**Towards independent and spontaneous rail travel for all**

**EDF Conference within the European Year of Rail**

**27 May 2021**

**Questions & Answers**

Below are answers to the most relevant questions asked during the conference. If you have other questions or need more details, please contact Mher Hakobyan, EDF Accessibility Officer (mher.hakobyan@edf-feph.org).

1. **Does the EDF or the EU cabinet have any plans to interact directly with Rail Disability Users Groups across the community, to hear from those with lived experience?**

EDF regularly consults persons with disabilities within our network to develop our positions and advocacy priorities. We do this through surveys, written requests through our Members’ Mailing, and by consulting our email expert group on transport accessibility and passenger rights. We always welcome feedback.

1. **In my country Belgium the Assistance service is accessible from 7 am to 9 pm. but what if I arrive later? Or there is a change when I combine transports, I cannot change my assistance and cannot call the Call centre to announce the changes. Will the regulations bring here improvement?**

Right to assistance is under the scope of the Rail Passengers’ Rights Regulation and not under TEN-T or TSI-PRM which aim to improve technical accessibility of infrastructure and trains. A recast of the Rail Passengers’ Rights Regulation was adopted recently but unfortunately it still leaves the possibilities to transport operators to limit the times at which assistance is provided. EDF tried very hard to change this with our “Turn-up-and-go” campaign, but unfortunately this was a missed opportunity by the legislators.

1. **I note that Pablo mentioned "Trans-European" funding. Is Ireland as an "island" nation losing out on funding?**

Ireland is eligible for EU Funding as any other EU member country. Countries decide themselves what kind of projects they want to do and apply for funding for. So, it is important that national disability organisations advocate to their governments to apply for funds for the purpose of improving accessibility of transport infrastructure.

1. **When will we be able to obtain PA-travel companions/disability discounts valid throughout the EU for those who rely on an assistant so as to be able to travel?**

This questions does not fall under the scope of the Regulations that were discussed during the conference but it rather concerns the European Disability Card, which is a different EU initiative. Currently it is only available in 8 EU Member States (Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Malta, Romania, and Slovenia) but the European Commission is planning to expand it to the entire EU by 2023.

1. **What are the EU tools to promote accessibility following universal design and not only special solutions for accessibility. Do you think that the knowledge on universal design is available in the rail sector?**

This question was answered during the conference and is included in the conference summary article. In addition, promotion and use of the new European Standard on accessibility and usability of the built environment (EN17210) can be a very good way of mainstreaming a design for all approach to accessibility of rail infrastructure and trains.

1. **How can user organisations like VFG use EU legislation to improve accessibility policy in Belgium? Can we use it as a tool for lobbying?**

It is indeed possible and important to use EU law for national lobbying, as the mentioned EU law on Rail Accessibility (TSI-PRM), TEN-T, and Rail Passenger Rights are Regulations**.** This means they must be applied directly by national governments and services, unless of course the Regulation allows certain exemptions. EDF regularly publishes analyses, position papers and conducts trainings about these laws to help disability advocates understand them and how they can benefit persons with disabilities. So, national advocates can use this knowledge and push for proper implementation of these laws at national level, similar to the example our Lithuanian members presented during the conference. It is also important that national advocates give us and the European Commission feedback when things are not working at national level, so that during revision of EU law, weak aspects can be strengthened. EDF also always welcomes feedback from national advocates to learn about the situation in the different Member States to improve our advocacy work.

1. **Should there be screens with Sign language for those who may not be able to read to supplement the audio announcements both on board trains and in station areas?**

This question was answered during the conference. The short answer is ‘yes’. However, it is always best to consult persons who use sign language communication to make sure it is provided based on their needs.

1. **Having to give 24hours notice to travel is discriminatory, has ‘turn up and go’ been abandoned as an objective?**

Unfortunately for now, this is the minimum requirement in the revised Rail Passengers’ Rights Regulation, even though EDF strongly advocated for a ‘turn up and go’ principle.

1. **All stations and most trains are equipped with toilets for travellers, however, there are very few stations equipped with toilet facilities for assistance dogs. There are more and more assistance dogs, will our strategy be adjusted to ensure this fairly low-cost facility is provided at key transport hubs?**

EDF advocates that transport facilities are accessible for everyone, including for users of assistance dogs. This means, having facilities for assistance dogs during rail travel.

Below are questions which were either repetitions, out of the scope of the conference or comments. If you still want an answer to any of the below, please contact Mher Hakobyan, EDF Accessibility Officer (mher.hakobyan@edf-feph.org).

1. Question for Pat - How are these national disability advocates selected?
2. Is it really inclusive for the EU transport twitter account to use the strap line - "Hop On"?
3. Will there be better language used to describe people with disabilities - previously the EU chose to describe us as "People with Peculiarities" in the new regulations/guidance materials?
4. Can those proposed new technical standards/regulations be made "real life" proofed - the current technical regulations do not take account of the size of powered chairs. Access/Egress points are not wide enough and corridors/toilet facilities are hard to move around in for those with large powered wheelchairs?
5. Should the EU provide funding to national rail organisations such as "Irish Rail" who have excellent leadership from the top, who want to make their system as accessible as is humanly possible, but are frustrated because of budgetary constraints, to empower them and EU rail systems to be accessible?
6. Should there not be sharing of those initiatives that have worked in a member state to enable others across the community to benefit from same?
7. Vinnie, great question and there is an EU Disability Pass being trialled in eight countries - https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1139 - Ireland wasn't one of them.
8. I thought the German Railways and Belgium Railways bought new railway sets without any consultation with the disability community. If that what is considered a high standard?
9. Is the sliding step a disability access reason for it or is it being Holland so that cyclist can access the train?
10. Are there any plans to make the train more accessible for those with PAS, and who need help to transfer onto the toilet seat? It can be very hard to always ensure that one will be able to skip the toilet step.
11. We are fortunate to have 'Free' travel as disabled persons in Ireland- Does the panel foresee that in the future it would be possible to use our travel passes throughout Europe (in much the same way as the Parking Card operates)?
12. How can rail service providers be made to consult with disability organisations from design concept to improve their disability inclusion and access?
13. In the context of EYR, what solutions are offered / planned in the area of accessibility of rail transport of the severely handicapped people, necessarily accompanied by a carer or assistant in wagon-lits (not meaning chaise longue)?
14. What solutions are available / planned for the transport of passenger cars with adaptation of the wheelchair and / or special motor homes \*) in combination with the joint simultaneous transport of passengers by rail sleeper cars?
15. How will the project of European Disability Card continue? See https://www.edf-feph.org/the-european-disability-card-and-the-disability-rights-strategy-whats-next/
16. How can we, NGOs, make our local central authorities more respectful of all European conventions on the rights of the disabled to barrier-free rail transport? How to prevent cases where, for example, a German railway company in its Germany approaches the solution of barrier-free access to wagons in an very exemplary manner and in the Czech Republic uses a deadly solution of boarding with the help of rails with an inclination of 25 °! and, in addition, without side guide locking stops on the rails? (Repeated interventions by MEP Radka Maxova did not help in this case either.)
17. The Opus Lacrimosa Institute, of which I am the director, developed and had built a completely unique motorhome designed for people with severe physical disabilities. The Charley Tramp™® camper was developed primarily for people in electric wheelchairs or who can only be transported in a supine position (possibly with the need for instrument support for breath ventilation). We operate our camper Charley Tramp™® as a subsidized non-profit rental. There are very few such cars in the EU, most probably only this one. Distances from Brno (CZ) to tourist and recreational areas are mostly over 1200 km. That is why the question of the possibility of transporting a car by rail is important to us.