

## Covid-19 reawakens Europe's sleeper trains

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

What do you know about railways? Choose the correct answers.

1. The world's first passenger railway was in **the UK / the USA**.
2. Railways in **China / Japan** carry more passengers than any other country in the world.
3. The longest train journey in one country is in **Canada / Russia**.
4. The first underground railway was built in **Budapest / London**.
5. The busiest railway station in the world is in **Beijing / Tokyo**.

#### 2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

tentative  
bailout

flurry  
forsake

foresight  
inaugural

thrive  
resurrect

quadruple  
rolling stock

1. If people \_\_\_\_\_ something, they stop using it.
2. A \_\_\_\_\_ sign or indication is not certain or definite.
3. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a short period of activity.
4. An \_\_\_\_\_ event is the first of a series.
5. If people \_\_\_\_\_ something, they start using it again after it has disappeared, been forgotten or stopped being used.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ is the good judgement to think and plan before an event so you are prepared for whatever may happen.
7. If things \_\_\_\_\_, they become four times bigger than they were before.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ consists of the engines, coaches and other parts of trains used on a railway.
9. If businesses \_\_\_\_\_, they become very successful.
10. A \_\_\_\_\_ is money given or lent to an organization with financial problems.

#### 3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. How many people can a normal high-speed train accommodate in one coach?
2. When did the German rail operator, Deutsche Bahn, end the sleeper service from Paris to Berlin?
3. When did the night train from the Czech Republic to Croatia begin operating?
4. In which country is ÖBB the rail operator?
5. What is The Man in Seat 61?
6. Which two cities are connected by the Trenhotel Lusitania?

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#### 'People don't want to fly': Covid-19 reawakens Europe's sleeper trains

*Overnight services in Europe had seemingly hit the buffers but pandemic has revived demand*

**Daniel Boffey**

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- 1 For all their promise of romance and adventure, Europe's sleeper trains had appeared to have reached the end of the line. Cripplingly expensive to run and forsaken by travellers for budget airlines, a decision by the German rail operator, Deutsche Bahn, to terminate the service connecting Paris to Berlin in 2014 ushered in the closure of routes across the continent including almost all of France's network.
- 2 But as Europe continues to grapple with the coronavirus pandemic, there are tentative signs of a new dawn for the couchettes and twin bunks, as the concerns of both governments and travellers over the environmental impact of short-haul flights are being complemented by a desire to avoid airport departure lounges and security queues.
- 3 Recently, there has been a flurry of announcements and inaugural journeys. The Swedish government has said it will provide funds for two new routes to connect the cities of Stockholm and Malmö with Hamburg and Brussels. France's Transport Minister, Jean-Baptiste Djebbari, has said an overnight service will be resurrected between Paris and Nice following Emmanuel Macron's Bastille Day promise to redevelop night trains for the nation.
- 4 Leading the way has been the Austrian operator, Österreichische Bundesbahnen (ÖBB), which had the foresight to buy 42 sleeper cars from Deutsche Bahn in 2016. It has resumed half of the night-time routes connecting Hamburg, Berlin, Munich and Düsseldorf to Austria, Switzerland and Italy.
- 5 Despite a recent rise in the number of coronavirus infections in Belgium, up 71% week-on-week, a Brussels-Vienna service, which opened in February, offering one-way trips from as little as €29.90, will recommence in September. Along with government action, there is evidence of renewed enthusiasm among the paying public, too, as people reflect more deeply on how they travel amid the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 6 A new summer night train linking five EU member states – the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia – had barely started setting off from Prague on 30 June when the level of demand from holidaymakers heading to the coast ensured it was upgraded to a daily service.
- 7 The Swedish rail company Snälltåget said in June it planned to quadruple the number of night trains on its Stockholm-Malmö-Copenhagen-Hamburg-Berlin route. A new Alpine-Sylt night express that began operating between Sylt in northern Germany and Salzburg in Austria was also due to run for only two months but will continue until November due to demand.
- 8 "What I am told by people using my site is two things in the same breath: they are fed up with the airport experience, and they want to cut their carbon footprint," said Mark Smith, who runs the award-winning The Man in Seat 61 railway website offering information on pan-European services. "Certainly, in the short term, I am getting people commenting that they don't want to fly because of the pandemic. I think climate change will be the bigger one in the long term because hopefully this pandemic will be over at some point."
- 9 A normal high-speed train can accommodate 70 people in a coach and take multiple journeys a day, offering a number of stops. A sleeper might hold 20 to 30 beds in a coach, but the majority of its passengers will travel end-to-end. The rolling stock is used for just one journey over a 24-hour period.
- 10 Train services have had to pay track-access charges as they cross borders since 2000. New services run by private companies are often just for the summer months, while state operators are taking huge government handouts in order to re-establish their overnight routes. As a result, some of the most romantic night-train journeys that were still running when the pandemic struck may still be discontinued, including the Thello Paris-Venice night-train service and the Trenhotel Lusitania, which runs between Lisbon and Madrid.
- 11 Karima Delli, a French MEP who chairs the European Parliament's transport committee, welcomed governments' loosening of their purse strings. "Relaunching night trains is both a necessity and an ecological solution for the planet," she said.

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12 But Alexander Gomme, from the Back on Track Belgium campaign group, said there needed to be a wider rethink of the costs to allow private operators to thrive, raise standards and take advantage of the new mentality. "More state' is a possibility but another is that the European Union makes it easier and cheaper for operators to book track access," he said. "Night trains do a lot of kilometres, and access charges are counted in kilometres."

13 Nick Brooks, the secretary general of the Alliance of Rail New Entrants, which represents independent providers, argued that governments should also prohibit airlines receiving state bailouts from operating any short-haul or late-night flights that could be done by train. "This pandemic must lead to a better appreciation for rail," he said.

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### 4 Comprehension check

Choose the best answers according to the text.

- Why did rail companies start closing sleeper routes across Europe?
  - because the tickets were too expensive for most travellers
  - because the routes connected cities that no one wanted to visit
  - because they were expensive to operate and most people preferred to fly
- Which of these sentences best summarizes why sleeper trains have been resurrected?
  - People no longer want to fly because of concerns about the coronavirus pandemic.
  - Governments are worried about the environmental impact of flying and people catching coronavirus in crowded airport departure lounges.
  - People want to avoid crowded airports and, along with governments, are also concerned about the effect of short-haul flights on the environment.
- What advantage do state operators currently have over private train operating companies?
  - They receive money from governments to re-establish overnight trains.
  - They only have to operate during the summer months.
  - They don't have to pay track-access charges to cross borders.
- What solution does the secretary general of the Alliance of Rail New Entrants propose?
  - that all late-night journeys should be done by train
  - that airlines that receive state bailouts should not be allowed to operate short-haul or late-night flights
  - that access charges should no longer be based on the number of kilometres that trains travel

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#### 5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. a five-word phrase meaning *the moment when something has to stop because it cannot succeed or improve* (para 1)
2. a two-word phrase meaning *costing an excessive amount of money* (para 1)
3. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *make an activity or process begin* (para 1)
4. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *try hard to solve a difficult problem* (para 2)
5. a verb meaning *start again after stopping temporarily* (para 4)
6. a three-word phrase meaning *annoyed or bored with something that you feel you have accepted for too long* (para 8)
7. a four-word verb phrase meaning *increase the amount of money that is available* (para 11)
8. a noun meaning *the ability to understand the true nature of something and realize why it is important* (para 13)

#### 6 Two-word phrases

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

- |                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. environmental | a. enthusiasm |
| 2. security      | b. charge     |
| 3. renewed       | c. queue      |
| 4. carbon        | d. rethink    |
| 5. access        | e. impact     |
| 6. wider         | f. footprint  |

#### 7 Word-building

Complete the sentences using the correct form of the word in brackets at the end of each sentence.

1. It seems that the \_\_\_\_\_ of night-train routes across Europe may be over for the moment. [CLOSE]
2. Some of the night-train routes that were operating when the pandemic started may be \_\_\_\_\_. [CONTINUE]
3. MEP Karima Delli is in favour of \_\_\_\_\_ night trains. [LAUNCH]
4. She believes it is both a \_\_\_\_\_ and an ecological solution for the planet. [NECESSARY]
5. Recently, there has been a flurry of \_\_\_\_\_ about resurrecting night trains. [ANNOUNCE]
6. The summer night train connecting the Czech Republic and Croatia has been \_\_\_\_\_ to a daily service. [GRADE]

#### 8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- Night trains are slow, uncomfortable and noisy.
- It's much better to travel by plane.
- Train travel is better for the environment.