

INTERNATIONAL

Eurostar schedules from and to London have been further updated and are now valid until July 19 (Table 10).

RailJet service **89** from München to Verona has been extended to Bologna. In the opposite direction, train **86** from Verona to München now starts from Bologna (Table 70).

SPAIN

The classic route between Guadalajara and Zaragoza, including the branch line between Sigüenza and Soria, is temporarily closed until mid-December so that engineering work can be carried out. All services are operated by bus during this period and Table **651** has been updated with the revised schedules.

Sant Andreu Arenal station has been renamed Fabra i Puig to avoid confusion with Sant Andreu Comtal, which has itself been renamed Sant Andreu (Table **656**).

Avant service **8664** from Málaga to Sevilla has been retimed to depart 25 minutes earlier (Table **663a**).

Engineering work between Benidorm and Dénia has been completed and so the normal service has now been restored (Table **667**).

Most *Media Distancia* and *Regional Exprés* services on the València / Alacant – Albacete – Alcázar de San Juan corridor have been retimed. This includes the two *Media Distancia* services in each direction between Alacant and Ciudad Real (Tables **668** and **678**).

Engineering work taking place between Sagunt and Zaragoza has closed the line until November 17. Rail replacement bus services are operating during this period (Table **670**).

Media Distancia services between Algeciras and Antequera - Santa Ana have been extended to and from Antequera AV, as shown in Table **673**, thereby improving some connections to and from Granada (Table **678a**).

Serveis Ferroviaris de Mallorca has introduced additional services from Palma to both Manacor and Sa Pobla. Table **674** has been updated with the revised timings although, due to the lack of space on page 330, we have had to temporarily move this table to page 326.

NORWAY

From April 4 the normal service was restored between Oslo and Trondheim following completion of repairs to the bridge south of Otta station, which was damaged by severe weather in January (Table **785**).

Due to the ongoing electrification work on the line between Trondheim and Steinkjer, rail replacement bus services will be operating along sections of the route from May 3 to June 15 (Table **787**). The work will generally take place between 1000 and 2000 each day meaning most daytime train departures will be affected. The work will be carried out in three phases:

- From May 3 to 24 affecting services between Trondheim and Stjørdal
- From May 25 to June 1 affecting services along the entire route
- From June 2 to 15 affecting services between Stjørdal and Steinkjer

Journey times will be extended by up to 30 minutes and readers are advised to confirm timings with the operator before travelling.

GERMANY

Timings shown in the German section are valid until June 6, a period when a section of the important Mannheim to Stuttgart high-speed line is closed for essential maintenance. This has resulted in major alterations to many long-distance services with some trains diverted via alternative routes (resulting in considerably extended journey times) while others are either curtailed or suspended. Note that long-distance services between Köln and Koblenz are also being diverted during this period and do not call at Bonn Hbf; journey times are extended and certain services that normally run as through trains via Köln Hbf, instead start from or terminate at Köln Hbf with no connection between them.

FERRIES

Our tables covering Adriatic Sea ferry services (**2715 - 2795**) have been updated to show, where possible, schedules until the end of October.

Finnlines will now accept foot passengers on its Naantali to Kapellskär route (Table **2407**).

Trasmediterranea has withdrawn its route between Málaga and Melilla (Table **2595**) with its sailings to Melilla now operating from Motril (located just over 100 kilometres east of Malaga). A new Table **2596** has been created to show the revised schedules.

Opinion: Spanish Railways' International Ambitions

The Spanish press recently reported that Spanish Railways (RENFE) was considering stopping all cross-border operations, only for a further announcement to rapidly follow that it was instead entering a "phase of reflection".

RENFE's first foray outside the Iberian peninsula dates back to June 1969, when it launched the *Catalan Talgo*, a daytime service between Barcelona and Genève that took nine hours each way. There was even a connection offered in Avignon for journeys to and from Milano, giving one-change service between Catalonia and Lombardy, something that is much needed today.

This ground-breaking venture, made possible by Talgo's gauge-changing technology, soon expanded to include night trains from Madrid and Barcelona to Paris in collaboration with French Railways (SNCF), as well as connections to Milano and destinations in Switzerland. At one stage RENFE even offered a limited winter service from Barcelona to the French Alps.

However, as overnight rail services fell out of favour across Europe, these routes were gradually discontinued. In their place came a new joint venture with SNCF, marked by a modern twice-daily TGV service between Paris and Barcelona, alongside RENFE's own offerings to Lyon and Marseille using its S-100 sets.

This partnership dissolved in 2021, when SNCF entered RENFE's most profitable domestic route – Madrid to Barcelona – with its budget *Ouigo* brand. In response, RENFE announced its own plans to launch services to Paris in time for the 2024 Olympics, using the new Talgo Avril series 106 trains, as well as re-establishing direct services to Lyon and Marseille independently.

Unfortunately, persistent production issues at Talgo, compounded by uncertainties around ownership, have delayed certification of the

Avril trains that were supposed to be offered in France until at least 2028. In the meantime, the limited offering of just two daily services from Catalonia to France has proven unsustainable, contributing to the RENFE Groups' substantial losses – €123 million in 2023 and a further €23 million in 2024.

Meanwhile, Spain's push for greater competition on its railways has certainly benefited consumers. Yet, if French media reports are accurate, SNCF itself incurred a €45 million loss in 2024 from its efforts to gain a foothold in the Spanish market – though this is almost certainly negligible for a company that posted €1.6 billion in profits the same year.

Looking abroad, RENFE has sought to emulate the successful expansion strategies of its European counterparts by acquiring a 33% stake in Italy-based Arenaways and a 51% share in Czech operator Leo Express. Though it is still early days, these international investments do not appear, perhaps unsurprisingly, to be yielding encouraging results.

Given the mounting pressure from SNCF and Trenitalia, both of which have successfully siphoned traffic from RENFE's domestic long-distance routes, it would not be surprising if the Spanish operator opts to retreat from international markets and refocus on its domestic base, where there is political pressure to resolve issues with the Madrid and Barcelona suburban networks.

The story of RENFE's international ambitions act as a reminder that, even in an era of open borders and shared infrastructure, railways remain deeply shaped by national interests, so expansion is far from easy. Let us hope that RENFE's board are sufficiently adept to ignore the short term wishes of their political masters and stay the course of being an international open-access operator.