

EU: BOOKING OF TRAIN TICKETS TO BE EASIER



Cross-border train journeys should be easier thanks to a new regulation adopted by the European Commission. European rail operators are required to share their data creating a standardized pan-European system.

A new regulation of the European Commission aims to standardize European ticket and timetabling systems in rail transport. When the pan-European system is applied it should be easier for passengers to plan cross-border train journeys and to buy the tickets.

According to the EC, the rail bookings should be then as easy as airline bookings in Europe. Currently, the passenger data is handled differently in each country. **Since the national booking systems do not exchange data seamlessly the cross-border rail bookings are limited.** Travelers planning longer journeys across Europe by rail thus often face problems with bookings.

According to the new regulation rail operators are required to share their data necessary for booking and buying train tickets. "This is already a common practice for many rail operators of neighboring countries," stated Petr Stahlavsky, the spokesperson of the Czech Railways. "For instance, the Czech and German IT systems are already well connected." Thus passengers in Prague can easily book their train ticket for a journey from Berlin to Cologne, reported Czech Press Agency.

However, the situation gets more complicated when booking a ticket for a destination not served by the Czech trains. "In Spain for example the Czech Railways has detailed data only about the high-speed trains," explained Stahlavsky.

Next year, Brussels will require by law the rail operators to standardize their practices and IT systems so that they can be interconnected. The data to be accessible to the rail operators across Europe as well as companies selling train tickets should include e.g. information about train stops, amount of tickets available for booking, type of train used on specific routes etc.

Trains are generally viewed as more environmentally friendly than airplanes; thus the EC wants to further support rail travel. The European commissioner for transport Siim Kallas claims that in order to persuade people to use the rail, buying the train tickets should be as easy as buying the corresponding airplane tickets.

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