

# AERA

Association of European Rail Agents

## AERA MEETING 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012

### at the offices of: Railbookers

#### *Attendees:*

Bob Hex – Trainseurope (Chairman)  
Philip Barnard – ACP Rail (Secretary)  
Andy Brabin - Railbookers  
Vic Allen – Trainseurope  
Tom Lyde – HRG  
Dave Felstead – Railtrail Tours  
Trevor Garrod – EPF

#### *Apologies:*

Susan Parsons – ABTA  
Jennifer Swierc – ATP  
Brendan Fox – Thomas Cook Timetables  
Dan May – Ffestiniog Travel  
Lee Davies – Travel Bureau  
Don Somerville – HRG  
Mike Woodward – Life Member (Treasurer)  
Enrico Soresini – International Rail (Vice Chair)  
David Glover – RailTour Guide

Meeting Started 11:08

### Welcome and Reports

The Chair welcomed all and thanked Andy Brabin for providing use of his meeting room and hospitality.

The relation with East Midlands trains is not good at the moment as they won't recognise us and therefore we can't get access to their meeting room.

Dave Felstead mentioned that ATOC don't recognise AERA as a positive rail association. Possible meeting at ATOC maybe??

The Secretary advised of apologies and the rest of his report features in the agenda  
The Treasurer advised (although absent) that the bank details were the same as last meeting

## **EPF**

Trevor Garrod gave an overview of the latest from the European Passenger's Federation (EPF.)

### ***EPF***

- Trevor mentioned that the EPF were 10 years old this year and they celebrated with a breakfast at European Parliament.
- Trevor handed out the DBV Magazine and Railwatch magazine
- The EPF membership comprises of 33 associations in 19 European Countries and nearly all of them are passenger associations... AERA being the one exception (as we represent the rail agencies which passengers use.) however our relations with the railways were similar.

### ***London TravelWatch***

- The next EPF meeting will actually be in London on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2013. This will be the London TravelWatch meeting and AERA are welcome to send a guest or two along, however, as AERA is an associate they will have no voting rights.

### ***Railfuture***

- Railfuture are another UK member association of EPF and they would welcome AERA to have a stand at their twice yearly events. Usual attendance at these meets are 80 – 100 including representatives from many local users' groups.
- This Railfuture event would undoubtedly make great contacts for AERA
- There could be a possibility that AERA could advertise in the Railfuture magazine Railwatch. Trevor Garrod will ask about costs and if there is a discount for multiple adverts over the space of a year?
- AERA would want to keep all adverts in a "house-style" so we will do the graphic design of our own adverts

### ***ERA (European Railway Agency)***

- The EPF is related to the ERA.
- The ERA try to get harmonisation between railways and are based in Valenciennes.
- The ERA will look at the TAP/TSI project and PRM (Passengers with Restricted Mobility) issues.
- Also working with European Disability Federation (EDF) for PRM's.

At this point the agenda item for Eurostar was raised: *"As Eurostar made a lot of publicity about being a carrier for the 2012 London Olympics, specifically carrying the Belgian and French Paralympic teams to London. Will they be making a change to their "2 only wheelchair space per train" policy?"*

Andy Brabin answered that he had heard from Eurostar that their new trains would be increasing their disabled spaces from 2 to 4.

It was discussed however that details on PRM's are not clear at all and it would great to have a central source of information on this subject.

The Secretary suggested has sent a note to Brendan Fox (Thomas Cook) to see if PRM details could be added to the European Timetable?

Andy Brabin mentioned that PRM's would have an issue when there is engineering work and trains are replaced by buses. The replacement buses would need to have a lift or be low-floor. We need to pressure the Railways to provide low-floor alternatives.

### ***CER***

- The EPF take part in the Customer Liaison Group of the CER. These are two meetings per year and are all day sessions, with disability and cyclist federations in attendance.

### ***Eurostar, Thalys and RailTeam***

- The EPF try to meet Eurostar, Thalys and RailTeam at least once a year.
- The EPF have a questionnaire for High-Speed journeys with two or more sectors... would any AERA members be interested in letting your clients participate in this survey?
- It was mentioned by AERA members that the RailTeam services seem to get less and less seamless, what with the Eurostar and Thalys connections for example.
- It was mentioned by AERA that London- Bruxelles – Frankfurt should be seen as a through single journey as stated in the CIV.
- AERA members spoke to Trevor Garrod about the EPF putting pressure on the railways to hold services by 10 minutes in Bruxelles if connections are late?
- Trevor Garrod mentioned that AERA could perhaps come along next time as part of the EPF delegation and meet with RailTeam.

### ***Long Distance Working Committee***

- The EPF are currently working on a project “the final mile” which is detailing the last part of a long distance journey which is usually a journey within a conurbation (by bus, tram, regional train and non-high speed trains.)
- i.e: London – Amsterdam – Amersfoort

## **AERA Housekeeping**

### ***AGM & 2013 Dates***

It was decided to set the dates for the next year in advance to give everyone an equal opportunity to book an advanced rate ticket. It was also agreed that Tuesday would be the best day to hold a meeting. Therefore the 2013 meetings will be:

26<sup>th</sup> February (AGM)

21<sup>st</sup> May

24<sup>th</sup> September

10<sup>th</sup> December

Guest speakers at meetings will be a key part of moving forward and names like Christian Wolmar, Nigel Harris and Simon Calder were all mentioned.

We will need to get booking our AGM as soon as possible.

There was a possibility of Oxford (passenger association link) or Port Vale Football Club (Dave Felstead can hire the box there.)

### ***Subscription***

It was suggested that the £100 subscription stays in place and all will be invoiced. Dave Felstead asked “would you pay £100 for a Rolls Royce?” We will need to charge more to cover AERA’s new way and also to fund new projects. It was asked should we include independent UK Rail selling agents into AERA as there are only a hand full of those left now? Trevor Garrod mentioned that it would be possible for him to make a start in helping AERA build a list of such agents, as he knew of a few. The subscription price issue has been left for the agenda of the AGM.

### ***Nominations***

The committee present were willing to stand again for nomination. The Chairman mentioned that he can stand in as long as he can but he did advise that he has now retired and his contacts will get less the longer he is retired? We unanimously agreed that the current Chairman should stay as its not the contacts but the way of running an association. He has great experience in this. We all welcome Bob to stand as Chairman again.

### **Eurostar PRM’s**

The agenda point of PRM’s (Passengers with Restricted Mobility) on Eurostar was visited again. Trevor Garrod had recently heard from Eurostar on this point and he could quote that apparently they had learnt a lot from the Olympic and Paralympic games. After carrying the Belgian and French teams they learnt how to adapt their trains if something like that was to happen again? AERA certainly would have a good chance of lobbying with EDF on behalf of PRM’s if they got the EDF (European Disability Federation) behind them. However, Eurostar is commercially driven and taking out seats to make a PRM space means that Eurostar have to fill PRM in this space to make it worth while.

### **AOB**

#### ***Eurostar Groups***

Dave Felstead said that Eurostar causes a big problem to group travel. Eurostar ask for a 25% group booking deposit and if you reduce your place numbers you lose the 25% deposit?? This is starting to put of the group travel market. Eurostar Groups Department used to also call you to advise you that your Ticketing Time Limit is due up... but they have been told to stop. (It was suggested that this was probably to gain the 25% deposit?) It was mentioned that we should place an article in the Group Travel Magazine to the effect of “Are you fed up with Eurostar group booking conditions?... come to us!” AERA Members could operate in the same way with group rates and we can make this market what it should be again without the hefty deposit.

Andy Brabin mentioned that the new Eurostar system will change things and the Ticketing Time Limits will surely tumble.

#### ***AERA Lawyer***

Vic Allen suggested it would be good to have an AERA lawyer for if any cases with customers or contracts came to court. The majority of people present thought this would be a very useful idea... in fact the Chairman personally knows a firm that may well be able to help us. The Secretary advised this is a good idea but the lawyer would

not be able to use the name AERA in any individual cases, as if a case is lost there may be fall out or blacklisting in terms of member agencies who were not involved.

***Daniel Mahr***

We have all agreed to invite Daniel Mahr to an AERA meeting to give us an overview of his time in the industry and take him out to lunch for his efforts to the UK market. It was suggested that the next AERA AGM would be the best time to do this. The Secretary will write to Daniel Mahr to invite him.

Meeting closes at 13:22