

# Regionalization in Public Short-Distance Passenger Traffic

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The present developments in public short-distance passenger traffic in Germany would be unthinkable without railroad reform and the accompanying regionalization. Regionalization of public short-distance passenger traffic (ÖPNV) on 1 January 1996 was an essential part of the railroad reform started by Parliament in December 1993 with the passage of the Railroad Reorganization Law. Consequently, the responsibility for organizing and financing the entire ÖPNV—including the short-distance passenger rail traffic—passed from the State to individual states. Previously, communities and states had been responsible only for buses and subways in the cities. Short-distance rail traffic was administered by the Federal government or the former Deutsche Bundesbahn. All this changed completely with the railroad reform and regionalization. What seems very matter-of-fact today, was actually a revolution in transport and politics.

On 1 January 1994, the Deutsche Bundesbahn and Deutsche Reichsbahn were converted to a modern stock corporation, Deutsche Bahn AG (DB), freed from the rules of bureaucracy; it has a modern structure, and operates successfully in the traffic market.

DB quickly recognized the importance

of short-distance traffic and soon moved into this neglected area, which is now the center of investments, because regionalization has made the short-distance traffic market an important growth centre with a yearly volume of around DM30,000 million. Regionalization has taken short-distance passenger rail traffic out of the shadow of tax subsidies.

For the states to be able to fulfill their legal obligations, they will receive about DM8,700 million in 1996, and DM12,000 million in 1997 from the Federal government. At the same time, Germany has become the first EU state to comply with European law by opening the DB rail network to third parties. This means that any approved rail traffic business can use the DB network on payment of various charges. This has created the preconditions for a traffic revolution in Germany. Competition on the railroads has changed the market situation completely for DB.

The principle of regionalized short-distance traffic is: "The user pays." meaning whoever requires short-distance traffic services to be furnished in individual regional markets must contract with DB or another rail traffic business and must pay the market price. The rail traffic enterprise "sells" the traffic service and is paid the market price for it. This is a funda-

mentally new concept in short-distance traffic in Germany, freeing it from the "Cinderella role". In the past, the State railroad had to meet almost every wish of states and communities with no chance of payment or profit. This was the main cause of the continuing high deficits of short-distance traffic in the government railroads.

A target of the rail reform is to get more traffic on the railroads; after the Federal government took over the DM70,000 million debts of the Bundesbahn and Reichsbahn, the government hopes to support this ambitious target by regionalization, leading to more effective short-distance traffic meeting citizens' needs. Current finances will be used to provide more and better short-distance traffic, based on the premise that the regions know best what public short-distance passenger traffic—including rail traffic—they need. This is the fascinating idea behind regionalization. Some critics said that DB has used regionalization to retreat, but everyone knows today that the exact opposite is true.

In the next 5 years, DB will invest about DM7,000 million in new and modern short-distance rolling stock. The entire fleet will be replaced or modernized before the end of the century. Three hundred lightweight powered railcars have already been ordered within this programme—the largest investment in German railway history. These cars are about 30% lighter than conventional cars. In addition, they are constructed mainly from proven components used in buses. They still cost more than a bus, but are equivalent in terms of maintenance expenses. They achieve several targets:

- \* Reduced costs
- \* Improved attraction (improved accessibility for all passenger groups, especially for disabled passengers; better train changes; attractive internal and external design)



New Light Multiple Unit

(G. Dweik)

\* Improved safety level (high braking power for handling hazards; continuous communication by train radio; defined energy-absorption ability)

These cars are a decisive step to become able to compete with automobiles and buses on side tracks at low loads. Many side tracks—especially in the new states of the Federation—which were hardly profitable because trains were drawn by locomotives, are enjoying a renaissance. The cars reach an average maximum speed of about 130 km/h and present a real alternative to the automobile.

From the cost viewpoint, the cars are attractive for states and communities. Overall, this is intended to prevent closure of short-distance rail traffic for reasons of profitability, and replacement by “rubber rails” (bus). Naturally, there are lines where even these cars cannot have the desired effect, because the passenger volume is too low, and here the bus must be used.

To connect regions to regional hubs served by InterCity or high-speed InterCity Express trains, the railroad offers four products to short-distance customers:

1. SE—city express  
Quick connection between congested area junctions at hourly intervals
2. RE—regional express  
Quick connection to all larger centres of region, at least at intervals of 2 hours
3. RB—regional rail  
Traffic connections for sparsely-populated regions at fixed intervals
4. S-trains in rapid succession (congested areas)

Depending on demand, NeuTech trains, double-decker cars, or modern light-weight powered railcars are used. In addition to new cars, DB offers passengers and service providers an optimized timetable, such as the integrated interval timetable. With this easily-memorized



Series 670 Double-Decker Rail Bus

(DWA)

timetable, towns of a region are serviced at fixed intervals all day (including Saturdays and Sundays). There are good connections to long-distance traffic and, in the ideal case, to buses.

This is based on the simple philosophy of: get in, go, and return, with the certainty of assured connections and without having to study timetables. Thus, the integrated interval timetable offers similar convenience to the car. In the states where the timetable is in use, high passenger increases (up to 40% on individual lines in Rheinland-Pfalz) have been obtained. In Rheinland-Pfalz, we will reopen four lines by the start of 1997. The high demand—triggered by the timetable—has changed provisional trial operation to regular operation.

“Travelling by rail must be as comfortable as possible”. Based on this simple formula, DB wants to attract more traffic onto the railroads, and wants to expand potential in congested areas as well. With this

in mind, DB is offering tailored short-distance traffic to regions, starting from planning, routing, and actual operation. In this manner, DB is exploiting new concepts. For example, in Schleswig-Holstein, our most northern state, ZugBus GmbH (a rail-bus company) has been established, combining the most important means of transport under a single roof. The concept of combined bus and rail aims to provide an attractive service package for customers, notable cost savings (for states, districts, communities), and extensive rationalization for service providers.

DB AG is open to any type of cooperation. Only when all enterprises join forces for short-distance traffic to offer the customer and the provider a seamless service, can short-distance traffic survive competition and win the future for itself. The decisive factor will be which traffic system and not which enterprise can remain in competition permanently.



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Klaus Daubertshäuser is a board member of Deutsche Bahn AG with responsibility for short-distance passenger traffic. After school and military service, he worked as a commercial official, in personnel administration, and in labour and social law relations. In 1980, he was elected transport spokesman for the SPD party in Parliament. He was a member of the administrative board of DB from 1988 to 1993, and of the Deutsche Reichsbahn from 1991.