

Towards a climate-neutral EU with MEP Javi López Fernandez

Julia Vazquez: All aboard to your new weekly favourite podcast “Next Stop” where you will find out all there is to know about trains! 2021 is the European Year of the Rail - a year to remind us that the journey is as important as the destination. My name is Julia and this is Next Stop, a podcast by the Spring 2021 trainees of the European Committee of the Regions.

Did you know that hydrogen-powered trains are apparently the most sustainable trains in the world? Their by-product is water and they give off zero carbon emissions. There are two hydrogen trains in Germany, and they may be coming soon to Austria!

Trains are among the most sustainable and efficient forms of transport. Night trains and high-speed rail in particular are serious contenders to replace short-distance flights. According to a 2019 report by the International Energy Agency, high-speed trains can reduce by 80% aviation transport on the same routes.

Joining us today is the Member of the European Parliament, Javi Lopez Fernandez, from Barcelona, and member of the Socialists and Democrats group. Javi is a member of several distinct committees at the European Parliament, including the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, and he is Chair of the Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly. Javi, benvingut! Moltes gracies for being here with us today. Thank you so much for having agreed to do this.

Javi López: it is a pleasure to be here and to share with you this comments and this analysis of trains with you, and I think it is a great initiative your podcast.

Julia Vázquez: Thank you very much, that is great. Javi, you are a Member of the European Parliament, you must travel very often between Brussels and Strasbourg. Do you normally do this trip by train? And do you travel very often by train?

Javi López: Yes, in fact we have this Parliament trains to do this Brussels-Strasbourg trips, and well, I am from Barcelona and I usually go to Madrid, and we have a fantastic Line Madrid-Barcelona by train, and this is something that I use often. And also we have a good experience with trains, especially I remember well an Interrail, that is like a train summer ticket that you can do and I did when I was at university, connecting different cities in Europe, and this is something that I have in mind also.

Julia Vázquez: I assume that when you travel from Strasbourg to Brussels, or the other way around, you also pass through Luxembourg and that must be a very beautiful trip, and the even exciting having the chance to be in three countries in like three hours and in the same day. It is great to hear that you have experienced the interrailing trip and think we should encourage young people to take it, because it is wonderful and it is a very enriching experience.

Javi López: yeah, of course, and also I take planes, but I prefer to use the train and this interrailing experience is a fantastic experience, I think it is already working and it is a fantastic excuse to know better Europe and contact people and doing it by train.

Julia Vázquez: Absolutely, I totally agree with you. Ok, one of the purposes of the European Year of the Rail is to promote rail as a sustainable mode of transport, rail is largely electrified and emits far less CO₂ than equivalent travel by road or air. Since you are a member of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee, what is your view of the role of trains in delivering the Green Deal goals and achieving climate neutrality by 2050?

Javi López: basically we should live a new golden age of trains if we want to move on in our GD goals, especially the decarbonisation of our economy, as you know, transport is one of the backbones of our EU economy and has negative consequences in terms of pollution, congestion, climate change, noise accidents, and if we think about a different transport instrument that we have. Train is the most efficient in terms of climate efficiency, but also with less impact in other dimensions. The rail is responsible less than 0,5% of greenhouse emission, and we can use a lot, not only for citizens, but also for goods because basically we do all the international trade transport by ships. Rail's green credentials speak for themselves and show that this mode of transport is a game-changer or could be a game changer, and then we need European institutions, states, local institutions trying to bet for this transport. It is from the past but should be for the future.

Julia Vázquez: Definitely, I think it is super interesting that you just mentioned transport for goods, because normally when we think about rail, we think about tourism, movement of persons, but also there is a o of movement of goods, both inside the EU and also to third countries, and that requires a lot of transportation by train or by ship or by plane, and I think it is quite important to promote the transport of those goods by train if we want to reach climate neutrality by 2050.

Javi López: Yes, basically we use ships now, megaships, to do this international trade transport, but recently we saw the weaknesses of this mode of transport and the risks with some accidents that we saw recently this year. We move on with bad this kind of transport, train is gree, safe, also for goods should be one of our guidelines for transport for the next years and also for our climate poicy that should change our basic modes of transports in Europe.

Julia Vázquez: Absolutely, I totally agree with you. However, trains can also have a negative impact on the landscape of regions and cities, especially in the rural ones, that may affect biodiversity and can alter ecosystems. How can we minimize that impact?

Javi López: First of all, using the signs and the signs provide us technology to minimize this kind of impact, also it is really important that when we build new lines and so on and we use our stakeholders, the local network of institutions to work other and to decide together where should be organised the new lines. But I will underline that it is always a matter of costs balance. It obviously has costs to build new lines of trains, but if we balance the costs of new lines of

trains and we compare it to the impact that airports or ports can have in our life, in terms of pollution and so on, the train is the winner in terms of efficiency and balances and costs, we use the signs to minimize this kind of cost and also talk with local institutions to organise and design the maps, but if we have all the map, if we have the whole landscape in terms of costs of different benefits and costs of different modes of transport, the train becomes the winner.

Julia Vázquez: that is great to know, and it is really important as well, because sometimes we only tend to focus in the positive outcomes and we forget to realise that they may also have a negative impact and it is important to see the whole picture, to do a balance of the consequences that might have an action, so it is great to see that even though it might have a side effect still the train wins.

Let's move now to the international dimension of rail, Javi since you are Chair of the Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, member of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence, member of the Delegation to the EU-Mexico Joint Parliamentary Committee. You have been truly engaged in human rights and foreign affairs issues, particularly regarding Latin America. Do you see a possibility for the EU to promote the use of trains in other continents to contribute to the fight against climate change on a global scale?

Javi López: Yes, sure. Well, one of our main goals in foreign affairs for the next decade should be to cooperate to fight climate change, and especially in a region like Latin America with one of the biggest ponds of biodiversity in the world is extremely important that we work in this line, especially because the region is really committed with this goals, the Paris Agreement and so on, and if we want to work in our trains in Europe also we can use our new technology, our expertise, our background in this field to export to other parts. We have interesting projects in Latin America: we have the train Maya in Mexico, one of the biggest train projects in the world, we have Central Bi-Oceanic railway that now Brazil is building, and also a macro-line that try to connect a continent. And we have a lot of things to do: information, sharing technology and also using our companies in the region and this is something that we could do and we can do if we put it in our agenda in institutional relations.

Julia Vázquez: I think it is quite important to think about the GD globally and not just in the EU, because after all it doesn't matter that much what we do in Europe if in other third countries the fight against climate change is not ambitious enough it is going to have consequences in the whole world and that is what we are trying to fight against, climate change in the whole world, not just in a continent or in a region, so it is great to know that the GD goals are also considered and taken into account very seriously in the foreign policy of the EU.

Javi López: Yes, of course and also it is a great opportunity because, you know, the world is a quite hostile place right now with competition between great powers, it is specially the tension between China and the United States it is in the centre of all international relations. But when we deal with climate change we always move to a land of cooperation, competition is not possibility, and it is a great opportunity to defend multilateralism, defend cooperation, defend

norms and values as our method of working in the international arena, and for that reason climate change is so important in our foreign affairs. Not only because it is important the climate to save our planet, we have to think about our next generations and in the next years our next generations will enjoy or suffer the consequences of the decisions that we will take in the next years, also because it introduces a really positive method of work, international institutions, dialogue, norms, multilateralism, and for that reason it is so important.

Julia Vázquez: I can only agree with you on that. Alright Javi, how much are you looking forward to your next train ride and do you have a last message to encourage our listeners to use the train more often?

Javi López: Well, I think it is a great adventure the trip itself. I would encourage if we have young listeners I encourage them to take the interrail, as an experience. To be honest, this weekend I was thinking in my holidays and I was checking if we have night trains, Madrid-Lisbon, for example, because this is something that existed pre-Coronavirus, it is not restarted yet, but we have this kind of experiences. I also saw the last days that new capitals will be connected by night trains and it is also an opportunity. The trip is part of the adventure, not only the place to visit.

Julia Vázquez: That is it, and now that we mention night trains we very often forget about them but they work greatly, because you travel while you rest and then you arrive at the place of the destination full rested and ready to discover places, to explore the area or to work or to do anything else, so that is really good.

Alright Javi, thank you so much for your encouraging words and for being with us today, it has been a great pleasure to have you here.

Javi López: thank you for having it, has been pleasure.

Julia Vázquez: Julia Vázquez: thank you.

Pop Wagon section

Mila Ćorić and Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: Hola! Szdravo! We are Mila and Jose.

Mila Ćorić: Welcome back to our Pop Wagon!

Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: The moment that all of you have been really waiting for.

Mila Ćorić: Once again, we bring to you some bites of culture to entertain your trip.

Mila Ćorić, and Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: Let's go!

Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: You know? We have already talked about cinema and music. But what I really like to do while travelling by train, is to read. During my trips a book can never be missing in my bag. But my point is that trains have been used for many authors to create legendary stories. One example is Murder on the Orient Express from Agatha Christie.

Mila Ćorić: Famous one.

Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: Exactly, even the name of the train is in the title of the novel. In the story, the detective Hercules Poirot must solve a murder that have been committed in a sleeper train. It was a great idea to build a mystery story in that scenario. We can all imagine the claustrophobic effect of the wagons in the characters.

Mila Ćorić: Agatha Christie was really responsible. She could have set the action in a plane, but she preferred a train to reduce the carbon footprint of the novel.

Julia Vázquez: Hey guys, I also have something cultural to share.

Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: Wait, wait, wait. Julia? What are you doing here? This is our section now.

Mila Ćorić: Come on! She is very passionate about trains too, don't be a party pooper.

Julia Vázquez: Yes, I am, and since one of the aims of the European Year of the Rail is bringing EU countries closer, I thought it would be worth mentioning the great Oresund bridge, which connects two different cities in two different countries: Malmo in Sweden and Copenhagen in Denmark.

Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: Mmmm very interesting, but you know we are talking about trains, not bridges.

Julia Vázquez: I know! The bridge contains a very important railway tube. Thanks to it, mobility has significantly increased between both countries, with two-thirds of passengers using the train.

Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: What does it have to do with culture?

Julia Vázquez: On one side the city of Copenhagen is full of references to Christian Andersen's stories, including a small statue of the Little Mermaid. And on the other side of the bridge, there is the vibrant city of Malmo, host of the Eurovision Song Contest in 1992 and 2013. There is even a TV series based on the Oresund Bridge and Henning Mankel novels are based in the region, so of course it is perfectly suitable for this section!

Mila Ćorić: I agree. With only one train we can connect so much culture!

Now that we have talked about Sweden, have you heard about how they are reusing the body heat of the commuters passing through Stockholm's Central Station to warm another building that is just across the road?

Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: What?

Mila Ćorić: Just as you heard it. Jerhusen is a real estate company in Stockholm. They have placed heat exchangers in the ventilation system of the station to convert the excess body heat into hot water.

Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: So, they prepare tea out of it?

Mila Ćorić: No! The water is pumped to the heating system in the nearby building to keep it warm. Not only is the system environmentally friendly but it also lowers the energy costs of the office block by as much as 25%.

Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: Smart guys these Swedish.

Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: Well... it seems that the Pop Wagon is arriving at its next stop.

Mila Ćorić: It is!! But we cannot leave without saying "The quote of the day". As Julia brought the topic of Nordic countries, this time, the quote belongs to the Danish writer Piet Hein: "*You will always be late for the previous train, and always in time for the next*".

Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: I like it! What we can learn from it is that we have lost many opportunities in the past. Let's try to be on time to catch the train of the Green Revolution.

Mila Ćorić, and Jose Manuel Llopis Ortiz: Doviđenja! Adios!

Julia Vázquez: And we come to an end to another Next Stop episode. Make sure to take part in any way you can in the European Year of Rail and don't forget to follow us on twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Remember that trains are a climate friendly alternative either to your daily commuting or your travel plans. My name is Julia and thank you for listening. See you at the Next Stop!