Europe's largest rail companies, SNCF and Deutsche Bahn, are withdrawing UK trade support, disbanding UK teams, and reducing technical assistance, risking increased car and air travel. This threatens European rail accessibility, sustainability, and Eurostar's future, potentially losing significant sales. The industry is urged to join AERA to advocate for international rail travel.

This information, which has recently reached AERA via trusted sources within SNCF, is sounding alarm bells within the British travel trade – both retail travel agents and tour operators – many of whom use the services of SNCF French Railways, and DB German Railways, for their leisure and business customers, and of course tour operators who include rail travel to and within Europe in their package tours.

Unofficially we understand that the team within SNCF which has hitherto looked after the UK Travel Trade is being disbanded tomorrow (31st July 2026); ticketing remains possible on some GDS (Global Distribution Systems) but there is no longer any technical support associated with these ticket issues, and the same applies to the trade website mytraintravel.com which has already disappeared (it now defaults to the public site sncf-voyageurs/en/travel-with-us)

The same has already applied to Deutsche Bahn, whose office in Surbiton, established there for decades, and whose staff have looked after the British travel trade so well, closed down some time ago.

Given the almost unanimous agreement that rail travel is greener and more sustainable than competing means of transport, this can only be a retrograde step. Without the technical knowledge of how railway systems work, and in the absence of a good understanding of the railway geography of Europe, potential passengers trying to book anything other than the simplest cross-border journey themselves is fraught with difficulty and potential expense, and ultimately will only drive them (if you'll pardon the pun) to the car, and to the aeroplane, both producing far more pollutants than modern railway trains.

There is another, even more sinister, consideration. Eurostar – once proudly proclaimed as "a service by the national railways of Belgium, Britain and France," and now merged with Thalys, is effectively owned by the French, by virtue of a large majority shareholding. If the withdrawal of support for the UK travel trade by the French, is extended to Eurostar, then a very large chunk of sales will disappear – surely one of the most stupid unintended consequences of a French decision since the Maginot Line!

This news is so recent that it hasn't yet had time to sink in, let alone evoke any considered reactions. However, we would like, over the coming weeks and months, to hear from you, about your experiences and what effect it might have on your travel business.

If you do any European rail business as part of your Company's activities, we would encourage you to join AERA – the Association of European Rail Agencies – a community committed to advancing the cause of international rail travel – **and to calling out those railways who seem determined to do exactly the opposite!**

Go to www.aera.co.uk and click on "join aera," complete the form and we'll do the rest!

n.b. I should add that any opinions expressed in this posting are my own, and do not necessarily reflect the official views of AERA as an organization.

Vic Allen