



**European Committee
of the Regions**

Next Stop a European Year of Rail podcast

**Final report on the Spring 2021
YFactor edition**

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Introduction

The Spring 2021 Trainees at the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) invested their talents, ideas and expertise in an innovative format for the Y Factor Project. For the first time since the creation of the project, we abandoned the concept of a conference or an online event to develop the ambitious idea of producing a podcast of eight episodes around topics connected to the European Year of the Rail. The Podcast, entitled "Next Stop", is entirely produced by CoR trainees divided in four teams responsible for the general coordination, research, production and communication and outreach.

The theme developed in this project lies at the intersection of several themes close to the values and priorities defended by the CoR:

- Bringing Europe closer to people
- Managing fundamental societal transformations: responding to the major transformations our regions, cities, towns and villages face today
- Cohesion: putting the EU at the service of its people and their places of residence

More specifically, we chose the European Year of the Rail, as the perfect base on which we have built our thematic episodes, for several reasons:

It is diverse and inclusive ⇒ It can benefit everyone. Businesses and freight carriers can shift to rail and benefit from low-cost, increasingly competitive offers to transport their goods all over Europe – all while reducing their carbon footprint.

It is green and sustainable ⇒ Rail is largely electrified and emits far less CO₂ than equivalent travel by road or air.

It is affordable, comfortable, innovative and safe ⇒ Whether you are on holidays or travelling for business, you can rely on rail to get you safely to your destination. It is the safest land transport mode with the lowest incidence of fatal accidents.

The purpose of our project is twofold. On the one hand, we want to reach an audience as wide as possible, in order to promote trains as a sustainable, inclusive and affordable means of transportation and to raise awareness on their role for cross-border mobility and enhanced cohesion among European Regions and Cities.

On the other hand, this project is expected to raise awareness towards EU policy-makers on the disparities in railways infrastructures across Europe and to encourage the development of this safe and sustainable means of transportation to foster cohesion, especially in remote regions. Therefore, the project is set to reach three specific targets:

- promote rail as a sustainable, innovative and safe mode of transport, in particular by highlighting the role of rail as a game changer to help reaching the Union's climate neutrality objective by 2050 and by reaching out to the wider public, especially young people;
- highlight the European cross-border dimension of rail, which brings citizens closer together, allows them to explore the Union in all its diversity, fosters cohesion and contributes to integrate the Union internal market;
- enhance the contribution of rail to the Union's economy, industry and society, covering aspects related to regional development, industrial competitiveness, sustainable tourism, innovation, employment, education, youth and culture, and improving accessibility for people with disabilities.

In this final report, we are going to present the topics of our eight episodes, based on the research and corroborated by the interactions with our guests. Moreover, we are going to summarize our communication strategy and the partnerships we have formed in this journey. Finally, we are going to present our team and report on the budget for the realization of this project.

Episodes

Episode 1 | Getting back on Track after COVID with Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg

For the first episode of the podcast, Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg, Member of the European Parliament and rapporteur for the European Year of Rail, was invited to reflect on how to get back on track after the current pandemic. Due to the restrictive national measures of containment, the number of both domestic and international rail passengers decreased considerably in 2020. At least 50% drop in domestic travel and almost 100% drop in cross border travel by rail is observable¹. The transport and tourism sectors were among the most affected by the pandemic. However, the rail sector is expected to experience a quick recovery after the pandemic². The European Year of Rail could contribute to accelerate this process.

Furthermore, given the beginning of the new cycle of the Multiannual Financial Framework and the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plans, now is the time to rethink the transport system and improve it to be more efficient and sustainable.

Ms Deparnay, who was just arriving by train from Berlin, shared with us her thoughts on possible solutions to the current challenges facing the railway sector. From a harmonised ticket system, track access charges, to better cooperation between aviation and railway sectors.

When comparing the potential of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRP), the rapporteur noticed that the Recovery and Resilience Plans had a better start in light of the minimum threshold of 37% of expenditure to be directed to climate investment, where a few countries already pledged to invest in the digitalisation of the sector.

A key point for the future of the transport system is the cooperation between each mode of transport. We reflected in particular in the aviation industry and the railway sector. Being more sustainable, the railway sector is a key player to reduce our carbon emissions. These two sectors could work together in particular to replace short-distance flights with high-speed and night trains, as we need to pay attention to issues such as energy and fuel. However, Ms Deparnay admitted as well the need for better infrastructures.

When it comes to the local and regional level, the rapporteur shared some best practices to promote the use of rail, such as creating climate friendly alternatives for the last mile, or subsidizing economically irrelevant areas. Most interesting, taking into consideration the psychology of transport, the key moment when people think about their mobility is when they are moving or starting a new job. Thus, public transport companies could offer discounts and promotions to encourage people to be more sustainable.

¹ International Union of Railways, 'MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 - First estimation of the global economic impact of Covid-19 on Rail Transport' (2020)

² [Andreas Schwilling, 'Global rail market continues to grow despite drop in transport volumes due to COVID-19' \(Rolandberger.com, 2 October 2020\)](#), accessed 9th June 2021.

Finally, Ms Deparnay encouraged everyone to take part in the European Year of Rail, to rediscover the pleasure of travelling by train, to get in touch with local decision-makers and ask for improvements for passengers' rights, and to share personal experiences.

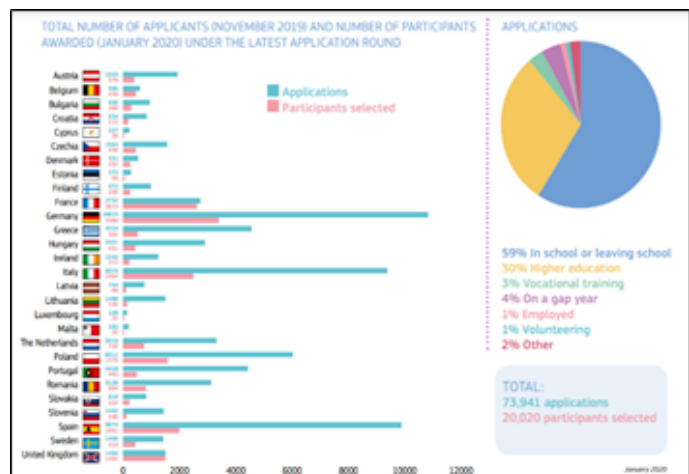
Episode 2 | DiscoverEU with Lucy Allan and Vincent-Immanuel Herr

From Sweden to Rome and from Paris to Warsaw, today we have an unprecedented ability to travel and explore our continent and the treasures it harbours. Travelling is cheaper, faster, and easier than ever; yet, only one out of three EU citizens travel outside their home country per year and – according to our episode's guest Vincent-Immanuel Herr – almost 40% of European citizens have never left their home country. Our DiscoverEU episode aims to encourage Europeans to travel by bringing awareness to the richness of Europe and the travel possibilities it has to offer. Specifically, the episode focuses on travelling sustainably by train and the DiscoverEU Interrail pass contest, which offers 18-year-old EU citizens an opportunity to win a free Interrail pass.

We were very lucky to have Vincent-Immanuel Herr join our podcast. Together with his colleague Martin Speer, he co-founded the consultancy Herr und Speer which focuses on European integration, gender equality, and youth empowerment. They have been among the biggest advocates for free interrail passes for young people, arguing that it would bring Europe closer together and strengthen the European identity while bringing invaluable travelling experiences to young people who otherwise might not be able to afford travelling.

Vincent told us about his travels, advocacy work, and the idea of having all EU citizens receive a EU-funded interrail pass for their 18th birthday. Vincent has done three interrail trips, and he praised interrail experience for its diversity and uniqueness: "... interrail is quite different from other forms of international travel. You get a sense of how Europe is connected, how people are connected, and how also our differences ... are a beautiful part of the European experience. Interrail travel has made me a true European."

Our second guest, Lucy Allan (Scotland), was among the lucky ones who won a free Interrail pass in 2019. Lucy is a student who also hosts her own podcast and YouTube channel where, with a range of other topics, she posts videos of interrailing and travelling. Lucy found out about the DiscoverEU competition via social media advertisement, and since she had already done an Interrail a year earlier in 2018, she did not hesitate to apply. While in 2018, she travelled for six and half weeks through Europe's big cities, in 2019, she started from Glasgow (Scotland) and travelled first to Rotterdam (Netherlands), then to Berlin (Germany),



then to Luxembourg, then to Bern (Switzerland), then to Bratislava (Slovakia), and finally to Budapest (Hungary).

Lucy highly recommends interrailing and young people to apply for the DiscoverEU scheme, which she described as a "triple win": it is a great way to treat yourself after graduating from high school, for example, it is climate-efficient with low CO₂ emissions, and, if you win the DiscoverEU pass, the whole trip will get tremendously cheaper.

Episode 3 | Towards a climate-neutral EU with Javi López Fernandez

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA) 2019 report, rail is among the most efficient and lowest emitting modes of transport³. Globally, three-quarters of rail passenger movements and half of rail freight relies on electricity, which makes this transport sector the most electrified. The report also states that around 0.3% of CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels come from rail compared to around 2% for global aviation. Urban and high-speed rail hold major promise to unlock substantial benefits, which include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, congestion and air pollution. High-speed rail is particularly important as it offers an established low-carbon alternative to short-distance flights. High-speed rail lines can reduce aviation transport on the same routes by as much as 80%.

In the interview with Javi López Fernandez, Member of the European Parliament and a member of several distinct committees, including the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, and a Chair of the Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, trainee of the European Committee of the Regions Julia Vázquez delved deeply into the role of trains in delivering the Green Deal goals.

Javi López mentioned that transport is one of the backbones of the EU economy and has negative consequences in terms of pollution, congestion, climate change, and noise accidents. 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.

To tackle this problem Javi López emphasised the need for stakeholders and the local networks of institutions to work together in deciding where the new lines should be organised. Mr. López also noted that one of the main goals for the EU 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. "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," declared Javi López. Finally, Javi López encouraged our young listeners to take the interrail, as an experience and mentioned the option of taking a night train.

³ ["The Future of Rail" \(2019\).](#)

Episode 4 | Transport exclusion and deterioration of infrastructures with Bartosz Jakubowski & Iwona Budych

In this episode we talked about how 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.

We listened to Bartosz Jakubowski's account of the world of transport, and rail infrastructure in the 80s and 90s, and the potential solutions to build efficient and clean rail infrastructures. He stressed that passengers look for a reliable infrastructure not only new wagons.

In the 80s and 90s the Polish government decided to cancel all unprofitable connections. In those years, around 9000 km of railway routes were cancelled. No plan, nor effort to save train connections was put in place. The only priority was to cut costs. A lot of very popular connections with trains full of passengers were cancelled. The policy resulted in various towns being cut from the world and depopulating afterwards. Protests were organised by the local populations in many villages and towns but didn't succeed. Sometimes the closed connection was the only way to comfortably travel from those places. In some cases - the responsibility for train connections were put in the hands of local and regional authorities. It improved the situation, although in many cases the cooperation between authorities is a problem. The key to improving the situation, according to our guest is, indeed, more connections, especially for peripheral areas.

With our second guest, Iwona Budych we discussed the topic of transport exclusion, the social and economic consequences, as well as its psychological reach and gender dimension. Iwona also analysed and presented her understanding of the perception of public transport and railways.

Many small towns and villages became cut off from the world when the railway connections were being shut down due to unprofitability in the 80s and mostly 90s. People were protesting about it but mostly didn't succeed in stopping the process. Citizens have also been frequently requesting actions from the Ombudsman.

A lot of those places depopulated, because people had the choice either to lose their jobs or to move away. In places without public transport, the life of some people is totally dependent on cars. Some family members have to dedicate most of their time to driving around others. In other cases, families without cars are dependent on others. People want to feel independent, without it, their own image of themselves suffers. 14 million of Polish people do not have access to public transport on a daily basis.

Those people every day have to live in distress, wondering whether and how they will reach their doctor, their friends and other necessary services and activities.

Some people face difficulties to reach their workplace. Therefore, their true working day is prolonged by 2 hours or even more. They don't have time for rest, hobbies and often suffer from exhaustion.

There is a gender dimension to transport exclusion, with less women having cars and driving licenses and being dependent on men. The elderly often suffers from loneliness, being left alone in peripheral places. 1/3 of all school students cannot attend extracurricular classes due to unsatisfying transport.

In conclusion, according to our guest, public transport in Poland is stigmatized, associated with the underprivileged, people with disabilities and the elderly.

Episode 5 | Connecting Europe Express and EGTCs with Herald Ruijter & Slaven Klobucar

In episode 5 of the podcast, we interviewed Herald Ruijter, Director of the Directorate for Investments, Innovative and Sustainable Transport in (DG MOVE) of the European Commission, about the most emblematic initiative of the European Year of the Rail, Connecting Europe Express. In the second section we spoke to Slaven Klobucar, manager of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) from the COTER Commission in the European Committee of the Regions, about the EGTC platform, its potential in cross-border cohesion and the platform's work within the transport and rail industry.

Mr Ruijter explained that the Connecting Europe Express initiative is a train that will start its journey in Autumn in Lisbon. The train will pass through 40 different European cities, with a number of events being held in each location and opportunities for the general public to be involved as passengers of the train itself or as visitors of the museum set up in one of the carriages. The aim of the initiative is to raise awareness, connect people, businesses and goods in a greener and more sustainable way.

The project will also raise awareness on the importance of financing sustainable infrastructure such as rail, and of EU support for such investments, including through the recently agreed Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), worth €33.7 billion, as part of the next long-term EU budget 2021-2027. We also touched on issues related to the "missing links" in the train system in Europe and on the Ten-T corridors and funding for the rail system within Europe. Overall, it was an insightful discussion over the most exciting initiative of the European Year of the Rail. We were assisted by great inter-institutional support from the COTER unit and the Communications department of (DG MOVE), which we hope will only get stronger in the future.

Slaven Klobucar then introduced us to the EGTC platform of the Committee of the Regions, which 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. The platform is a very useful tool that has helped in cross-border regions and across Europe to develop relationships, thereby strengthening cohesion and cooperation. It's a great initiative and the podcast wanted to highlight its outstanding work and potential throughout Europe and in particular in the Dresden-Prag project and GECT Eurodistrict

PAMINA. Slavan's participation in the Next Stop podcast highlighted the work of the Committee of the Regions, which we were delighted to speak about.

Episode 6 | Accessibility for persons with disabilities to rail with Kamil Goungor & Laura Alčiauskaitė

Accessibility to rail is highly important, especially for passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility. There is already EU legislation regarding rail accessibility in place. But the EU needs further input to improve. Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness about the access needs of persons with disabilities. Full accessibility can only be achieved if the current barriers to independent and spontaneous rail travel are erased.

In 2014, the EC adopted the Rail Accessibility Regulation which establishes the technical specification of interoperability (TSI) relating to accessibility of the EU's rail system.⁴ It includes different requirements for infrastructure subsystems. Independent and spontaneous rail travel is also related to passengers' rights. In September 2017, the EU recast its Rail Passengers' Rights Regulation⁵ from 2007. Most currently, the EU looks at accessibility to rail in the European Accessibility Act of 2019⁶. Even though these Regulations and Directives have brought important improvements in terms of accessibility for persons with disabilities to rail, there are still many daily barriers persons with disabilities face while trying to use rail services.

A 2018 Eurobarometer⁷ on rail satisfaction shows that between 2013 and 2018 satisfaction with access for people with disabilities or reduced mobility has only slightly improved. More recently, the EC launched, as part of the Union of Equality umbrella, the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, building on the previous cycle of 2010-2020. The current strategy continues the path to ensure that persons with disabilities can enjoy to the full extent their human rights. Regarding railways in particular, the EC is committed to launch an inventory of assets of rail infrastructure. One of the most emblematic initiatives by the EC to promote accessibility for persons with disabilities to rail takes place via the Access City Award⁸.

Kamil Goungor, our guest for this episode, is member of the Youth Committee of European Disability Forum and Development Officer of European Network on Independent Living. He is also a travel blogger⁹ and has already attended the Accessible City Award ceremony several times and travelled to many of the awarded cities.

⁴ [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 1300/2014 of 18 November 2014 on the technical specifications for interoperability relating to accessibility of the Union's rail system for persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility.](#)

⁵ [Recast of the regulation on rail passengers' rights and obligations.](#)

⁶ [Directive \(EU\) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services.](#)

⁷ [Survey on passenger satisfaction with rail services](#) (2018).

⁸ [Access City Award.](#)

⁹ [The Trawheeler.](#)

Kamil Goungor expresses concern that there are still many barriers that persons with disabilities have to face when travelling by train. For example, before the trip, it is necessary to plan the route so that all the stations along the way are accessible. Discriminatory attitudes from staff and other passengers towards persons with disabilities - being social barriers - is also something that Laura Alčiauskaitė comes across while working on the TRIPS project¹⁰.

Laura Alčiauskaitė and her colleagues want to create solutions and decided first to identify obstacles. That is why they conducted interviews with persons with different disabilities on the barriers these persons face when they access public transport. There are still many unresolved issues when it comes to accessibility to rail. Most issues are related to early pre-booking times, lack of assistance and inaccessibility. Kamil Goungor and Laura Alčiauskaitė emphasised that proper development of accessible rail is only possible through co-production and co-design. In this way, measures can be implemented at all levels, especially at the regional and local levels, to ensure accessibility for all. To achieve this, engagement of different stakeholders, more political will and various appropriate instruments are still needed.

Episode 7 | Behaviour changes and charging systems with Alberto Mazzola & Livia Spera

In this episode we highlighted the fact that some countries in the EU apply a VAT rate to international rail tickets, while at the same time the aviation and maritime sectors are exempt from these charges. As a result, international rail tickets become more expensive, creating economic distortions. Particularly, considering the carbon emissions of the other modes of transport, we consider making international train travel more affordable a top priority.

We also discuss deeply about the trains and the environment: the transport sector accounts for roughly one-fifth of global emissions, especially the transport on road account for more or less 17%, the maritime transports for only 3% and the train sector an astonishingly low 0.5% of total global emissions!

On the behavior part, we talk about changing attitudes and encouraging consumers regarding trains and mobility, all in the spirit highlighted by the green new deal and the objective of a 2050 carbon neutral European Union. Furthermore, we take a look at the composition of the railway workforce, predominantly male, and the possibility of making this particular profession more attractive to young people and women in general.

We also touch on the argument of increasing digitalization in the railway sector, with opportunities and challenges for both consumers and operators, trying to discover the future of railways in Europe.

We discussed these topics with Alberto Mazzola, Executive Director of the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER), and Livia Spera, Acting General

¹⁰ [TRIPS Project](#).

Secretary of the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) on the topic of Women working in Rail.

Episode 8 | The Future of Rail with Apostolos Tzitzikostas & Tatjana Söding

Rail is the most sustainable, safest, efficient and green means of transport - as it has been shown in the previous seven chapters. The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) also pointed out that "the future is rail"¹¹. But what does the future hold for this mode of transport and travel? The European Union has identified 30 Priority Projects that are included for the development of the Trans-European Transport Network. 18 of these 30 key projects are connected to rail¹².

Examples

Priority Project 1 - Berlin-Verona/Milano-Bologna-Napoli-Messina-Palermo: This railway axis crosses three Member States (Germany, Austria, Italy) and also includes the 55 km long Brenner Base Tunnel. The line will contribute to the increase of the rail-transport capacity and to connect important urban areas.

Priority Project 6 - Railway axis Lyon-Trieste-Divača/Koper-Divača-Ljubljana-Budapest-Ukrainian border: This 1,638 km long axis is part of the Mediterranean corridor that is the main east-west passage and will connect Spain and the Hungarian border with Ukraine. When finished, it will ease the pressure on the road transport and tourism and allow a modal shift to rail.

Priority Project 20 - Railway axis Fehmarn belt: This project is part of the Scandinavian-Mediterranean corridor and improves the connection between Denmark and Germany. It complements two other Priority Projects, the Øresund bridge and the Nordic Triangle railway axis. When finished it will attract ca. 35,000 trains per year and reduce the travel time between Copenhagen and Hamburg.

Priority Project 22 - Railway axis Athina-Sofia-Budapest-Wien-Praha-Nürnberg/Dresden: Being the only railway connection to South-eastern, once finished it will improve the linkage between Germany and Greece.

¹¹ [CER, 'Future is rail'](#), accessed 20th June 2021.

¹² [The European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency \(CINEA\), '30 Priority Projects'](#), accessed 21st June 2021.

The next steps for rail in the EU

The rail is always evolving and certain trends and developments can be observed that will shape the future of this transport. The following are the key elements that will shape rail the most in the upcoming years:

- **Better level playing field: Polluter – user pays principle.** The Commission announced in 2020 that transport users would be rewarded through the pricing depending on the level of pollution of the mode of transport used, thus encouraging the use of the rail¹³.
- **Ensuring sufficient funds.** Due to the impact of COVID, the sector of rail, similarly to aviation, needs more than ever national funds to survive the effects of the pandemic, as the volume of passengers has dropped significantly. Funding is also essential to ensure the rail's future expansion¹⁴.
- **A functioning Single European Rail Area.** This means creating an integrated network of rail that connects all Member States in the EU, overcoming the technical and operational challenges that this objective presents¹⁵.
- **An ambitious digital rail agenda.** Which will bring many benefits to the sector, such as improving the infrastructure capacity, increasing the rail's effectiveness and responding better to customer necessities¹⁶.
- **A performing European Rail Supply Industry.** Maintaining the high competitiveness of the European rail sector, as it is one of the most robust in the world¹⁷.
- **Making rail more attractive to citizens and customers.**
- **Infrastructure to connect Europe (TEN Transport).** The Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) policy regards the implementation and development of a European network of railway lines, roads, inland waterways, maritime shipping routes, ports, airports and railroad terminals. The objective is to close gaps, remove bottlenecks and technical barriers, as well as to strengthen social, economic and territorial cohesion in the EU¹⁸.

13 [European Commission, Press Corner, 'A fundamental transport transformation: Commission presents its plan for green, smart and affordable mobility'](#), accessed 21st June 2021.

14 [International Railway Journal, 'Rail allocated €1.6bn from EU €2.2bn transport fund'](#), accessed 21st June 2021.

15 [European Economic and Social Committee, 'The Single European Railway Area'](#), accessed 21st June 2021.

16 [European Parliament, 'Digitalisation in railway transport: a lever to improve railway competitiveness'](#), accessed 21st June 2021.

17 [McKinsey & Company, 'Navigating the EU rail-market liberalization'](#) accessed 21st June 2021.

18 [European Commission, Mobility and Transport 'Trans-European Transport Network \(TEN-T\)'](#) accessed 21st June 2021.

- **Coping with crises (resilience dimension)** COVID has shown that the EU has to have mechanisms to protect sectors such as rail in the cases of unexpected crises. The creation of green lanes, the continuity in terms of provision of rail freight services, but also rules on temporary suspension of certain EU regulations and directives enabled at least the continuous provision of the European citizens with essential goods and permitted industry to operate in difficult circumstances to a certain extent¹⁹.

The Pop Wagon

Trains have been part of the European's life for centuries. Trains have been shaping the life and the history of our continent. Many important events have indeed had trains as a scenario and trains have been not only part of films, songs and poems but trains have also inspired several authors who wrote some of the funniest and hilarious quotes.

This is what the Pop Wagon section is all about. We wanted to share with our audience that trains are not only a key means of transport. Trains are also a way of life, almost a philosophy, trains are cool.

In our section you can always revive a historical fact, discover interesting stories related to trains, get a museum reference and last but not least, listen to a quote that can change your life.

In our section humor is always the next station and we try to do not leave indifferent any passenger. The Pop wagon is the wagon where everybody wants to have a sit. Music, culture and history find in this wagon its home. All aboard!

¹⁹ [European Commission, Communication, 'On the implementation of the Green Lanes under the Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services'](#), accessed 21st June 2021.

Guests list

- **Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg (MEP, Greens/EFA, DE):** Ms. Deparnay-Grunenberg is a forestry and environmental scientist by training, and since 2019 she is a Member of the European Parliament, where she is serving in the Committee on Transport and Tourism. She was the rapporteur for the European Parliament report on the European Year of the Rail.
- **Vincent-Immanuel Herr (Herr und Speer):** Mr. Herr is the co-initiator, together with Martin Speer of the free-Interrail idea. He is involved in several projects, and has been working with different institutions such as Stiftung Mercator or UN Women in Germany. He co-founded the consultancy Herr und Speer, which is committed to empower young people to change the world.
- **Lucy Allan (Discover EU):** Ms. Allan is a Youtuber who touches very diverse contents, particularly on travelling and promoting the Interrail. She was the winner of the Discover EU competition in 2019 and was awarded with an Interrail pass.
- **Javi Lopez Fernandez (MEP, S&D/ES):** Mr. Lopez has served as a Member of the European Parliament since 2014. Javi is a member of various 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. He was the rapporteur for the European Parliament report on the implementation of the Ambient Air Quality Directives. He also has his own podcast series "Brussels Calling", in which he tells about current EU affairs.
- **Bartosz Jakubowski (PL/Jagiellonian Club Analysis Centre):** Mr. Jakubowski is an analyst on public transport and serves as the 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.
- **Iwona Budyh (Transport Exclusion Association):** Ms. Budyh is the president of the Transport Exclusion Association, a Polish organization that works for making public transport universal and fights against transport exclusion.
- **Herald Ruijters (Director at DG MOVE):** Mr. Ruijters is the Director at the European Commission, DG MOVE, after more than 20 years working with mobility affairs in the European Commission. Herald holds a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and two master diplomas in European Studies and Languages.

- **Slaven Klobucar (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, CoR)** Mr. Klobucar is an administrator in Directorate for Legislative Work 2 - COTER Commission at the European Committee of the Regions (CoR).
- **Kamil Goungor (Development Officer at European Network on Independent Living):** Mr. Goungor is an advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities and works as a Development Officer for the European Network on Independent Living. He is also a member of the European Disability Forum. Passionate about travelling, he has his own blog "The Trawheeler".
- **Laura Alčiauskaitė (Project Coordinator at European Network on Independent Living):** Ms. Alčiauskaitė is a coordinator of the Project TRIPS at the European Network on Independent Living. TRIPS is an EU funded project which started in 2020 aiming to make the transport system more accessible in the following seven cities: Bologna, Brussels, Cagliari, Lisbon, Sofia, Stockholm, and Zagreb. Laura has been actively advocating for human rights and social rights since 2013 and she is a member of three different NGOs (social inclusion, peace building, sustainable development goals, youth empowerment, etc.).
- **Alberto Mazzola (CER):** Mr. Mazzola is the Executive Director of the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER). The CER was founded in 1988 and has since been an active voice of the railway sector at EU level, covering topics from passengers, to freight, sustainability and infrastructure. He holds a Master's in Business Administration and a Doctorate cum Laude in Nuclear Engineering.
- **Livia Spera (ETF):** Ms. Spera is the acting Secretary General of the European Transport Workers Federation. She joined the organization in 2005 and was most recently the Political Secretary for Dockers and Fisheries. She holds a Master Degree in Labour Studies.
- **Apostolos Tzitzikostas (CoR):** Mr. Tzitzikostas is the governor of the region of Central Macedonia since 2013 and President of the European Committee of the Regions since 2020. He studied International Politics and Diplomacy at Georgetown University and worked at the office of the Chair of the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs. He also has studied Public Policy and Economics at the University College of London.
- **Tatjana Söding (Erasmus by Train):** Tatjana is a co-founding member of Erasmus by Train e.V., an initiative that advocates for the provision of free Interrail Tickets for all participants of the Erasmus+ Program. She holds a Bachelor's in Liberal Arts from University College Maastricht and is currently studying Human Ecology at Lund University. Being passionate about environmental justice, Tatjana is exploring ways

in which a transport and energy transition can be reached through de-growth strategies.

Communication Strategy

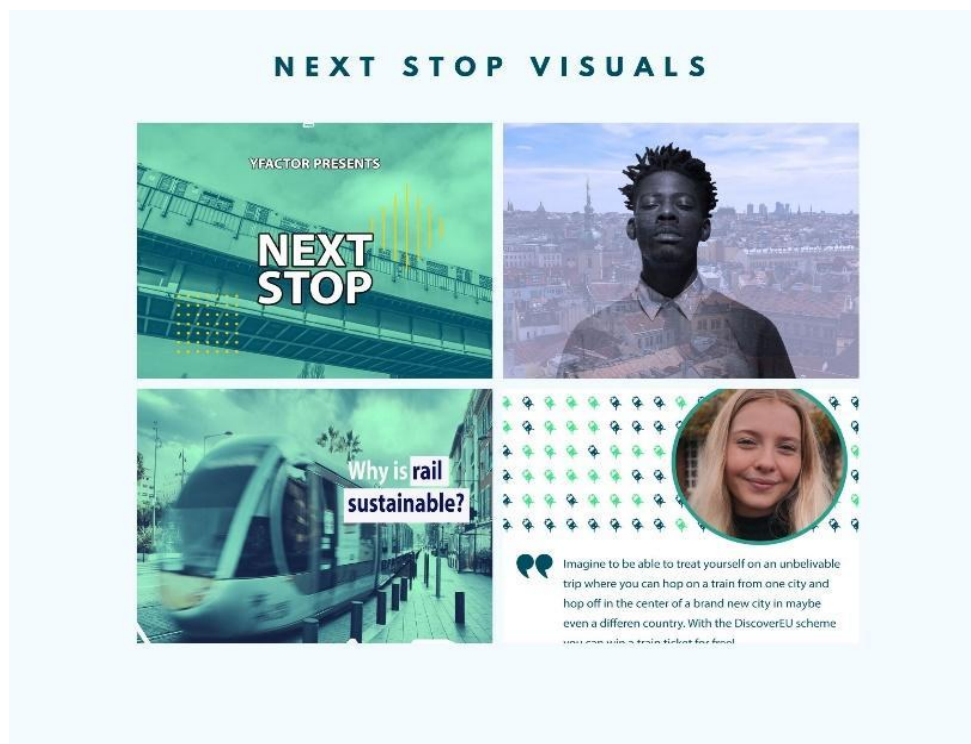
Given the utterly digital nature of the project, particular attention and efforts were placed on the planning of Next Stop's communication campaign.

The communication group worked on three main strands of activities:

1. Definition of a coherent visual identity
2. Implementation of reach out initiatives
3. Execution of a social media-based communication campaign

Visual identity

We developed a completely new visual identity. The choice of the colour identity and of the images tried to reflect the core themes of the podcast series, such as innovation, sustainability and youth engagement. Therefore, by combining different shades of green, blue and azure, we devised a colour identity associated with the concepts of sustainability, energy and youthfulness.



Reach out initiatives

Since the beginning of the planning of this project, we regarded promotion and external communications as a core area with a lot of potential to influence the success of our podcast series. For this reason, we did not only take excellent care of our relationship with our guests, even after the interview with thank you and follow-up messages, but we also reached out to various stakeholders to explore any potential collaboration that could help us to increase our audience and promote our podcast series further.

Apart from the CoR official social media channels and the Commission's Directorate General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE), regional offices such as Veneto Region (Italy) or Fundacion Galicia-Europa (Spain) have shared our podcast in their media (LinkedIn and newsletter). Similarly, most of our guests have also mentioned and interacted with us in their social media, which contributed to reach a larger audience of listeners.

Moreover, seizing the momentum of the European Year of Rail (EYR) and the Conference on the Future of Europe to reimagine mobility, we have decided to apply for participation in the European Young Event (EYE21), taking place next fall in Strasbourg. Our plan for the event is to organize a dynamic and audience-engaging ideas lab, aimed at young citizens, in which we would discuss, recognise and find solutions to overcoming the barriers to using rail.

Communication objectives

The Social media team aims to optimise information exchange on social media for the targeted audience by ensuring communication around the project outcomes and progresses.

Specific Objectives

- Inform about YFactor project / traineeship experience;
- Sharing information and build narratives that promote trains as a sustainable, inclusive and affordable means of transportation;
- Raise awareness in an engaging manner about the role of railway infrastructure for cross-border mobility and enhanced cohesion among European regions and cities;
- Advocate for an enhanced contribution of rail to the EU's economy, society and industry.

Target Audience

Our project is targeted to an audience composed of young Europeans, students, professionals or job seekers between the age of 18 and 35. By choosing a target audience we expect to better organize our outreach strategy and strategic partnerships to convey the messages described by our purpose. This does not exclude other potential listeners from different age groups or categories. The reasons behind the choice of this target audience are twofold: First of all, we believe that we are in the best position to address our peers and raise their awareness on the issues of sustainability, inclusivity and rural connection linked to railway transport.

Secondly, we think that the instrument we intend to employ to deliver our message, namely a podcast, is best suited to reach an audience formed by young people who constitute the majority of users of this specific means of communication.

Social media campaign

The social media campaign operated on three channels: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. We worked to deliver a distinctive tone and voice that could resonate with our target audience (young Europeans between 18 and 35 years old). Across all three channels we devised multimedia content that can be best described as:

- Informative
- Educational
- Engaging

The overall aim of the content strategy was to provide our audience with useful information and stories that could encourage them to increasingly choose rail as their preferred mean of transport.

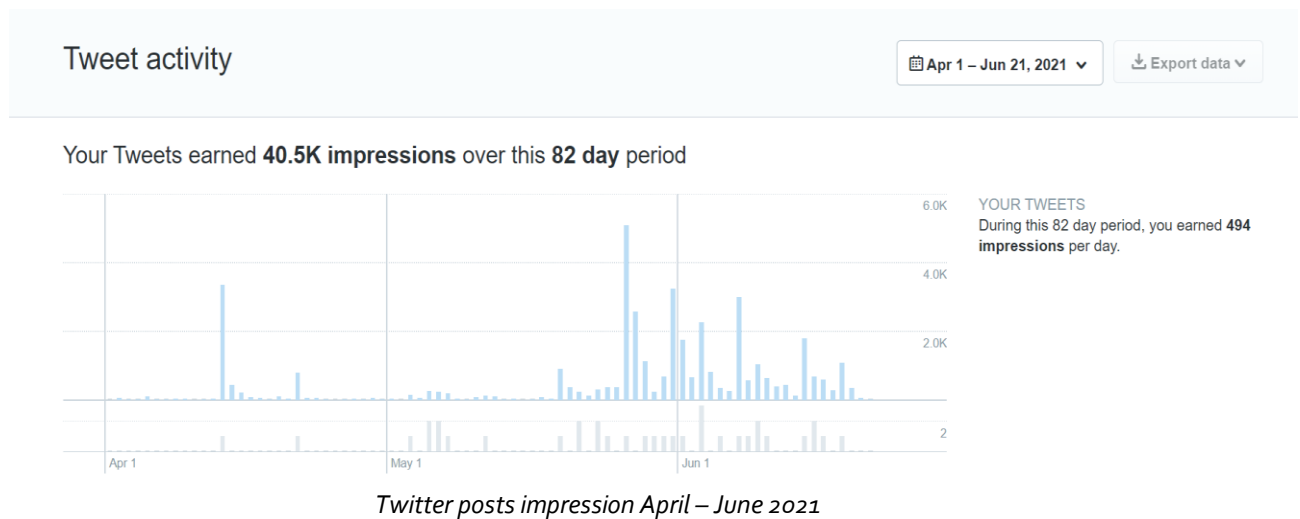
Social media insights²⁰

The best-performing channels in terms of engagement and interactions were Instagram and Twitter.

On **Twitter** we managed to get our content shared on relevant stakeholders' channels, such as [EU Transport](#), [Greens Political Group in the CoR](#) and [CER](#). EU departments

²⁰ The cut-off date for collecting the insights was 21 June 17:00 PM.

(EU Environment, EU Climate Action, EU Transport), along with rail-industry associations (European Rail Skills Alliance, CER – Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies, ETF Railways) started to following YFactor's Twitter account. This is a significant advancement that will help future trainees involved in the YFactor program to reach important stakeholders in sustainability, transportation and technological transformation matters right from the start.

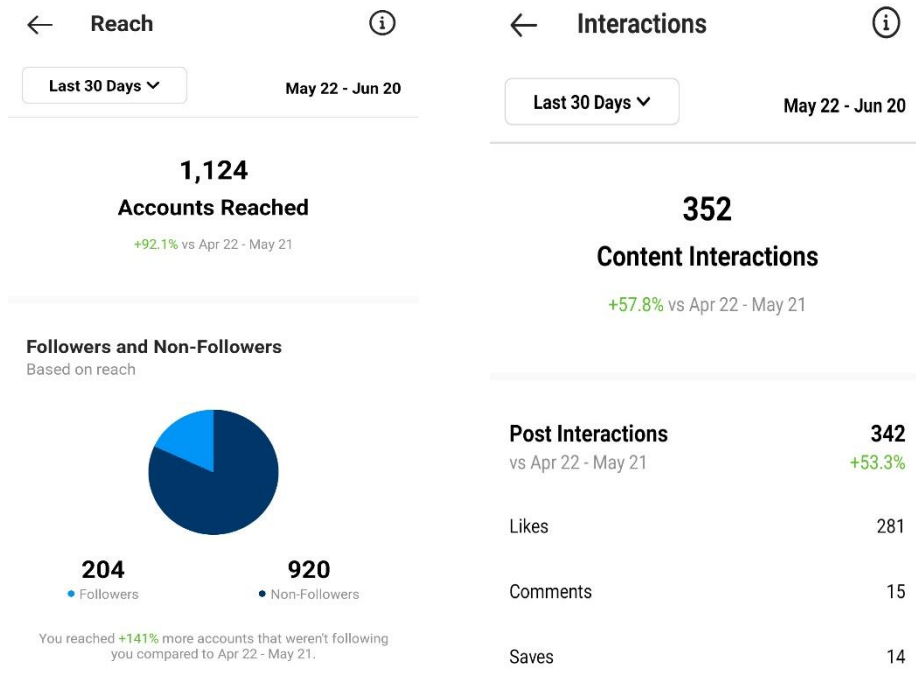


On **Instagram**, we developed three main content formats:

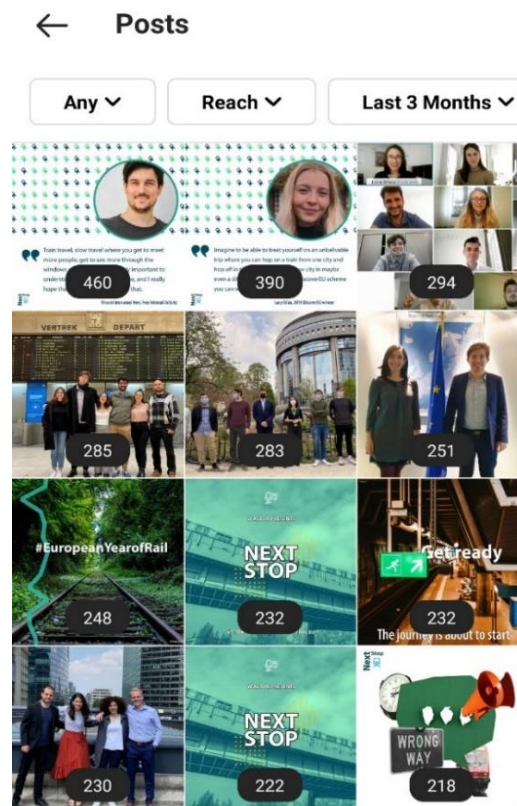
- Carousels
- Quotes from guest
- Teaser stories

On average, these different types of content received satisfactory level of engagement and reach.

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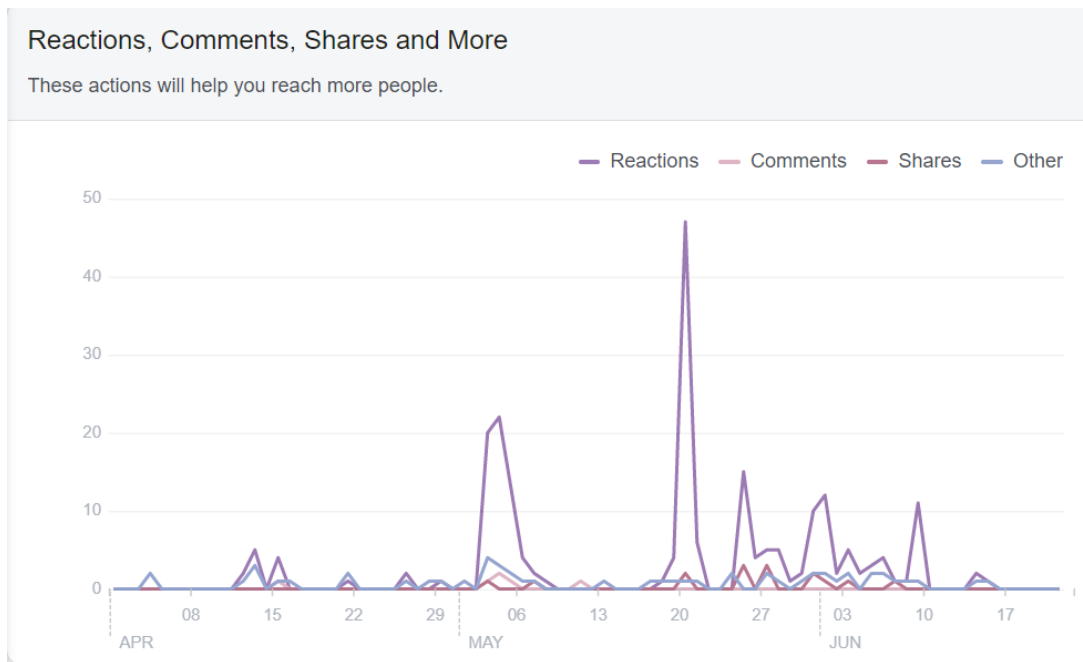
Instagram posts' reach and interactions May – June 2021



Top-performing posts in terms of reach April – June 2021

However, **trainees' pictures were among the most successful content** – a fact that suggest that YFactor social media channels can be one of the most effective instruments for the CoR to promote its traineeship programme.

On the other hand, the performance on **Facebook** was unsatisfactory. The low level of engagement on Facebook can be explained by the fact that this specific network no longer ranks among the target audience's (i.e. Millennials and Generation Z) favourite social media.



Facebook posts' results in terms of reactions, comments, shares April – June 2021



Facebook page's total reach April – June 2021

Communication Channels

CoR Website: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/about/Pages/YFactor-presents-next-stop-podcast.aspx>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/yfactorpresents>

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/yfactor?lang=en>

Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/yfactorproject/>

Conclusion

With this initiative, we, the spring 2021 Trainees of the Committee of the Regions, made our contribution to the European Year of Rail, with the aim of highlighting rail as one of the most sustainable, innovative and safest transport modes available. In addition to that, a range of activities will place rail in the spotlight throughout Europe in 2021, to encourage the use of rail and to contribute to the European Green Deal and to the goal of climate neutrality by 2050, including the Connecting Europe Express, which is going to be one of the most emblematic.

We are convinced of the many benefits of rail which the European Year of Rail aims to promote, such as its role as a climate friendly means of transport or the potential to connect rural areas and foster cross-border cohesion or the opportunity of the DiscoverEU programme for young European citizens.

With this report we condensed our research and the insights we collected during our interviews thanks to the contributions of our special guests, who have dedicated their time and expertise to help us dive deeper into the topics and raise awareness on the European Year of Rail. We hope we were able to highlight and raise awareness through the different subjects of our eight episodes. We have talked about discovering the EU programme, the idea of a climate friendly means of transport, the evolution of this transport from concentration to exclusion and deterioration, the accessibilities issues, the behaviors of customers, the Connecting Europe Express, and the future of the rail. On this final tone, we would like to thank all the special guests we have received and who have dedicated some of their time to help us understand and describe the main goal of the European Year of Rail.

Organisational structure

To carry out this project we decided structured our work in different teams:

- Coordination team
- Research team
- Production team
- Communication and PR team

For the Coordination team we present to you Aurelien Godin and Lucia Alfano, responsible for the oversight of the project and the organization of weekly general meetings





The Research team is composed by (from the right): Jose Llopis Ortiz, Conor Gilligan, Ramon Calot Alventosa, Xenia Rak, Edgar Haraszin, Mattia Bagherini, Nicola Donelli and Ieva Miklasevskaja. Alexander Stachurski and Christopher Cmoch, who do not appear in this picture, are also members of the research team. They have been responsible for the extensive research work that underpinned each topic of the podcast and their knowledge and expertise also fed into this final report.



The Production team is composed by (from the right): Jose Llopis Ortiz, Mila Coric, Xavier Miro Argemi, Claudia Goncalves Pinto, David Horoba and Berta Lopez Domenech. The Production Team took care of building the structure of the episodes, translating the material provided by the research team into scripts and specific questions to the guests. Moreover, they hosted the “Pop Wagon” recurring segment. A special mention goes to David Horoba, whose unique technical expertise has been essential to bring each episode to life and online. His are also the credits for the music and sound.



The Communication and PR team is composed by (from the right): Teemu Karhapaa, Benedetta Giuliani, Julia Vazquez Santiago, and Valerio Montanari. Bianca Marengo, and Clara Taulier, who do not appear in this picture, are also members of the Communication team. The Communication team worked relentlessly to promote the podcast on the Y Factor social media channels, to establish collaborations with external partners and to organize the participation of guests in the episodes.

YFactor presents:

Next Stop - a #EUYearOfRail podcast

Thanks for having travelled with us!