

**Connecting Europe" w/ Herald Ruijters (NL/Director at DG MOVE; TEN-T) & Slaven
Klobucar, managment of EGTC Platform, Cross-border cooperation, European Territorial
Cooperation**

All aboard to your new weekly favorite 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. I'm Conor and this is a podcast by the Spring 2021 trainees of the European Committee of the Regions.

The Trans Europe Express train was founded in 1957 and ceased in 1995 brought cities together by offering an international 1st class only train service. During its peak in the 1970s, this European network of trains connected up to 130 cities. Given its luxury dimension, these services started to fade away with time, giving space to more 2nd class wagons and connections. They also started to be replaced by intercity and high speed trains, and air travel. But recently the German transport minister, spoke about how the network of routes that flourished in the 1960s and 70s could be the model for a new set to connections from 2025.

Host: The Connecting Europe Express is one of the European Year of Rail most emblematic initiatives. Starting in Autumn in Lisbon, this train will pass through 40 different cities bringing train travel closer to the people. In 2016, only 6% of rail passenger traffic was international. Therefore, this initiative hopes to raise awareness, connect people, businesses and goods in a greener and sustainable way. In fact, the EU already agreed on the new Connecting Europe Facility, worth 33.7 billion EUR, as part of the next EU budget cycle.

Host: We are grateful to be joined today by Herald Ruijters. Mr. Ruijters is the Director of the Directorate for Investments, Innovative and Sustainable Transport in (DG MOVE) of the European Commission. He will be talking to us today about the Connecting Europe Express, which will be one of the European Year of the Rail most visible and exciting initiatives. So, thanks very much! Thanks for coming here Mr. Ruijters! And we are delighted to have you on the Next stop podcast! And to get things started, can you tell me what was the inspiration behind the Connecting Europe Express and how will The European Year of Rail be a turning point in the journey towards a truly connected rail networking Europe?

Guest: Thank you very much and thank you for having me in this podcast. I am delighted to be with you. Of course, inspiration comes from let's say sometimes let's say fond memories of long journeys across borders but to be honest first of all it is because there is a Green Deal and in modern days and they are the most climate friendly modes...best energy consumption and so we really need to put forward

the new strategy which...and we have of course new proposals coming...and then it is European Year of rail so what do we want to do else, I mean it is...conference about 3000, 5000 people gathering a month hence we thought we are going to the people.

Host: Yeah, it is a great initiative. The launch of the Connecting Europe express, one of our former guests Anna was speaking about it and was really excited...was really good as well...like The Connecting Europe Express is one of the European Year of Rail 2021's most emblematic initiatives. It is going to be stopping in cities and regions right across the EU. Like with each destination what will happen? Now it is stopping in number of different cities and how can local people in each city be involved and how can people interested in organising events along the route can get involved in the initiative also?

Guest: The train that is starting to ride in Lisbon on the second of September...October will stop in many many cities, we have 69 longer stops to see capitals and major cities alongside of this long journey throughout all member states in EU. What we want to do is to connect as many people around that journey...of course we can completely do is organize events alongside journey, so we are organizing 5 events ourselves in Lisbon, Bucharest, Berlin...Ljubljana and...all arrivals to these cities by...and there will be many more organized by the national, local and regional authorities by the rail companies and by other groupings who find an interest in this journey. In the beginning we were very much restrained in the capacity by...40 people...but we hope we can widen the capacity event and that also citizens can travel along...and that all citizens can visit the events as far as possible that we are organizing alongside. This is also a direct dimension that will connect citizens with train and what we are doing in policy.

Host: That is really exciting, to see that...The Connecting Europe Express we will actually be doing that in certain way going across different cities and different borders and normal people like are gonna be able to come and visit and those two carriages that is really a cool point, it is like a small museum in a way, so that is nice. Obviously a big thing within European green deal like sustainability and how friendly the rail is for the environment. So, something I wanted to ask you like in my lifetime and I am sure in a lot of other young people's lifetime we always jump on a plane because it is it could be 20 EUR for a ticket from one capital to another, so like obviously this needs to change if we want to be more sustainable. What are the challenges the rail face to be a favorite mode of transport, rather than the plane and the aviation sector?

Guest: I think that rail carries more of...in its let's say...infrastructure that they have, I mean you sometimes wonder why...they should really like make full use and we need to tackle a number of issues...liberalization, packages, but we still seem to not get to final, what is also really hampering... capacity.... but the rail is very...it is like it is almost...old, you have to put your slot in 2 years before.

You have no flexibility there and if you really want to go...and have a very flexible...there should be a new mechanism around that....and nevertheless...because...comfort...you are more at ease... you don't go through many controls, but still it is quite expensive...so we also need to look.... competition.... you can say there is ain order to meet people's expectations and to come to a level....yeah the train is also an expression of I would say constructive criticism.

Host: Moving forward I think it is probably one of the things that will probably change a lot in our lifetime, the switch from everyone picking the airplanes and maybe taking rail to different cities, being from Ireland haven't the opportunity to take by rail by...midi to like the centre of Paris it is very exciting, and I think, I don't know, I hope it is more accessible...and to see it changing, moving on to a different topic, this is a more of a technical thing, the Ten-T network. For any listeners who wouldn't know about the Ten-T network its an attempt to encourage the transition from national networks to a truly integrated European network, it is called the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) it addresses the implementation and development of a Europe-wide network of railway lines, roads, inland waterways, maritime shipping routes, airports and railroad terminals. My question for you is obviously there is a lot of goals and a lot of ambition with Ten-T network, but how realistic is do you think is the most important goal of 2030 and the secondary network by 2050 which can remove missing links, is it realistic, you think we are on track to achieve these goals?

Guest:...we are on track and that is also why this train is really important...along this project...because ...all of the most important project we are cofounding right now, you said we really focus on cross border because we feel that this is where we can make a difference and we where we can make a difference...border cities anyhow...were is lacking to do a last bit across the border...we are building at this moment... and many of these projects will see the light in the upcoming decades and...I already spoke earlier on projects connecting the Baltic with Poland...need to be finished in the second half of this decade...I will be speaking the links between Lisbon, Madrid and France... I could highlight the links between...Berlin that Germany... also will be ready in the second half of this decade, there are many of these kinds projects which are under construction at the time as we speak, so we are ...quite large, more than 90 percent finished and we will propose also real ambition in the new proposal...to go one step beyond...because citizens are asking also for...high speed linking the capitals, linking the airports and we have to accompany that.

Host: Yeah, definitely, not a straightforward answer question because it is very difficult, there are so many different factors, building like a rail network or building a transport network takes obviously years and the future is bright in my eyes a bit and it is very exciting time and I am sure for being in DG Move you are seeing so many changes sustainability so it is really cool to see and that leads me on to my final question for you. Yes, so, obviously, the connecting Europe Express is one of the main events of the

EYR and I suppose like how optimistic are you in like terms of this journey towards creating more sustainable transport and mobility system not only in the connecting Europe express and how great this event is going to be but also in terms of the future in real life, how and what are your thoughts on that?

Guest: I am an optimist. Life is too short not to be optimistic. My firm belief is that we are here to make things, becoming a better place and there is too much pessimism around already. It is difficult I mean I am not going to say that business is easy right, it is not, this is about huge investments, about cross border cooperation, about tackling old monopolies, about getting real improvement for citizens and for all... So real ambition for a new high speed network and real ambition also to realize the...new life that would be set, so yes I hope that the CEE will be visible, what we are doing...what is positive and what needs to be kept around still a bit. I am looking forward to a very long journey!

Host: That is great to hear, thanks so much for being here with us today and coming to next stop podcast. Working in a transport area myself and getting the euro view on things is really exciting and it is good to see great optimism, great hope for the future, just wanted to say thanks from all the trainees here at the Committee of the regions and we hope that we can enhance the EYR with our podcast and I can't wait my...connecting Europe Express trains myself.

Guest: Thank you very much, it is a great pleasure to be with you, also on that side I would like really to encourage you, I am happy that you do this as group thing...had been 92 myself I can only say get going with it because there is a still green...in Europe and it never stops.

Host: Thanks a million for being with us. Really appreciate it.

Host: In this next stage of the podcast, we are joined today by Slaven Klobučar, he works for the COR and the EGTC platform, The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) allows public entities of different Member States to come together under a new entity with full legal personality. The EGTC Regulation was established in 2006 and was the first European cooperation structure with a legal personality defined by the European Law. So thank very much Slaven for coming on the podcast today, so I suppose my first question is what exactly is the EGTC and how does it operate?

Guest: Thanks Conor, it is nice to be here with you. The EGTC is really the first legal framework that allows local region authorities from across borders to create the joint legal body well that might sound quite dry actually has very significant consequences for cutting administrative burden while is many of the obstacles that exist in cross border cooperation because this tool really it is really essentially a tool that allows local regional authorities to create one legal entity that is recognized by all the member states under the EU law and it started gonna have its own budget, its own staff, its own property and managed

the project on its territory as one entity under one legislation of the member state normally the one where the city is located, so this really helps cut a lot of problems that the local and regional authorities have and we have this tool for roughly 15 years in place and for last 5 years we have seen really the strength of this tool because in the first 10 years it took quite a while to set up and gain experience but now we see many EGTCs creating joined European universities creating very large scale infrastructure projects some of them discussed today but they are also sharing daycare between regions... touristic... really anything that you could imagine that EGTCs are actually doing on the ground so basically it is the tool that has most further cross border cooperation in the EU but not only cross border cooperation but also transnational cooperation between different member states because the EGTCs don't necessarily have to be sharing a border they can be from any member state as long as they fulfill some of the basic requirements.

Host: That is really interesting, and like I suppose for me, as I have never really heard of EGTC before coming to the COR so it is pretty cool to see that they can...these kinds of entities that will support people like overall this EGTC platform, like what is the overall goal for improving cross border relations in Europe?

Guest: So basically, the EGTC platform here is really just to train EGTCs to point them out where the funding opportunities exist, for them to share experiences because what happens with all the EU projects is basically the results that they have with the project is normally should be free to citizens but also should be free to be shared with Europeans and different European entities, so we have this for example very interesting example related to transport that also in...involves rail, is in the EGTC in ... which is the Spanish French border, and basically they realized there were different kind of transport means going across border, but there was no coordination, there was no way at citizens to plan out their trip across the border because simply the systems were not compatible so they have obtained a EU funding to create a project that now allows for all the providers of transport to put in their itineraries, their timetables, into this program but also to meet and maybe harmonize the time schedules and now you can actually plan out your trip across the border by easily, for free for all the citizens of that regions now what we see this EGTC sharing this technology with other EGTCs so the same thing would be replicated along EU borders. So this is something we are trying to assist and this is really the value of EGTC platform but we don't really fund them but there is quite sufficient funding available already.

Host: Ok, and obviously the next stop podcast we talked about trains as you imagined there about in Spain the EGTC there, but also I understand that there are 2 EGTCs in Dresden, Prague and Eurodistrict Pamina, could you maybe elaborate a bit on them?

Guest: Yes, these 2 EGTCs are very interesting I mean is a new region basically what they are trying to do is facilitate then intensify cooperation in support of a balanced and more sustainable territorial development what they have noticed is that transport links are simply not efficient in that regions across border because there is quite a lot of movement people daily across borders go to work, to go to universities so basically they are quite championing in direction toward slower rail links which are called missing links which are sometimes not really fully recognized by the EU or member states, it is normally given more visibility and funding to large scale projects such as big railway, fast lanes as well as highways and similar but we also have to look how do we not with that much money improves smaller links along the links so we can reestablish the rail connections however now with the new trend going towards green Europe this is becoming not acceptable and people want to have a car, private cars so this comes back into the work of cross border regions where there is clear need to return this links that used to exist and there on the other hand we have the other EGTC you mentioned, that is the cooperation of the city of Dresden in Saxony and Prague in CR, so basically the common aim of CR and the free state of Saxony was to improve the rail railway link between Dresden and Prague and this is because all the estimates they have done in the past few years have shown...traffic in the region as well as passenger traffic will considerably increase deepening the integration so the passengers would like to see a shorter journey times but also a better service for the trade transport so basically they have created an EGTC as a tool that could facilitate this construction and it is a really a large scale project which is the new plan railway lined outside of Elba valley which will reduce the travel time passenger long distance transport between ...Prague with currently more than 2 hours to less than 1 hour so there are 2 really parts of that railway that will be constructed one that speeds up to 200 km/h and the other part to up to 350 km/h which will considerably cut the time, so we believe this is a great example thatPrague something that will serve as an example of great practice what EGTC really can provide for to local and regional authorities. And in this case there is also a high involvement of the Deutsche Bahn in the whole project so we also see that the public companies such as DB see a great value in a tool such as EGTC.

Host: That is great to see that like they are improving the cross border regions and improving the travel time because I suppose that is what people care about like in terms of how easy for them it is to travel between cities and that is quite powerful to see that the COR and the EGTCs are helping there, so my final question for you Slaven is just that within the rail industry how can the EGTCs be utilized more and more moving forward?

Guest: yeah well I mean, it is just like with these 2 EGTCs that a structure that will implement construction of railway across the border while having it under legislation of one member state many of the aspects of the building but there are certain issues with EGTCs, EGTCs do still do not resolve all that legal obstacles and at the moment we do have a proposal in the Council by the EC that was already approved by the EP and strongly supported by the COR and that is European border mechanism that

would allow for even greater integration and especially would benefit such large scale projects as maybe what it will essentially allow is to carry on these projects as...a territory of one member state and not really on 2 that is essentially aim of such a tool which would cut down costs immensely in EGTC has already cut costs but it cannot address all the problems that such large projects face so we would really need that complimentary tool as this European cross border mechanism would be.

Host: That is great to hear and I think it is an opportunity to be very powerful and utilize more and more, we wanted to get you on the podcast basically because it is something that a lot of people even within the COR and in Europe wouldn't know about, so thanks very much for taking the time and coming on the podcast and hopefully more and more people within the rail industry could start utilizing this. Thanks very much for coming.

Guest: Thank you for having me, bye.

Host: No problem.

POP WAGON

All speakers: Zdravo! Hola! Hola!

J: Welcome back dear Pop Wagens!! We are Mila, Jose and Xavi. And we are pleased to connect trains with culture again!

M: In the same way that the Connecting Europe Express has the objective to bring people together, culture has a powerful connection power.

X: Knowledge does not take place, so please, allow us to fill your brains with a bit of information. Are you ready?

M & J: LET'S GO!!

[Train whistle effect]

[Pause]

J: Talking about connection, I cannot stop thinking about how many times I have seen in movies cool story lines in which people connect in one way or another inside trains.

X: Indeed, we already mentioned in previous episodes how trains are suitable scenarios to develop different fictions.

J: Before everyone had a phone with internet and WhatsApp, what could you do during a long and boring ride?

M: Taking a siesta?

J: Yes, that's also true, but a movie about someone taking a siesta would have been very boring... What I meant is talking to people. When you start talking with strangers in a train something magic can happen. As it happened to the characters of Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy in the movie *Before Sunrise*. This film of the director Richard Linklater tells the story of two young travelers that met on a train trip to Wien and they fall in love while walking around the city.

M: Aaaa yes! So romantic!

X: In movies not only new relations are born. The bittersweet side of love can be experienced when a train leaves, as we learnt from *Brief Encounter* and *The Secret in their Eyes*.

J: I know, but I preferred to talk about the beautiful stories, party pooper...

[Pause]

M: You know guys, no better opportunity than today to talk about the Trans Europe Express.

J: Mmmm, Mila, we already talked about it, during the podcast. Didn't you listen?

M: Of course I listened, smartass. I am not referring actually to the train, but to the music album that the German Electronic music pioneers Kraftwerk released in 1977.

X: An album with the name of a train?

M: Exactly, the disco was named after the Trans Europ Express railway, that Connor mentioned before. Their objective was to celebrate Europe as a whole and to meditate about the disparities between reality and appearance. They even recorded some sounds from railway bridges to include them in the songs.

[Pause]

J: Cool, now I want to listen to it, let's play it here...

X: Wait wait wait wait!! We can't do that!! Did you ever hear about copyright? What we can do instead, is to say The Quote of the Day!!

J: Mmmm, not that interesting, but ok...

X: "Many times the wrong train took me to the right place", from the Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho.

M: That's indeed inspiring.

J: I see that we are approaching to the next station. So it's time to say goodbye to our Pop Wagens. Hope you will join us in the next trip next week!!

All speakers: Adios, dovidenja, adeu!!

Host: And this brings us to the end of the episode. Thanks so much for listening and make sure you follow us on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter. And also if you get the opportunity try jump on one of the Connecting Europe Express trains this autumn. My name is Conor Gilligan and I will see you at the Next Stop.