

Rail 4 All with Bartosz Jakubowski and Iwona Budyh.

Alexander Stachurski: On board to the new weekly favourite podcast *Next Stop* where you will find out all there is to know about trains! 2021 is the European Year of Rail - a year to remind us that the journey is as important as the destination. I am Alexander and this is "Next Stop", a podcast by the Spring 2021 trainees of the European Committee of the Regions.

High speed trains normally have an average speed of between 100 and 200 km/h. The Eurostar between London and Paris averages 219 km/h. Imagine now how must it be to take the magnetic-levitation train in Japan, the fastest train in the world: in 2015 it reached the speed of 603 km/h.

Trains connect cities, towns and villages around Europe. People, especially those living in smaller municipalities, use the train to go to work, university, museums, to meet friends, etc. If you have ever lived outside the city you work, try to think for a while how much time of your life have you spent on trains? Probably months or even years!

A reliable infrastructure, a trustworthy train timetable and a sufficient frequency of trains are crucial for the people to see trains as an attractive mode of transport. If there are not enough available connections or people don't know if the scheduled train will get to its destination in time, people will start organizing their lives differently and switching from trains to cars. But what happens to those who cannot afford a car? They are left without any transport option, leading to what is known as transport exclusion.

Joining us today from Warsaw, in Poland, is Bartosz Jakubowski, analyst on public transport and coordinator of the transport experts team of the Jagiellonian Club Analysis Centre, a Polish think tank. He also hosts "Węzeł przesiadkowy", which means "Interchange hub", a podcast about transportation, mobility and infrastructure. Welcome Bartosz and thank you for being here with us today.

Bartosz Jakubowski: Morning. My Pleasure!

Alexander Stachurski: Bartosz, when and why did you start getting involved in the world of public transport?

Bartosz Jakubowski: Oh well. About 11 years ago I started working in the Marshall office in Lower Silesia, in Poland. I started organizing regional and local rail transportation. And there were many other things such as Przewozy Regionalne the main operator of regional public transportation rail in Poland, in that days. And then many other things. And now I'm consultant in one of the companies which are doing some studies about the rail projects in Poland. And as you said, now I am a podcaster since March 2019.

Alexander Stachurski: Thank you for that. I am a big fan of your podcast myself. I would like to ask you in the 80s and 90s the Polish government decided to cancel unprofitable connections. In those years around 9000 km of railway routes were cancelled, which accounts for around 1/3 of all routes! Why do you think they did so? Do you think it was a good decision?

Bartosz Jakubowski: Well we have to go back in the early '80s and look how the Polish railway and well how it was organized. In the communist economy, the state railways were a huge company. It was even enormous even if we look it was a communist economy. In the '80s, when the communist economy started crashing it had to go through some changes. Since many other companies were integrated in the railway company, the Polish state railway had to cut some of the passengers lines, the branch lines, the local lines, not because it was

unprofitable, it started doing that because the freight traffic, which was financing the loss that passengers traffic made. So if we look at the lines that were abandoned in 1980s and 1990s they are still in the terrain, it was just abandoned, left to the nature. It was not a policy or a system solution, it was very short-term thinking. Now we got thinking like this, sometimes, like when Silesia Metropolitan Region thinks about taking old freight lines, not from the state railways, but from coal miner railways or salt mines railways and making it into the bike lanes. So the effect, as you call, pushing people to use cars, it wasn't really intended, it just came up, with no alternatives.

Alexander Stachurski: It sure seems like short-sighted policies and economies at all costs have really hurt this country. On this note, what would be the best solutions to improve the railway system? Do you believe that rail routes will be rebuilt and people living in small towns and villages will be able to benefit from a reliable transport base?

Bartosz Jakubowski: the train connections in Poland are step by step, slowly, being rebuilt, mainly in the large metropolitan areas, by the large cities and between them, right? If we want to rebuild local lines, branch lines, to the small towns, even to the villages, we need to look at what cost so much and it's not the security or safety about the railway. It's about the interoperability. If you look at it, many local lines run on engines which are really impractical in European areas. If we really want to have branch lines, if we don't want to replace them by buses or even with nothing, which mainly happened in Poland. It is the first problem. The second one is that rebuilding the railway takes much more costs than maintaining it, even in poor conditions. We abandoned and dismantled too much to rebuild everything. And the third thing that differentiate Poland from Western states or even the Southern states is that our economy changed too much, mobility changed too much from what we had in the '70s and '80s and what we have now. So we shouldn't think about rebuilding what we had 50 years ago, but we should think about what we could build new to provide safe, fast, reliable and clean transport.

Fortunately, it seems there is a silver lining after all. Even very popular connections with trains full of passengers were cancelled. When you are talking about infrastructures being abandoned, it makes me think that also people relying on railway transport were abandoned. How did those people react? Did they agree with those decisions, or maybe did they protest?

Bartosz Jakubowski: In some cases, yes they made some local protest, they even called journalists, television or something like this, but these days as I said the state railways was an integrated company, there was no private operator who could take their lines and provide the trains. Local authorities did not have the money, these times there wasn't a local authority in the law. Of course in some cases people protested. In some cases, they just bought the cars and forgot about the railways forever. In some places the passengers transport was taken by the buses. But mainly people took all their money and bought cars.

Alexander Stachurski: Thank you for describing this process. What do you think about the role of local and regional governments in that process? And what do you think about the role of the EU?

Bartosz Jakubowski: So of course if the regional authorities are into it, if they feel that the railway is important they will do it and as you see they also have no problem with taking EU programmes, EU funds to make new quality of public transportation. I see the main role now

in education. If we think about the European Year of the Rail, I think it's mainly about the education. How rail can change communities, cities, regions and how important it is to be common. If it is common, you got the passengers.

Alexander Stachurski: This is a great point; we need to remember that using train transport is a great way of diminishing our CO2 emissions. Thank you so much for your time and thank you for being with us today Bartosz. Before finishing the interview, I would like to ask you if you have one last message to encourage our listeners to engage in the European Year of the Rail.

Bartosz Jakubowski: Well actually the railway is green if you look at the emissions. The railway emits almost nothing, it is clean right now, even if the electricity is produced from coal. If we transform our energy production into a greener one, it is ok, but it is fair enough today, it is green right now, cars aren't, we have to switch from cars to the railways.

Alexander Stachurski: It is with us Iwona Budyh from Poland. She is the president of the Transport Exclusion Association, a Polish NGO that works for making public transport universal and fights against transport exclusion. They build public awareness on this topic and collaborate with local and regional governments to make public transport accessible. Welcome Iwona, and thanks for being with us.

Iwona Budyh: Thank you very much for the invitation.

Alexander Stachurski: First of all, could you tell us about the transport exclusion phenomena? How many people are concerned? How do you define somebody who is affected by transport exclusion?

Iwona Budyh: yes, this is a very important and very good question, so thank you for that. Transport exclusion, is currently one of the most important problems in the country, as it limits active participation in social life of many residents and seems to end in other types of social exclusion in Poland but also in Europe. This phenomenon hits the most vulnerable people, the elderly, the disabled, or the poor, the hardest. The result is not only the social exclusion but also the professional and educational exclusion. Studies carried out by independent bodies and institutes show that about 15 million people in Poland are excluded in terms of transport. It is a large number, but at least 1/3 of these people did not feel transport excluded because they are used to this situation. This is really strange. As we can see over the years, until 1980 the train network was systematically electrified, here in Poland. Unfortunately, after 1989 this changed abruptly, the passenger transport system, became practically inflexible in relation to systemic transformation and as a result between 1993 and 2016 as non-urban regular bus transport lost about 75% of passengers with a decrease in the availability of the offer by as much as 50%. So exclusion is highly conditioned by the socio-economic and spatial factors.

Alexander Stachurski: wow 15 million people! Thank you Iwona for pointing that out. It is an enormous number. This is pretty much 40% of the whole Polish population. Let me follow on that, why do so many people not feel excluded from transport? Don't they believe the government has a duty to provide them with good transport opportunities?

Iwona Budych: Yes, so first of all we need to know that exclusion is very much determined by social and economic and spatial factors and we need to know who is going to use this transport and to what extent. There are social classes that are particularly vulnerable to transport exclusion. These are people who, for some reasons, do not use or cannot use individual transport. Individual transport means travelling by car, by bike, or on foot to various places of services or just to work.

Alexander Stachurski: So maybe looking from that perspective, if people are able to provide private transport for themselves, we shouldn't look at the whole situation as a problem. Or maybe there are particular challenges that they face that we should take care of.

Iwona Budych: Yes, so first of all we have to take care of the consequences of transport exclusion. But we have some groups of people that feel that they are transport excluded. The first group and it is very important is the group of school children. The municipality has to provide school access for students after the end of elementary school and high school students will only get a driver's licence at the age of 18. So at the same time usually high schools are far away and getting there on foot or by bike is not obvious. So they need to use public transport. We have to know that these people would like to go to the centre of the towns not only during school hours, but also in the evening or just go for additional trainings or courses. The second group we should take care of, are elderly people, especially women and widows, whose transportation was based on a car driven by their late husbands. This possibility with the death or disability of the husband suddenly ended. So we also have to look at overall population, where population density is high and families are multi-generational, transportation for elderly people is generally provided by their relatives.

Alexander Stachurski: It sure seems like transport exclusion do not affect everyone the same way. Do you agree that there is a gender dimension to the problem? And to elaborate on that could you tell us more about the psychological effects of transport exclusion, for example a whole family relying on one car, or a family relying on the car of their neighbour. Do you think there are difficult psychological effects to take into consideration when discussing this topic?

Iwona Budych: yes, this is another very interesting question. First of all, in the 65+ age group, the majority of men have a driving licence, among women, the proportion is still definitely lower, and I have checked yesterday preparing to do this interview that 43% of ladies between 56 and 65 in Poland have a driving licence. In the past 10 years, it was 25%. We see that it is growing, but it is still not the same. So yes I think that right now, much fewer women are drivers, but it is changing. Your second question about the psychological effects, we also have the population areas, as you mention, where the older population dominates and they are left alone, or unable to benefit from someone's help, but the first major difference is that people living in peripheral areas, including populated areas, will not have access to the same services, compared to those in metropolitan areas. This is a fundamental effect in the development of children and young people. Not always, but often we can observe the differences in culture and customs. In rural areas individual transport will always remain more convenient and will be chosen by a large proportion of travellers. Nevertheless, public transport is needed, but it must be matched and its development must be integrated with other public policies, such as education, health, social life and so on. Everyone needs to have an access to the labour market and to the basic services, but this can be provided in different ways, not necessarily, by fixed rail or bus services, but sometimes, by redistributing services and through different alternatives.

We see here in our association that there is a huge spectrum of solutions used in different places around the world and they should be complemented. People in Poland at the government should also look at this very good solutions and try to improve here in Poland the public transport.

Alexander Stachurski: thank you Iwona for raising those very good points. Unfortunately, we are running out of time and I would like to ask you one last question. What is the image of public transport? Do you think it is seen as cool or shameful? And if it is shameful do you think there is a possibility to change that or to influence it?

Iwona Budych: yes, in Poland there is long standing belief that if you travel by public transport you are poor. It sounds not really good, that if you are travelling by public transport you are poor but, yes it is. Here in Poland this long standing belief is clear. Having your own car has been seen as something normal and if you don't have your own car many people think: What went wrong? Why you can't afford your private car? Nowadays, most of the population has one car in their household and I have checked yesterday also that normal household in Poland has three cars. It is a really huge amount. It is completely different in the West, where they are travelling to work by subway, or by train or by tram and there is nothing embarrassing in this, this is the norm. This is normal situation and nobody judges another person for not having a car. So please use your public transport, it is fast, it is I would say cheap and it is ecological. This is also one of the issues that our organization is trying to change, the perception of the image of public transport in Poland. We would like to encourage people to choose the train or tram or subway in Warsaw, instead of being in huge traffic jams in the cities. While riding a tram or a subway you can read a book, you can relax, you can talk with another person. While riding a car you have to focus only on the road and stay in traffic jams, during rush hours. You have to remember that big cities and their entrances are constantly jammed. If you live in the suburbs of Warsaw, you need to spend one and a half hour in the morning to go to work. If you use for example the subway, the tram or a train you have to spend 20 minutes or half an hour and it is really faster than using a car. So we have to remember that big cities and their entrances are constantly jammed and the public transport and bicycles do not take space away from the drivers, they give space to the residents. From the ecological point of view, here after the pandemic we will promote the public transport in our campaign starting in June and we hope that many people will choose public transport rather than staying in traffic jams in their cars.

Alexander Stachurski: Congratulations! I believe this is a great initiative. When it comes to me I am already convinced. I believe that people should choose public transport and especially railways. Iwona, do you have one last message for listeners to engage in the European Year of the Rail?

Iwona Budych: yes, so please use rails, because if you are travelling by train it is much more comfortable and you can see beauty from the window of the train. I would recommend because it is really comfortable travelling by train especially right now in Poland when most of our carriages are renovated.

Pop Wagon

Hola, hola, zdravo!

Xavi: We are Jose, Xavi and Mila! Welcome again to the Pop Wagon. We are back on track!

Mila: Today we are taking you to the Balkans and back to Belgium! Stay tuned!

All speakers: LET'S GO!!

Mila: I was wondering, have you ever heard of narrow gauge railways?

Jose: No, tell me more.

Mila: Well, back in the 20th century, there was a line connecting Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro as a part of the southern railway network of narrow gauge railroads.

Jose: Ah...that rings a bell!

Mila: And you know how they called these railways?

Jose: I am all ears.

Mila: "Railways of salvation". Wondering why? They enabled better life to many people living in the southern regions of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Indeed, the train was part of everyday life and transported not only people but mail, livestock, coal and food. People even named the train and affectionately called it "Ćiro".

Xavi: Transport exclusion is still a serious problem today, but it must have been extremely difficult to be excluded back then!

Jose: Does the railway still exist?

Mila: It is decommissioned, but looking on the bright side, there has been a project seeking to renovate the existing railway line, create jobs, increase tourism and entertainment options, so let's hope for the best!

Mila: Ok guys, I think now is the moment to go to Serbia! Everybody on board?

All Speaker: YES!!!

Mila: If you are interested in this type of railway, there is a wonderful movie you have to watch! It is called "Life is a miracle" set in the last days of Yugoslavia. It tells the story of a railway worker who builds a scenic railway to bring in the tourists, shutting his eyes to the war. And what is worse for tourism than war?

Xavi: Wait, is this the one with a breath-taking railway shaped as the number eight?

Mila: Yes! That one! It goes around the entire mountain, slowly ascending towards the peak. That is where its name, Sarganska osmica, comes from - word osmica meaning number eight.

Jose: It would be wonderful to have a romantic journey through the past; please tell me we can visit that one!

Mila: Well, although it was closed, its reconstruction in the 21st century was made possible by the support of the movie director Emir Kusturica. So, if you are up to some of the most stunning views in Serbia I recommend you to take this train. And what is more! Station buildings have been restored so that they look exactly the way they looked in 1925! Impressive, isn't it?

Xavi: Wow!

Jose: Great! Road trip to the Balkans it is!

Xavi: One tip! While on the train, if you like classical music, try listening to "Poème des Rivages by Vincent D'Indy, a French compose. More precisely "Horizons verts, Falconara" which takes you on a pleasant train ride in Italy.

Jose: And now, it is high time to recommend a great museum and exhibition for all of you fellow trainspotters!

J: Know the phrase "when in Rome, do what Romans do"? So, when in Brussels, do what Bruselaars do and go to the Royal museum of fine arts of Belgium. Starting in October, you will be able to visit the exhibition EUROPALIA - Tracks to Modernity, an artistic and historical journey regarding trains through works by major artists of the 19th and 20th century such as Monet, Severini, Léger, Magritte etc.

Xavi: Can't wait!

Mila: Me neither!

Jose: Ok, thank you all for listening!

Xavi: Wait, wait! We can't leave without the quote of the day!

Jose: Oh yes, you are right!

Xavi: Here is one to keep you on track! "The train is a small world moving through a larger world" by Elisha Cooper.

Mila: And unfortunately, we are now moving to the end of the podcast. Once again, thank you for listening!

All speakers: Adios, adeu, dovidenja!

Alexander Stachurski: And on that note, the forth episode of "NEXT STOP" comes to an end. Thank you to all our listeners and don't forget to follow us and give us your feedback on twitter, facebook, and instagram. Remember, a reliable railway system is necessary to fight against transport exclusion and it also does so while being the greener possible alternative. My name is Alexandre and please stay with use until we reach the "Next Stop", dovidenja!

