

DB Museum—the Whole World of Railways

Rainer Mertens

Some Basic Facts

German railways were born on 7 December 1835 when the first steam train departed from Nuremberg on a 6-km journey to the neighbouring town of Fürth. This marked the start of developments that would catapult Germany into the industrial age within a few decades. The Royal Bavarian Railway Museum—along with the Budapest Transport museum the first public institution in the world dealing with railways, their technology and history—opened its doors 65 years later on 1 October 1899. Including its postal section, which opened in 1902, the Museum of Transportation as it became known, has been one of Germany's most famous museums since its inception.

In 1996, the railway section, which occupies some 80% of the museum area, was renamed the DB Museum, becoming the official museum of the recently formed *Deutsche Bahn AG* (DB AG) railway company created 3 years earlier by the unification of *Deutsche Bundesbahn* (DB) and *Deutsche Reichsbahn* (DR), the railway services in

the former West and East Germany, respectively.

When DB AG took over its management, the long-established railway museum was extensively renovated. It was visualized as having a key role in presenting DB AG's corporate image to the public. During the following years, the exhibits have been fully updated both in terms of form and content, the collections were rearranged and catalogued in a computer database, and services were expanded and modernized. Out-of-date sections were removed and new areas of activity were launched. Furthermore, new locations were established nationwide to house the large collection of more than 120 pieces of rolling stock, giving the museum a presence throughout Germany.

New Directions

Following the renovation of several parts of the main Nuremberg building, general renovation started in 1999. A new permanent exhibition covering an area of 3700 m² and dealing with the history of railways in Germany was



'Adler' and ICE, the most ancient and the most modern vehicle of German railways

(Author)

then installed.

This project showed the new direction the museum is taking. At first, the museum had been seen as dealing with the history of technology, so its main task was to demonstrate the technological development of the railways as a transportation system. Consequently, original rolling stock was exhibited, along with signals and signal boxes, communications devices, and other technology related to railway construction. However, there was no social, economic, and cultural context showing the significance of the railways beyond the purely industrial.

The Eras of Railway History exhibit, which opened in the anniversary year of 1985, was the first exhibition to examine

the economic and political conditions in the 19th and 20th centuries that caused the development of the railways, although priority was still given to railway technologies.

With the new permanent exhibition, the technological development of Germany's railway system is integrated into a holistic consideration of the railway's history and its reciprocal interactions with politics, economics, culture, and society. Visitors move chronologically through 200 years of railway history, from its beginnings in England until German reunification in 1989.

The presentations are designed not to overwhelm visitors with information, and construction of artificial historical settings was actively avoided. The inclusion of an

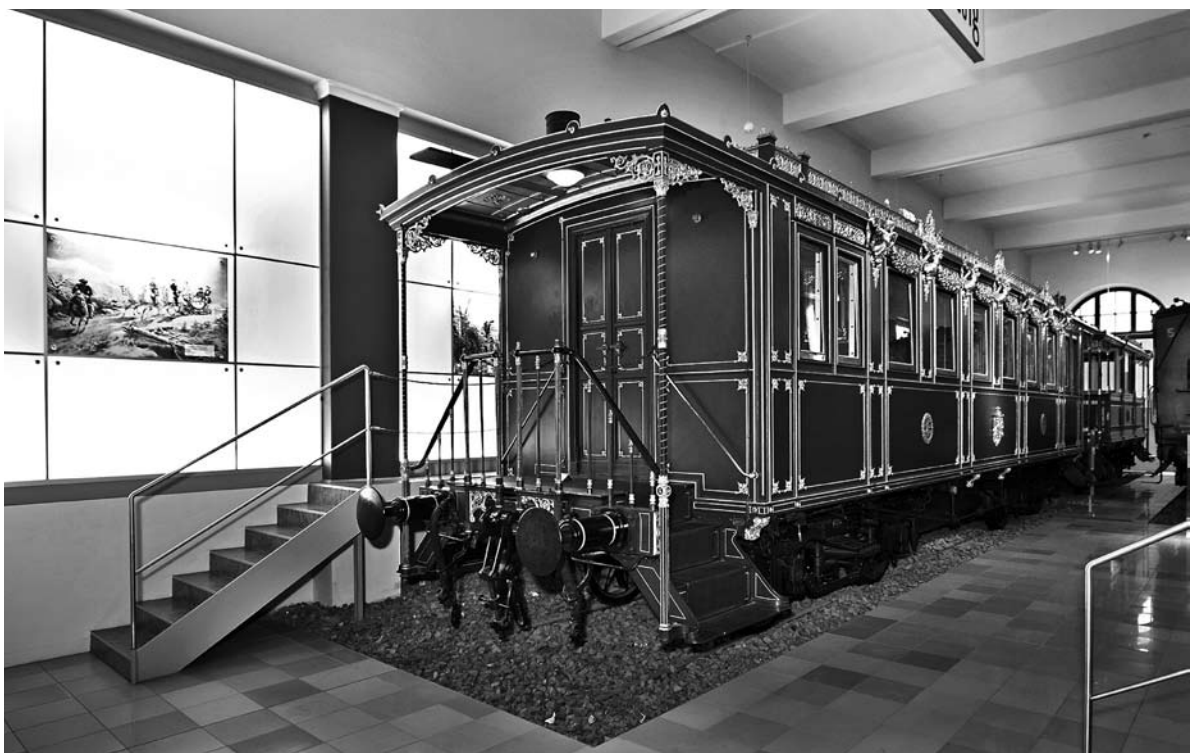


The "Adler"-Train

(Author)



The Locomotive Show at the 175th centenary of German Railways 2010
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Palace Car of Bavarian King Ludwig II

(Author)



The Hands-On-Area

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Jazz Concert in the Vehicle Hall

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educational expert on the team made it possible to account for the interests of first-time visitors when designing the exhibition, selecting exhibits, and writing explanatory text. However, the space constraints of the old building prevented the designers from achieving some of their aims.

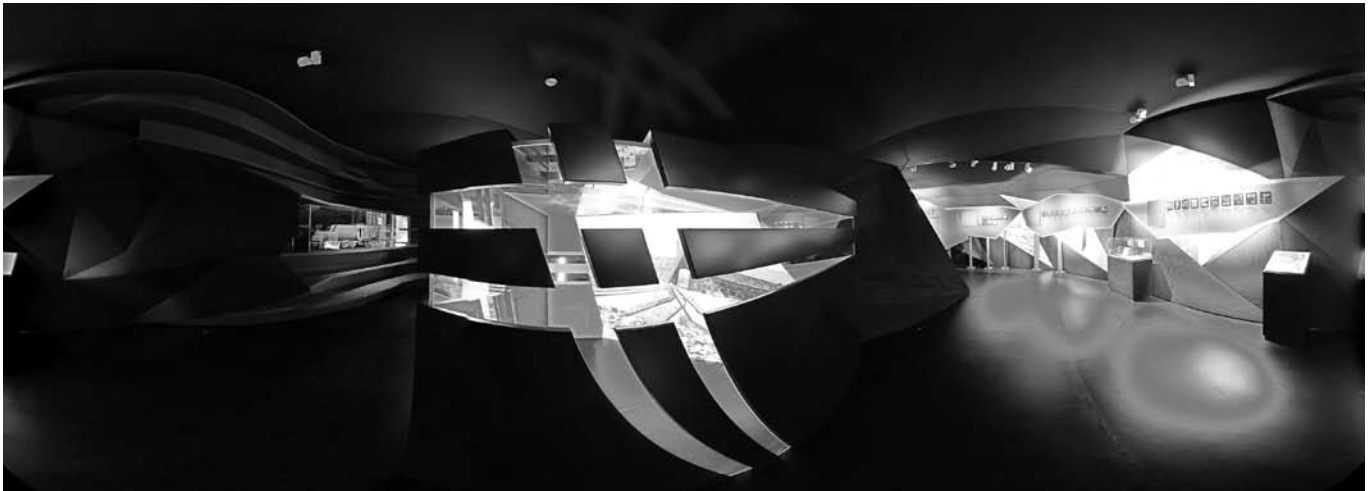
The exhibitions were planned by a team of four historians and one educational expert under my leadership. We received support and advice from a museum advisory

committee set up by the DB AG board containing historians, railway experts, and politicians. The whole renewal project was finished with the re-opening of the Vehicle Hall in the main building in May 2007. This hall on the ground floor houses legends of the 19th century, while the second Vehicle Hall located in the outdoor area of the DB Museum, presents railway stars from the 20th century.

Strategy and Jubilee

The period after 2007 was dominated by two tasks: developing a strategy for the future development of the museum and preparing for the 175th anniversary of German railways in 2010. A visitors' survey was used to find out the wishes and preferences of several target groups; it was repeated in 2010. The results were quite positive, but also showed that our exhibits and services could be improved. Preparatory works for the anniversary started in 2009; DB intended a nationwide event with the DB Museum playing a leading role. This was a great chance for the museum team, because it gave us a 'big stage' on which we could show our abilities.

Among the many activities across Germany, three main events stood out: the Jubilee exhibitions called 'Planet



Planet railways: the "Violence"-room about war and holocaust

(Author)

Railway' and 'Adler,' and 'Rocket & Co.,' as well as a 3-day ceremony around the birthday on 7 December 2010. All three events were in Nuremberg, many celebrities from the fields of politics, economics, and culture joined us, including German Chancellor Merkel who gave the official speech on 7 December.

The Nuremberg Jubilee exhibitions and events at the two branch museums in Halle and Koblenz were a huge success. About 250,000 people visited, almost 100,000 more than the previous year. German and foreign media gave a lot of coverage and the number of press reports rose from 120 in 2009 to 310 in 2010. The above-mentioned visitors' survey yielded excellent marks for the exhibitions and services. Moreover, the standing of the museum within the company rose considerably due to this success, becoming a torchbearer of DB's positive image and an 'ambassador' for the company. As a result, 2010 was the most successful year since the 1985 anniversary.

Heading to Future

In May 2011, the museum management changed hands, passing from the retiring Director Jürgen Franzke to the new Director Russalka Nikolov. The first challenge for the new management is finishing the strategic plan and defining the steps for achieving it. Based on the surveys mentioned above and on the conservation requirements, the most important task is to create facilities for displaying more locomotives and wagons. Furthermore, the PR activities must be improved and extended. In particular, the quality of the website and the museum's presence in social networks must



Planet Railways: Section about High Speed Trains

(Author)

be lifted to the top-level to match the museum's excellent contents and services. There are many ideas, plans and possibilities—and the highly motivated team is ready to take the next steps into the future. ■



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