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INTERNATIONAL

### More metro in Manila

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Continuing the digital mobility community in Europe Page 22  
Chengde Central railway station in Liaoning province opens its doors Page 26  
Crossing the Asian rail network in focus Page 46

One of 12 four-car trainsets supplied by KinkiSharyo leaves EDSA station on **Manila's** LRT1 light rail corridor heading for Baclaran. After years of planning, tangible progress is now being made to expand and enhance urban and suburban rail services in the Filipino capital, as we set out in our reports beginning on p30.

Photo: Benjámín Zelki

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## IN FOCUS

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Transperth's first C-Series EMU has entered service on the Joondalup and Mandurah suburban lines in Western Australia. Alstom is supplying 41 six-car EMUs for the 1067 mm gauge Perth suburban network, which is electrified at 25 kV 50 Hz.

Based on Alstom's X'trapolis family, they are designed for a maximum speed of 130 km/h and can carry 1200 passengers. The first trains to be manufactured in Western Australia in more than 30 years are being assembled at Bellevue near Perth, under a technology transfer agreement aimed at achieving 50% local content.

More than 10000 people entered a competition to win tickets for the inaugural ride on April 7, ahead of the start of regular operation the following day.



# COMMENT

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## All eyes on June

**R**ail policymakers and advocates gathered in Brussels amid stormy weather on April 3-5 for the Connecting Europe Days, ahead of the European elections in early June and critical decisions about funding for transport for the next EU legislative period.

On April 4 a coalition of more than 40 transport trade associations and advocacy groups issued a rallying call for the next European Parliament to boost transport funding. The partners have issued a document urging the European institutions and member states to increase the Connecting Europe Facility budget for transport in the upcoming EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework for 2028-34, preparation of which will begin next year.

Speaking on behalf of the European rail supply chain, outgoing UNIFE Director-General Philippe Citroën said the EU 'urgently needs to reflect its climate ambitions with significant financial support. As the backbone of sustainable mobility, rail is the most environmental friendly mode of transport, only accounting for 0.4% of Europe's total transport greenhouse gas emissions, which means the rail supply industry is perfectly placed to be a backbone of Europe's future prosperity as a net-zero industry.'

In her welcome address at the opening of the Connecting Europe Days on April 3, EU Transport Commissioner Adina Vălean reflected on the €50bn invested in transport projects through CEF since 2014, pointing out that 75% of this had been allocated to rail or inland waterway schemes. However, she believed that too many CEF applications were still being turned down for lack of public funding, and that the EU's long-term ambitions on climate and sustainability could be put at risk as a result. 'We will need more public funding', she insisted. 'We cannot miss this train.'

Reflecting on the many challenges facing EU policymakers in the run-up to the European elections, Vălean

**0.4**  
%  
of Europe's  
total  
transport  
greenhouse  
gas emissions  
come from rail

suggested that 'transport policy should not fluctuate every 10 years', but nevertheless 'we cannot use an old map to navigate a new world'.

She was keen to emphasise the role the TEN-T network could play in enhancing military mobility, notably in eastern Europe in light of the war in Ukraine. 'We do not have separate military transport networks, so we must make sure the corridors we do have are fit for purpose', she explained.

Acknowledging the adoption in the past year of a revised TEN-T Regulation, she lauded this 'already successful' measure as a means 'not only to connect the EU, but to connect Europe'. This has brought an increased emphasis on enhancing links, especially railways, to countries in eastern Europe including Ukraine and Moldova, and the western Balkans. 'We have new maps now', she emphasised, 'and they do not include the aggressor'.

There was a consensus among speakers and delegates throughout the event in Brussels that transport advocates face multiple challenges in ensuring continued political support for programmes like CEF and TEN-T.

'If I were a politician, I'd be thinking how to balance the needs of people worried about making it to the end of the week with those worried about the end of the world', noted TEN-T Scan-Med Corridor Co-ordinator Pat Cox, a former President of the European Parliament. This was a clear nod to concern about a potential populist backlash against green policies at the European elections.

Against this backdrop, Cox's counterpart for the Orient-East Med Corridor Mathieu Grosch insisted that 'tomorrow, we must make common

cause with all the member states' to drive a societal mission to complete the TEN-T network. He was joined in a panel discussion on April 3 by the transport ministers of Spain, Óscar Puente Santiago, and the Czech Republic, Martin Kupka, both of whom pointed to the fragmented nature of the TEN-T rail network at present.

Puente suggested that from a European perspective, completing a high speed axis from northern Spain into southwestern France via Hendaye was a priority because it would connect Spain 'better with the centre of Europe'. But he noted the contrast in progress in work on rail links on each side of the border: Spain's 'Basque Y' connection linking Bilbao and San Sebastián with the border is well in hand, but the Bordeaux - Hendaye high speed line in France is seemingly stuck at the planning stage. Puente suggested this was because, unlike Spain, France already had strong rail connections to neighbouring countries in the east; in response, Grosch insisted that 'we must persuade the French to continue the work to better connect Spain'.

Kupka concurred that funding must be maintained to address shortcomings in the rail networks of central Europe too. 'The EU rail system is like the warning you hear on the London Underground', he said. 'Mind the gap! There are still too many gaps in the rail networks, especially in the CEE region. That is something we all need to address.'

That could be easier said than done as the European bloc faces up to an era of perma-crisis. Many Brussels-watchers fear a spike in far-right populist votes at next month's elections. In a survey of current EU policymakers conducted by *Politico* at the end of April, this ranked highest among issues 'keeping them awake at night'. Climate change and the Green Deal, on which so much rail investment will depend, still emerged as a critical issue, and that seems unlikely to change in a macro sense whatever the makeup of the next parliament.

But whether a 'big picture' commitment to the environment can be translated into tangible enhancements to the TEN-T network through CEF and other instruments is unlikely to become clear until at least the back end of the year. 🌐

“We cannot use an old map to navigate a new world”

Adina Vălean, EU Transport Commissioner

## Briefing

The US **Federal Railroad Administration** has issued a final rule on the size of train crews. Due to come into force from June 10, this requires a minimum of two crew members 'except for certain identified one-person operations that do not pose significant safety risks'. It also establishes a special approval process for railroads seeking to initiate one-person operations.

Following the European Commission's introduction of Green Travel Support, Eurail and the Erasmus Student Network have launched a dedicated **Interrail Global** pass to encourage sustainable travel and exploration by students and staff participating in the Erasmus+ education scheme.

Backed by C\$3.2m from British Columbia's Clean BC Go Electric Commercial Vehicle Pilots programme, **CN** has purchased a 'plug-in' hybrid diesel-battery locomotive from Progress Rail. The railway intends to evaluate the main line unit under varying operational and weather conditions to assess the opportunity for retrofitting a portion of its fleet.

Channel Tunnel operator Getlink has started modifying its shuttle train terminals at Coquelles and Folkestone in preparation for implementation of the European Union's **Entry/Exit System** on October 6. Under an €80m investment plan, it is installing dedicated pre-registration buildings with a total of 224 biometric checking kiosks supplied by French manufacturer IN Groupe.

**Moldova** has applied for accession to the Convention Concerning International Carriage by Rail, which will be deemed accepted on June 26 unless objections are received from five member states. Accession would then take effect after a further three months, making Moldova the 51st OTIF member state.

# Ferrocarril Central inaugurated

## URUGUAY

The modernised Ferrocarril Central linking Montevideo with Paso de los Toros was inaugurated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Cardal station, 76 km north of the capital, on April 16. The event was attended by President Luis Lacalle, Transport Minister José Luis Faleiro, the President of PPP project promoter Via Central Group Alejandro Ruibal and officials from future train operator Portren.

The north-south trunk railway has been renovated to support the UPM pulp production mill being built on the south side of the Río Negro near Paso de los Toros, 273 km north of Montevideo. The mill is expected to provide a base-load of around 2 million tonnes per annum, but the line is also expected to carry improved passenger services.

Despite the celebrations, a number of tasks remain outstanding. These include the installation

of level crossing and signalling equipment, and completion of the track linking the passenger station in Montevideo with the UPM pulp terminal in the nearby port.

During the inauguration, Lacalle said other refurbishment projects were planned, adding that 'some companies have already come to talk about taking the train to Salto', and suggesting that the line to the border with Brazil 'could be used to move cargo'.

★ Citing a lack of action to implement ETCS, national freight operator SELF does not expect to be able to operate trains on Ferrocarril Central using its 10 GE 18-7i locomotives in the near future. Passenger services between Montevideo and 25 de Agosto are not expected to restart until at least 2025. 📌

# High speed RFP

## USA

The California High-Speed Rail Authority board approved on April 11 a request for proposals for the supply of high speed trainsets and their maintenance for 30 years.

Two prototypes are to be delivered for testing and trial running

within four years of the notice to proceed, followed by four production trains to operate passenger services on the initial 275 km Merced to Bakersfield 'early operating segment' from 2030-33. The trains must be capable of operating at 355 km/h and will be tested at up to 390 km/h.

Alstom Transportation and Siemens Mobility have already been prequalified. Their proposals are to be submitted this autumn, with the authority aiming to award a contract by the end of the year.

A federal funding contribution requires compliance with Buy America rules, although waivers may be sought for components that cannot be sourced domestically. 📌

# ComfortJet on track

## CZECH REPUBLIC

ČD unveiled its first 230 km/h ComfortJet inter-city trainset in Praha on April 9. The first trains were expected to enter service on Praha – Bohumin and Bohumin – Praha – Františkovy Lázně services from the end of the month.

The operator ordered 180 coaches from Siemens Mobility and Škoda Group in April 2021 under a contract valued at Kč12.5bn. Based on Siemens Mobility's

Viaggio Comfort range, the vehicles will be formed as 20 nine-car push-pull trainsets, paired with Siemens Vectron multi-system locomotives due for delivery from early 2025.

ČD plans to introduce the first sets in a temporary seven-car configuration without the Vectron driving trailers or restaurant cars, in order to address a shortage of rolling stock for domestic inter-city routes. In the longer term, the ComfortJet trainsets are intended to be deployed on international services linking Praha with Berlin, Hamburg, København; Wien, Graz, Villach; and Bratislava and Budapest. 📌





## Tema – Mpakadan DMU


### GHANA

The first of two Pesa DMUs for the 1435 mm gauge Tema – Mpakadan railway was delivered to the port of Tema in early April. Assembled in Bydgoszcz and shipped from Hamburg, the two-car Link DMU is to be commissioned formally by Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo in June.

The second unit is expected to be shipped in May, and a further 10 may follow. The 120 km/h sets are powered by diesel engines that meet Stage V emission standards, and will be maintained by Pesa for five years. They have been

procured by Ghana's VAOB financing and infrastructure management group, working with the Ministry of Railway Development.

Built with financial support from Exim Bank, the 97.7 km line is intended as the first stage of a 1000 km standard gauge route that would eventually reach Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. There are also proposals to build a branch from Yendi to serve iron ore deposits at Sheini.

The DMUs are expected to operate six trips each way per day. At Tema, passengers will be able to connect with the revitalised 1067 mm gauge line to Achimota, Baatsona and Accra. 



## Long-term plans approved

### SWITZERLAND


The Swiss Parliament has approved changes to the national railway investment programmes known as *Ausbauschritte 2025* and 2035 as proposed by the Federal Council. These add around SFr3bn to the cost, taking the total to SFr23bn.

The programme includes full double-tracking of the Lötschberg base tunnel, a tunnel from Morges to Perroy on the Lausanne – Genève main line, additional

expenditure on the Brüttener tunnel between Winterthur and Dietikon, construction of an underground station in Genève, and project design for the 21.8 km metre gauge Grimseltunnel between Innertkirchen and Oberwald.

Additions include planning for the separation of traffic flows at Pratteln, construction of a new station at Basel-Morgartenring and advance works for the second stage of the Zimmerberg tunnel near Horgen, as well as measures to reduce the negative effects of the

planned 2025 timetable change in western Switzerland.

Parliament has also approved the *Perspektive Bahn 2050* long-term railway development strategy. This is intended to prioritise routes in and between cities with improvements to short and medium distance travel, including more S-Bahn services and improvements to suburban stations. The strategy also envisages enhancements to make rail more competitive with road and air on long-distance routes. 


## Dublin – Belfast battery trains

### EUROPE

Funding has been put in place for a fleet of electric-battery inter-city trains to operate an improved cross-border *Enterprise* service between Dublin and Belfast.

Eight 1600 mm gauge train-sets are to be ordered this year and enter service in 2029, replacing four diesel loco-hauled rakes. They would use the existing 1.5 kV DC electrification in the Dublin area and battery power on non-electrified sections.

A tranche of €165m is being provided through the Peaceplus partnership between the European Union, the UK and Irish governments and the Northern Ireland Executive. Funding will also come from the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland and the Department of Transport in Ireland.

Under the Shared Island initiative, the Irish government will provide €12.5m each to Iarnród Éireann and Translink Northern Ireland Railways to support the planned hourly service. The trains are expected to reduce the journey time from 2 h 7 min to around 1 h 55 min. 

## Railcoop liquidation

### FRANCE

Open access co-operative Railcoop was expected to be liquidated on April 29, following a hearing at the administrative court in Cahors on April 15. The co-operative had been placed into judicial administration on October 16 for a period of up to six months.

While the liquidation would bring to an end the idea of using a co-operative model to launch open access trains such as Railcoop's planned Lyon – Bordeaux service,

President Nicolas Debaisieux told *Railway Gazette International* that the project could still be salvaged. Railcoop had been planning to restructure itself into an operating business and an asset management 'opco', negotiating with investment fund Serena Partners and a rolling stock leasing company to secure 60% of the €11m required.

The co-operative had explored the sale of its two X72500 DMUs to Romanian operator Marub SA to cover its legal costs, but Clermont Ferrand-based maintenance

contractor ACC M refused to release them as the business had not paid for the storage of the trains since 2022. A court order instructed Railcoop to pay €160,000 to ACC M.

Debaisieux felt that Railcoop had demonstrated a clear demand for rail services on secondary lines in France, and the experience had laid bare many of the hurdles facing new entrants. Its short-lived freight services had proved the organisation's ability to operate trains in line with regulatory requirements. Railcoop's membership had reached a peak of 14,000 at the time of its collapse. 