



Tilting trains for Zürich – Brussels services?

The Belgian capital Brussels/Bruelles is just under 500 kilometres away from Zürich as the crow flies. But anybody wanting to travel this route by train needs at least 6 h 13 min, even though certain sections allow trains to travel at speeds of 300 or even 320 km/h. Assuming the linear distance, the average journey speed is only just over 80 km/h.

The fastest connection is as follows: from Zürich HB with TGV 9222 to Paris-Gare de Lyon; then 45 minutes' time to travel with an RER (Réseau Express Régional) line D train to Paris-Gare du Nord; and from there with Thalys 9375 to Brussel-Zuid/Bruelles Midi. The journey is slightly easier via Frankfurt because stations do not have to be changed, but travel time is 7 h 35 min. The direct trains, which take the shortest route via Luxembourg, take 7h 51 min or 8 h 15 min. The railway companies involved are fully aware that all these services do not match customer requirements. Nevertheless, the number of passengers travelling along this route per annum is about half a million.

Belgian Railways (SNCB) is aiming to reduce the journey time between Brussels/Bruelles and Luxembourg by 38 minutes in the medium term. The lion's share of the gain in time is to be achieved as a result of upgrading work on the line and by using tilting trains; streamlining the journey reserve times and omitting the stop in Libramont should each provide a three-minute gain.

These improvements will probably not be implemented until 2018 at the earliest. By then, the second section of the LGV Est (high-speed line in E. France) from Baudrecourt to Vendenheim will have been completed and this will also allow reductions in the journey times between Strasbourg and Luxembourg. Once there is no

more need to change locomotives in Basel SBB and Luxembourg and full use can be made of the high upgraded-line speeds of up to 220 km/h between St. Louis and Strasbourg, a journey time of just over five-and-a-half hours might be feasible for direct services between Zürich and Brussels/Bruelles.

Certain sections of the route would also be interesting from a commercial point of view, for instance Strasbourg – Luxembourg or Luxembourg – Brussels, with journey times between 90 minutes and two hours. However, it should be pointed out that the railway is already competitive between Strasbourg and Luxembourg with a journey time of about two hours, but there are only four direct services per day.

It is thus clear that new rolling stock will be needed for the Zürich – Brussels route in a few years' time. SNCB has suggested to its

partners, SNCF, CFL and SBB, the purchase of four 250 km/h tilting trains. But it is unclear how this might be achieved. One option currently being considered is to purchase via a rolling stock lessor; various possible companies have already been approached on this matter.

The reportedly favoured initial idea of expanding SBB's contemplated tendering procedure for 29 tilting trains is no longer on the table, since SBB has decided to purchase trains without tilt technology. The number of units in question seems too low to warrant an invitation for tenders. However, it is conceivable that SBB's follow-up order for eight ETR 610 units with Alstom could be increased to the tune of four more trains. Moreover, the Polish operator PKP Intercity is also purchasing 20 "New Pendolino" trains, but without the tilt technology. (lüt/meil)

There are various routes between Zürich and Brussels. The most direct service via Luxembourg (purple line) is the slowest; the detours via Paris or Frankfurt are faster (drawing: SNCB).

