

PRESS RELEASE

GERMANY: rail incumbent DB is commercialising public safety during the COVID-19 pandemic

BRUSSELS & BERLIN, 2nd September 2020:

Summary:

- **Once again, Germany's market dominant rail operator Deutsche Bahn ('DB') is in line to receive preferential treatment – this time in the form of a multibillion-euro support package from its owner, the German government, in order to counter the effects of COVID-19.**
- **However, DB still refuses to share with independent digital ticket vendors data predicting how crowded its trains are in the current pandemic.**
- **The commercial intention is clear: to benefit from its dominance as an operator by ensuring passengers get better COVID-related information at DB's in-house ticket vendors (bahn.de & App "DB Navigator").**
- **Not only is DB commercialising public safety, but its in-house ticket vendors are market dominant & partisan, refusing to show & sell many other rail operators. Such behaviour leads to fragmentation, undermining the attractiveness of EU passenger rail – especially across borders.**

The Challenge:

On 3rd June 2020, under the auspices of the Netherlands government, 24 European countries – including Germany – agreed to work together on international passenger rail and make it a more “an attractive alternative”.

The letter that they sent to the EU Commission said that: "Issues such as complex ticket buying systems for multi-leg journeys with different operators should be addressed by digital solutions. Frequent rail travellers have long called for an online platform similar to 'Skyscanner' to be set up, perhaps by the EU."

In reality, at least nine such 'Skyscanners for rail' already exist. They are privately owned independent digital rail ticket vendors. Furthermore, they are 'Made in Europe', headquartered in places such as Warsaw, Stockholm & Paris, employing digital professionals in the EU. Two of them – FromAtoB and Omio – are even based in Germany. (Continued overleaf)

¹ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/railways/news/24-countries-sign-pledge-to-boost-international-rail-routes/>

In fact, only last month, Omio received a new round of growth funding from private investors². Like with the other examples, this demonstrates that private investors are still willing to invest in public transport, despite COVID-19.

Such independent digital ticket vendors fulfil a critical role: they show and sell all rail operators in an impartial and transparent manner. They also combine tickets of different operators to provide the most optimal (cheapest or fastest) multi-leg journey between any two rail stations, especially across EU borders.

Simply put: such digital innovators make the EU passenger rail system more transparent and accessible, a crucial factor in achieving the EU Green Deal.

But they cannot perform their role if state-owned rail operators like DB engage in **digital protectionism** – giving preferential data to in-house ticket vendors.

➤ **The result is chaos & fragmentation:** passengers who want to search and book the best multi-leg journeys across different operators often have to download two or more Apps – just for one trip(!) Few will do this – instead, they will use less sustainable modes of transport that are easier to book.

It is particularly galling that, during this COVID-19 pandemic, DB is giving its in-house ticket vendors better public safety data about crowding levels on trains. Omio's Founder & CEO Naren Shaam says. *"I never expected a monopoly, or any train operator, to stoop to this level – you don't commercialise public safety."*²

The Solution:

ALLRAIL Secretary General Nick Brooks states: *"now it is time for the 24 European countries to act and enable independent digital ticket vendors fulfil their crucial role: providing impartial information & booking options for international trips."*

For international passenger rail to grow, people need 'One-Stop Shops'. That means: websites or Apps where they can find impartial real-time data on timetables, delays, COVID-related crowding levels and the lowest prices as well as being able to book the most optimal multi-leg rail journey.

It is the 24 European countries that own the rail incumbents. Therefore, they must ensure that ALL ticket vendors receive equal access to the SAME data.

Competition between ticket vendors should not be in terms of who has better access to data but instead about who makes better use of it for the benefit of passengers, providing the most user-friendly One Stop Shop.

Without this, the Single European Rail Area will remain broken and fragmented.

² <https://www.ft.com/content/fa80a1fc-902a-4a90-8ad3-8eed128dd6d0>