

High-Speed Rail Give Short-Haul Air a Run for the Money in Europe, With More Flexible Travel, Greater Comfort, Lower Environmental Impact

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While air travelers put up with longer delays, cancelled flights and tedious security procedures, and drivers face rising gas prices and ever-increasing congestion, life keeps getting easier for passengers on Europe's expanding network of high-speed trains.

The latest developments and the far-reaching benefits of high-speed European train travel were the topics of a press conference, "High-speed trains: Changing the European Experience" held in New York today. Speakers included: CEO of the French National Railroads (SNCF), Guillaume Pepy; Commercial Director of the Eurostar train, Nicholas Mercer; and High-Speed Director of the Paris-based International Railway Association (UIC), Inaki Barron. Rail Europe -- North America's leading seller of European rail travel -- was the host of the conference.

Among the topics:

- œ Opening of new high-speed service on 4 routes in 2007
- œ High-speed rail wins major market share of combined air/rail traffic on routes of 3 hours or less
- œ Shorter rail travel times make possible different destination combinations, daytrips out of rail hub cities, overall a less stressful experience than short-haul air or driving
- œ Rail has dramatically less environmental impact, including greenhouse gas emissions, compared to air/road travel
- œ Economic benefits of high-speed rail for communities served.

HIGH-SPEED RAIL OVERVIEW

Traveling at speed of 150 mph or higher (compared to regular trains going 100 mph or less), high-speed trains currently run on 3,034 miles of track in 10 European countries. By 2010, another 1,711 miles are scheduled to be in operation, and there are plans beyond that to add on average 346 miles each year through 2020, according to the UIC's Barron. [See attached maps]

To travel at speeds over 150 mph, dedicated high-speed tracks (fewer curves, little change in gradient, no crossings) -- as well as fast trains -- are required. One of dedicated high-speed steel track's advantages over the more experimental Maglev type technology (besides lower cost) is the fact that high-speed trains can also operate on conventional steel track, as well as the dedicated track, allowing greater flexibility in destinations served. [See separate backgrounder on high-speed trains in event press kit.]

Basic benefits for travelers of high-speed trains vs. plane or car travel: competitive travel times between city centers (not to faraway airports), no long advance check-in, more legroom and freedom to stand up and stroll, frequent service with excellent on-time departures/arrivals, ground-level view of passing scenery, freedom from traffic/driving concerns.

Eurostar's punctuality in 2006 was a record 91.5%, far outstripping airline competitors on the London-Paris and London-Brussels routes. Latest figures from the UK's Civil Aviation Authority show that punctuality at London's airports remains around 70%, as in previous years. Spain's high-speed AVE trains also have punctuality over 90%.

"High-speed trains put the pleasure back in travel," said Fabrice Morel, conference moderator and President and CEO of Rail Europe. "And while airports and planes are pretty much the same whether you're in Athens, Greece, or Athens, Georgia, travel by train is an authentic European experience."

TRAVEL TIMES - US/EUROPEAN COMPARABLE DISTANCES

The high-speed Eurostar train today covers the 250 mi. distance between downtown London-downtown Paris in 2 hrs. 35 min. - with no transfers to airports required. On November 14, 2007 that will be cut to 2 hrs 15 min.

Paris to Marseille on the Mediterranean coast (480 mi. - same as NY-Detroit) takes 3 hrs by high-speed TGV train. Paris to Brussels (185 mi) on 186 mph Thalys train takes 1 hr. 25 min. - distance is comparable to NY-Boston (188 mi.). The 85 mile trip from Paris-Reims (heart of Champagne country) will drop from 1 hr 35 min. to 45 min. starting June 10 - distance comparable NY-Philadelphia.

The world speed record for steel-wheels-on-steel-track trains was just set by a specially-modified experimental French TGV on April 3, with a top speed of 357 mph. [See press release on world record in kit.]. Top operating speed for passenger travel of most high-speed trains in Europe today is 186 mph, but starting June 10, the new TGV East line in France will have a standard operating speed of 199 mph (320 km/hr). In 1954, 199 mph was the world record also set by a specially-modified experimental French train - and this year that will be standard operating speed. Research and development is currently underway in France to increase that to 224 mph.

WINNING MARKET SHARE FROM AIR

The proof of high-speed rail's appeal is in the figures - increases in passengers and market share captured at the expense of short-haul intra-European air and passenger cars. The first European high-speed line (Paris-Lyon) carried 2 million passengers in the first year of operation. Today, 100 million passengers a year travel on the French TGV network.

The total number of high-speed train passengers throughout Europe has been rising steadily from 183 million in 2000 to 245 million in 2005, according to the International Railway Association (UIC).

Among Eurostar's 7.85 million passengers in 2006 were 300,000 U.S. travelers.

Examples of high-speed lines winning dominant market share:

œ In France, rail held only 22% of the combined Paris-Marseille air-rail market before TGV Mediterranean went into service (2001), but in four years that market share rose to 65% and in 2006 it was 69% and EasyJet abandoned its Paris-Marseille flights.

œ Spain's AVE has 53% of air/rail/road traffic on the Madrid-Seville route.

œ Thalys train between Paris and Brussels holds 52% of air/road traffic; after the high-speed rail line went into service, airlines discontinued flights Paris-Brussels - the only competition remaining is road.

œ Eurostar has more than 70% of London-Paris market, 64% on London-Brussels. Last month, BMI discontinued its London-Paris flights.

High-speed rail has historically captured the major share of combined air/rail traffic along routes where train journeys are under 3 hours. But this is changing, says SNCF's Pepy: "With air travel becoming more complicated and increasing airport congestion, high-speed rail now wins 50% of the traffic where rail journeys are 4.5 hours or less," he said. On the Paris-Perpignan route (5 hrs by train), TGV has 51% of the air/rail market, on Paris-Toulon (4 hrs) 68%.

On routes with 2 hours or less train travel time, rail traditionally wins 90% of market share.

The new TGV East line, connecting Paris to eastern France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland in nearly half the time of current rail service, is expected to garner 75% of the Paris-Strasbourg market within one year and eventually 90% (currently Paris-Strasbourg takes 4 hrs by train, and air holds 60% of the market; with TGV East, train travel time will drop to 2 hrs 20 min). Air France has already announced plans to discontinue flights Paris-Metz the month after TGV East goes into service.

High-speed trains connect passengers to major European airports, including Paris Charles de Gaulle airport, Amsterdam's Schipol, Frankfurt, Zurich, Geneva, Lyon and others. This enables American travelers, for example, to take a transatlantic flight to Paris CDG and immediately connect by high-speed train to Brussels (or a variety of other destinations throughout Europe).

2007 HIGH-SPEED OPENINGS

œ June 10 - TGV East provides faster, direct connections between 20 French destinations and between Paris and 10 destinations in Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland. Main French cities in eastern France on route: Paris, Reims, Nancy, Metz and Strasbourg. [see separate press release dated April 10 and map in press kit]

œ November 14 - Eurostar will be 20 minutes faster between London-Paris and London-Brussels when it launches service from its new central London terminal, St. Pancras International. St. Pancras will be served by the UK's first 100% high-speed rail line, called High Speed 1. Currently, Eurostar travels on high-speed track for much of the journey in England, until just outside London when the trains revert to the existing rail track, shared with conventional trains, at much lower speeds. [see separate release]

œ Madrid-Barcelona - Before any high-speed tracks were built, this trip took nearly 7 hrs, but today much of the route is high-speed and travel time has shrunk to 4.5 hrs. By the end of 2007 another segment of high-speed track will be completed, cutting the time to just under 4 hours. And by the end of 2008 the Spanish expect to run the trains even faster, resulting in a 2.5 hr journey.

œ Brussels-Amsterdam - the Netherlands will open service on its new Zuid (South) high-speed line (by end of this year), but due to time required to implement a new signaling systems it may be 2008 before the Thalys train can operate at 186 mph on this newest segment. Currently, conventional trains make Brussels-Amsterdam in 3 hrs, Thalys in 2.5 hrs. This will drop to 1.5 hrs when Thalys begins high-speed service (which is planned to increase in frequency, with departures nearly every hour). In combination with Eurostar's faster service beginning mid-November 2007, the trip London-Amsterdam by rail will shrink from more than 4 hrs to 3.5 hrs - which is expected to attract many passengers to rail on one of Europe's most hotly contested air routes (London-Amsterdam).

SAVE THE PLANET (AND HUMANITY) - TAKE A TRAIN

High-speed rail (and rail in general) has a dramatically lower impact on the environment, measured by all criteria, than either air or car travel.

Greenhouse gas emissions: While greenhouse gas emissions from road travel (cars/buses/trucks) grew 19% between 1990 and 2005, and those from air travel increased 8.9 %, rail reduced its emissions 36%. When calculated per 100 passenger kilometers (number of passengers x distance traveled) air travel generates more than 4 times CO2 emissions than high-speed

rail, and private cars generate 3.5 times the CO2 (measured in kilograms per 100 passenger kilometers), according to statistics compiled by the UIC from European environmental agencies.

Each passenger on a roundtrip flight between London-Paris generates 122 kilograms of CO2, compared with just 11 kg for a traveler making the roundtrip on Eurostar, according to independent research commissioned by the high-speed train operator.

Energy efficiency/consumption: high-speed trains are the "sippers" (as opposed to guzzlers) of energy, delivering more than 8 x the passenger kilometers (passengers x distance traveled) per unit of energy than airplanes, and more than 4 times that of passenger cars. High-speed trains are actually 3 times as energy efficient as slower regional trains - but even the slowest train is 25% more energy-efficient than cars. (UIC statistics)

In addition to being the environmentally-conscious transportation choice, high-speed rail has an unparalleled safety record. In 26 years of high-speed trains running on dedicated high-speed track, there have been no fatalities. In the U.S., more than 40,000 people a year lose their lives in car accidents.

SNCF's Pepy estimates that by 2010 the level of congestion on European highways will destroy 1% of Europe's GDP annually, representing a staggering loss of approximately 90 billion Euros each year.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ENGINE - PART OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

High-speed trains not only benefit travelers and the environment, they also boost the economies of communities served. In France, they call it the "TGV effect" - increases in property values, rents/real estate prices and number of jobs/businesses in towns in or near high-speed rail lines.

Real estate prices in Avignon rose more than 30% in the first three years following the launch of TGV Mediterranean. In Vendome, near the TGV Atlantique line (Paris-Tours in the Loire region) real estate prices went up 50% in five years.

In Aix-en-Provence and Marseille, more than 2,000 new jobs were created in the two years before the launch of TGV Mediterranean. Tourism and convention business are growing along TGV routes to the south and west of France. Development officials in eastern France are creating new office space, particularly in areas close to the train stations, in anticipation of businesses moving out of Paris. From Reims, the commute to Paris that today takes 1 hr 35 min will be just 45 minutes.

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