

Covid-19 reawakens Europe's sleeper trains

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

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. The paragraph numbers will help you.

impact

upgraded

short-haul

operates

demand

1. If a service or system _____, it exists and is available. (para 1)
2. _____ is the effect that something has. (para 2)
3. A _____ flight doesn't travel very far. (para 2)
4. _____ is the amount of a product or service that people want or the fact that they want it. (para 5)
5. If a service is _____, it is improved. (para 5)

necessity

quadruple

access

fed up

carbon footprint

6. If things _____, they become four times bigger than they were before. (para 6)
7. If you are _____ with something, you feel annoyed or bored with it because you feel you have accepted for too long. (para 7)
8. Your _____ is the amount of carbon dioxide you cause as a result of your activities, for example travelling by plane. (para 7)
9. An _____ charge is the money you have to pay to use something. (para 9)
10. A _____ is something that is needed in a particular situation. (para 9)

3 Find the information

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

1. When did the German rail operator, Deutsche Bahn, end the sleeper service from Paris to Berlin?
2. Which cities will the two new Swedish routes connect?
3. When did the night train from the Czech Republic to Croatia begin operating?
4. How many people can a normal high-speed train take in one coach?
5. How many beds are there on a sleeper coach?
6. How many journeys does a sleeper train make in a 24-hour period?

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

Daniel Boffey

27 July, 2020

- 1 During the last few years, sleeper trains have almost completely disappeared from Europe. They are extremely expensive to operate, and travellers now prefer budget airlines. When the German rail operator, Deutsche Bahn, ended the service connecting Paris to Berlin in 2014, other European routes starting closing including almost all of France's network.
- 2 But as the coronavirus pandemic continues, there are some signs of a new beginning for sleeper trains because both governments and travellers are worried about the environmental impact of short-haul flights and because people want to avoid airports.
- 3 Recently, there have been several announcements and new night-train journeys. The Swedish government has said it will give money for two new routes to connect the cities of Stockholm and Malmö with Hamburg and Brussels. France's transport minister has said an overnight service will restart between Paris and Nice.
- 4 The Austrian rail operator, Österreichische Bundesbahnen (ÖBB), has led the way. It bought 42 sleeper cars from Deutsche Bahn in 2016 and has restarted half of the night-time routes connecting Hamburg, Berlin, Munich and Düsseldorf to Austria, Switzerland and Italy. A Brussels-Vienna service, which opened in February, offering one-way trips from €29.90, will start again in September.
- 5 A new summer night train linking five EU member states – the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia – started operating from Prague on 30 June. However, there was so much demand that it was quickly upgraded to a daily service.
- 6 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 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 now continue until November.
- 7 "On my website, people say two things: they are fed up with the airport experience, and they want to reduce their carbon footprint," said Mark Smith, who runs the award-winning The Man in Seat 61 railway website. "In the short term, people are commenting that they don't want to fly because of the pandemic. But I think climate change will be the main reason in the long term because hopefully this pandemic will be over at some point."
- 8 A normal high-speed train can take 70 people in a coach and do multiple journeys a day, with a number of stops. A sleeper might hold 20 to 30 beds in a coach, but the majority of its passengers will travel all the way. The trains are used for just one journey in a 24-hour period.
- 9 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 receiving huge government payments in order to re-start their overnight routes. Karima Delli, a French MEP who is head of the European Parliament's transport committee, welcomed government action. "Relaunching night trains is both a necessity and good for the planet," she said.
- 10 Alexander Gomme, from a Belgian campaign group, said, "the European Union should make 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."
- 11 Others argue that governments should also stop airlines receiving state aid from operating any short-haul or late-night flights that could be done by train. They hope the pandemic leads to more people travelling by rail.

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4 Comprehension check

Match the beginnings and endings to make statements about the text.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Rail companies started closing sleeper train routes because ... | a. ... half of its night-time routes. |
| 2. The Austrian train operator, ÖBB, has restarted ... | b. ... they have to pay access charges. |
| 3. State train operating companies receive money from governments ... | c. ... they were expensive to operate and most people preferred to fly. |
| 4. When train services cross borders, ... | d. ... they are worried about the pandemic and also about climate change. |
| 5. Mark Smith believes that people are travelling by train more because ... | e. ... should not be allowed to operate flights that could be done by train. |
| 6. Some people believe that airlines that receive state aid ... | f. ... to restart night trains, but private companies don't. |

5 Chunks

Rearrange the words to make phrases from the text.

- few last during years the
- short-haul the of flights impact environmental
- announcements have several been there
- train a night summer new
- main term in the the reason long
- period twenty- in a hour four

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. multiple | a. haul |
| 2. carbon | b. train |
| 3. short | c. company |
| 4. access | d. footprint |
| 5. high-speed | e. journeys |
| 6. private | f. charge |

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7 Word-building

Complete the table using words from the text.

	verb	noun
1.	travel	(person)
2.	operate	(person)
3.	announce	
	noun	adjective
4.	expense	
5.	day	
6.	environment	

8 Discussion

- Do you like travelling by train? Why? Why not?
- Have you ever travelled on a sleeper train? Would you like to (again)? Why? Why not?