

**Main Line for Europe /
Trains for Europe**

**Summary and
the study's task**



1. Summary

The rail corridor between Paris and Bratislava/Budapest is known as the Main Line for Europe (MLE). It is part of the Trans-European Network (TEN), the programme for a European network of trunk railways. A central element of TEN is the building and upgrading of rail infrastructure. The goal of the programme, which encompasses planning, construction projects and financing, is better transport within Europe.

The objective of the present study is to analyse current services on the MLE, to identify weak points in services and operations and to sketch improvement proposals for the planning process with the goal of creating attractive MLE services.

The study shows that only building new infrastructure – including lines, stations and train control systems – is not enough to assure optimal services for both passengers and freight, in particular concerning the end-to-end trip times.

Today, many categories of train operate along the MLE, each tailored to a specific market segment. They range from international high speed trains to regional trains stopping at all stations:

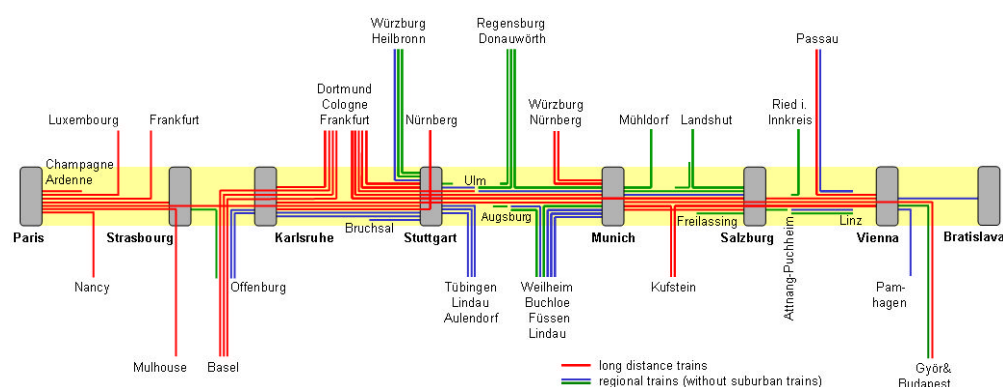


Figure 1 Trains of the Main Line for Europe

The result is that the companies operating trains on the corridor have a variety of objectives that are sometimes conflicting. This makes operations planning a highly complex process.

Also on their way are the developments being elicited by national and European law: the granting of multi-year contracts for regional train services and the competition for international passenger services resulting from liberalisation.

The train operators' various objectives and the effects of European law yield a complexity that is only increased by the technical constraints of the infrastructure and thus timetable planning. This complexity has a decisive influence on the setting of priority rules and on the resulting allocation of capacity among the train operators.

The study shows that in practice, the enormous investments in the MLE's infrastructure to reduce run times have not always yielded the desired improvements, including shorter end-to-end trip times. Indeed, despite new infrastructure, an optimal organisation of railway services and the creation of attractive connections between MLE trains and those on approach lines are often not possible.

The study also shows that travellers will only benefit from more attractive trip times and more frequent services when the development of both infrastructure and railway services – i.e. timetables – is pursued along the entire MLE in a simultaneous and coordinated way.

This result underlines the importance of taking into account the complex interrelationship between infrastructure and train services from the very start of each railway project. To this end, the infrastructure operators must coordinate all long-term timetable plans in order to determine the optimal requirements for new or better infrastructure. On this basis, they can offer the train operators high performance, high quality paths for international, national and regional trains.

This new approach will likely require further development of the current legal framework at the European and national level. In the midst of the dense and complex structure of European train services, this approach will have positive effects on rail liberalisation and make possible high performance paths for train operators. This will in turn ensure the greatest possible benefits from public investments and the best possible services for the population.

2. This study's task

The cities, regions and states (or Länder) along the Magistrale and their economic development agencies share the objective of politically supporting and when possible accelerating improvements on the Paris-Munich-Vienna-Bratislava/Budapest railway corridor.

To this end, the initiative Magistrale for Europe is also promoting improved feeder services to and from the passenger stations on the Magistrale. The ultimate goal of these efforts is to make the Magistrale more attractive and thus to enable later train operators to cover as much of their costs as possible from fare revenue.

In addition to intensive efforts to disseminate information, the initiative Magistrale for Europe also produces its own reference documentation and scientific transport studies.

Until now, discussions have centred on line segments and stations. Much less attention has been paid to the fact that in choosing a transport mode, a traveller is only marginally interested in infrastructure. The decisive choice criterion is service, including the timetable, travel time, service frequency and the ease of keeping the service pattern in one's mind. These elements must be optimised in a coordinated process.

The objectives of the present study are to illuminate these interrelationships, analyse current service offers, identify weak points in service offers and operations, sketch improvement proposals for the planning process by aiming for an attractive service offering to the customers and maximize the benefit for the general public.