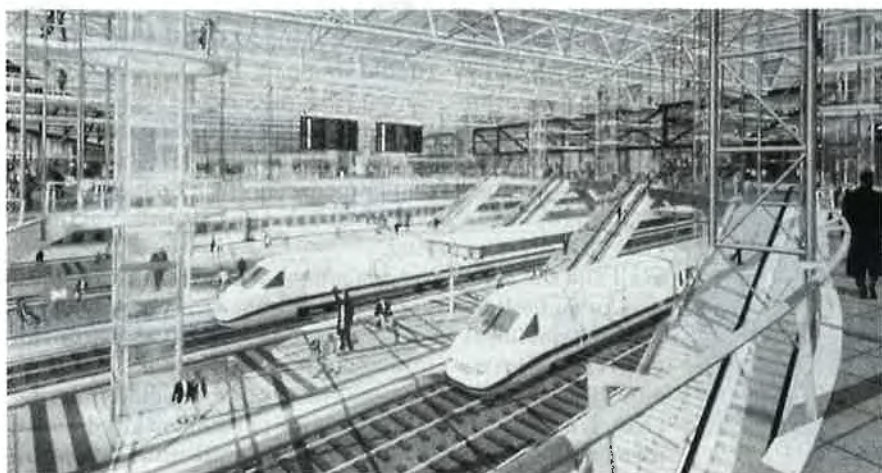
## The 3-S Programme

Safety, Supercleanlines, Service—these key aspects pinpoint the aim of the initial short-term strategic measures to improve the quality of the current station situation.

Safety: The personal feeling of safety is one of the most sensitive topics in the new railway station concept. Close cooperation between the security staff of the private BahnSchutz GmbH ('Railway Security Company'), the Bundesgrenzschutz (German Federal Border Guard), the state police and automatic monitoring systems, as well as the implementation of newly-formulated station regulations, will create a level of perceived security that will markedly ease the tasks of preventing and reducing crime and fringe-group problems.

Supercleanliness: Tomorrow's railway station will have a well-groomed look. Outside cleaning services and the BahnhofReinigungs GmbH ('Station Cleaning Company') will ensure that the new standards for cleanliness, environment-oriented waste disposal and waste prevention are consistently observed.

Service: The cultivation of a new form of service is one of the most basic



■ Conceptual drawing of Papestrasse Station, Berlin

factors in the new railway station philosophy. Increased employment of service staff, customer-oriented information systems, provisions for children, the handicapped, women and senior citizens keyed to their requirements, a special VIP service. The red-carpet treatment for the customer at the 'grand railway station'.

## New Image

Once this 3-S Programme gets properly into gear, it is important to follow through. After all, if tomorrow's railway station means to convince its new target groups, a substantial change of image is required, and in two opposite directions. Although, on the one hand, a uniform image with consistent elements and structures must be developed at a federal level—in the sense of a modern trademark policy, on the other hand, the identity of the local situation needs to be cultivated.

A multi-faceted design process that strikes a balance between architecture and public design, and graphic, material, and colour concepts, must provide contrasts both formally and content-wise, and still be concurrent with the overall system design on a federal basis. Yet, at the same time, it must have a character that is typical of the area. The railway station as a distinct personality!

The first indicators: the information giants of the family of stylized figures that have now become the hallmark in the stations of the Deutsche Bahn, the newly-installed service points,

and soon, the travel centres, as well as the first prototypes of inner city event and theme zones, such as the one near Bahnhof Zoo in Berlin. Everything needs time—and such a highly-complex project not only requires designing, but financing.

## Marketing Concept

If, on the one hand, each railway station is a traffic junction and therefore a basic element in the vast integrated system of Deutsche Bahn AG, it will also be a self-contained business in the future. A sovereign organism which, although operating within a fixed set of rules, will have to plan and act on its own account and according to the laws of a free-market economy.

The first step towards this new development phase is to set up a professional Centre Management unit with responsibility for the whole railway station as a commercial enterprise. This is where leases are organized, joint advertising arranged, events staged. The Centre Manager—is he a new breed of station master? A top job for full-blooded entrepreneurs with a feeling for the future!

A precondition for a concept that is to be self-sufficient on a long-term basis is that there is a perceptible improvement in the quality of the business and product mix; seedy beer joints need replacing by efficient and multi-faceted catering facilities that make dining an experience; sophisticated gallery and shopping arcades

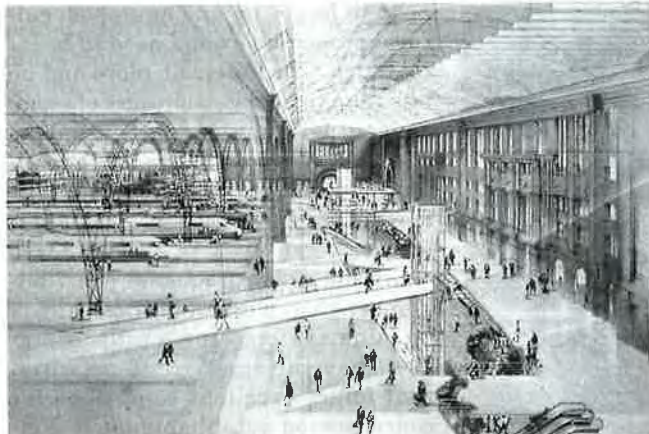
need to be set up and equipped; cultural promotion events need to be integrated. The aim is no more and no less than to initiate a process of social concentration, to create a multi-coloured, richly varied and safe territory of cosmopolitan life acting as a magnet for new forms of urban culture.

Given a visitor frequency of 3.7 billion per year, with an average stay of 20 minutes, tomorrow's railway stations have a target group potential that offers excellent conditions for concentrated establishment of consulting, social and medical professions, banks, insurance companies, tourist and transport organizations. Opportunities are equally good for establishment of child-care centres, meeting places for senior citizens, communal services, police stations, clubs and associations. Thus, a city within a city can develop, independent of the climate and with a perfect infra-structure.

## High Aims & High Investment

Obviously, huge investments will have to be made. Re-development of the basic building structure alone will require DM billions; hall roofs, platforms and waiting zones have to be brought to ICE standard in terms both of size and equipment; a new standard of lighting must be created, and the number of dark spots and corners reduced; a new guidance system with entrances and exits, ramps, lifts, escalators and conveyer belts, needs to be planned; ecologically-friendly supply and disposal concepts must be worked out, the latest media and information technology installed, and smooth connections with the local public transport systems and private transport organized.

The reception in the station foyer and on the platforms will have to change; business travellers are a major target group in terms of image and turnover, and must be offered an alternative to the ambiance of an airport, with up-market lounges and air-conditioned platform areas, with multi-media conference rooms and business centres on location. Scenic



■ Artist's Impression of Modernized Leipzig Central Station  
(Branca Caminski, Zagreb)

mood lighting will play an important part, as well as recreation and entertainment areas, in creating a vibrant lifestyle image.

## Railway Station as Prototype

The way has already been paved: Leipzig, Cologne and Berlin are test cases and testing grounds at the same time. Investing in the new station concept for the trade-fair metropolis in Saxony—a joint venture between the Düsseldorf architect's office Hentrich-Petschnigg & Partner and BME project designers—will cost Deutsche Bahn AG DM 300 million.

A daily flow of 180,000 visitors (100,000 more than now) will have 25,000 m<sup>2</sup> of shop space for up-market specialized and retail shops, a further 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> for railway-specific suppliers of services, 12,000 m<sup>2</sup> of office space and parking space for 2,000 cars, at their disposal. Leipzig railway station will be a huge microcosm, a hub for people and ideas, a trend-setter for state-of-the-art urban culture.

The case is similar in Cologne; each day, 150,000 passengers on the high-speed Paris-London route will pass through this junction, with its unique concentration of culture: the cathedral, the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, the Museum Ludwig and the Roman Museum. Here, the symbols of the future rub shoulders with the witnesses of the past—embedding the theme of the railway station in a fascinating tension with the present.

The vision of Berlin—the most ex-

ensive major project—is without doubt a new concept for Berlin stations. The meeting of historically-unique challenges after the fall of the Wall and the decision to make Berlin the national capital again, combined with the European idea and a new local identity, will provide infra-structure planning with one of its key socio-cultural tasks. The historic termini, condemned to decay, have been blasted out of their isolation both in political and in traffic-engineering terms, providing a *tabula rasa* for Germany's future capital as far as the railway station is concerned.

This initial situation is to be seen as an opportunity. In Berlin, the future is omnipresent with a future 3.6 million inhabitants, the seat of government, and future centre for service industry. Berlin—the largest building site in the world. Never before have so many ideas and so much capital been invested in a city in such a short time than in the new metropolis on the River Spree.

A scenario custom-made for tomorrow's railway station? No, there will be no new central station in Berlin. The city terrain is technically far too large for traffic engineers to focus it in one spot. Berlin is polycentral. Berliners say each district is a city in itself, every apartment block a 'Kiez' (a domain in its own right).

From the perspective of railway technology, this mega-city can only be caught in a net. Intersecting axes—during the initial phase before extending the Southern ring after 2005, provisionally called the 'Pils-Konzept' ('mushroom concept'): East-West axis, North-South tunnel and Northern ring.

A wagon wheel to cover every area with the first generation of new, large railway stations; the ICE European intersection on the site of the former Lehrter station in immediate proximity to the new parliamentary district. The former Gesundbrunnen station as a leisure-oriented Northern intersection; the Eastern intersection in the district of Lichtenhain. The Southern intersection in the Papestrasse area, as a link with private transport connections and with the new major airport of Berlin-Brandenburg; Spandau station as the Western intersection. In between, the Potsdamer Platz, Zoologischer Garten, and Friedrichstrasse stations. Each railway station will in itself be a very special segment of Berlin.

It is true. Tomorrow's railway station has the qualities of a public attraction. More ubiquitous than airports, which have tended to be uniformly structured; with a great deal more momentum than 'malls', American-style shopping centres only kept alive by artificial respiration. The railway station of the future is a concentration process, a particle accelerator, a pace-maker—possibly a traffic park with a completely independent 'genius loci', the magical attraction of a high-tech citadel of culture, poised on the threshold of the millennium. ■

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## Christian Steguweit

Christian Steguweit graduated in interior design and architecture before working for several large German businesses including Deutsche Olivetti GmbH, Commodore Computers GmbH and Deutsche Lufthansa AG. Since joining Deutsche Bahn AG in 1994, he has been managing station design concepts and images.