

Hopes and the reality, that is what will Czechs change in Polish railways

MICHAŁ WRÓŃSKI

And it has happened. Leo Express – a private Czech carrier – received from the Office of Rail Transport a ‘green light’ to start transport on the Prague – Katowice – Krakow route. So if nothing unexpected happens, then already in December we will see trains in characteristic yellow-black colours on our tracks, together with a new timetable. This will crown the continuing for a few years efforts of this carrier to obtain a possibility to render its services in the territory of Poland (so far due to the lack of access to the network they carried out bus transport ‘out of necessity’).

Passengers wait for Leo Express trains with a great hope. I dare saying, that even with slightly too great. Following the discussions, which were going on in the social media or on forums of popular information services one could have an impression, that with the start of transport by the Czech company the public transport will suddenly make a civilisational jump, like the first flight into the space. One could think that the speed restrictions, clapped-out tracks, and everything which so irritates us in the Polish railway will not apply to Leo Express trains.

Therefore the first thing, which I did after receiving a preliminary timetable for the Prague – Katowice – Krakow connection, was the check of the travel time between Katowice and Krakow. In fact, I do not know myself, what I have expected. A miracle? That Leo Express will travel this distance in an hour, because a modern railway should need that much to travel approx. 70 kilometres?

Obviously, there was no miracle. The Czech carrier trains – like those owned by Polish companies – will travel two hours on the mentioned distance.

So the bus drivers, travelling this distance in a time shorter by 40 minutes, can sleep quietly. They will rather not lose the customers.

This shows an obvious truth, that the rolling stock itself, even if it is most modern and shining clean, does not decide about the quality of travels. It still need appropriate infrastructure, to be capable of presenting fully its values. While in this case it is still missing.

I do not doubt that the Leo Express owner has carefully thought about the tracks, which he wants to enter. Per-

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haps his decision expressed a verging with certainty hope, that finally PKP PLK will cope with repairs and trains will be able to accelerate. Perhaps it is a symptom of business far-sightedness, which orders doing today this, which may bring benefits in the future. And may be in the model adopted by Leo Express the point is not to take away customers from the bus drivers on a small (on the scale of the whole) section of the route, but to take over those, who going to Prague (or to Krakow), usually were choosing their own car or a coach with a stork logo? Definitely there are premises for cautious optimism. Statistics clearly show, that the number of travelling by rail in Poland has been growing, albeit in fact this is a mere return to the situation a few years ago. So Leo Express hits at a good moment. Anyhow, it may become both a beneficiary and another catalyst of this trend.

In a year time we will probably know more. Then it will be possible to attempt first assessments, trying to resolve, whether Leo Express actually has turned out a new quality on the Polish railway, or rather is has adapted to its average level.

However, definitely the Czechs entrance to the Polish market will make some breakthrough. For the first time a foreign carrier will be providing services on the Polish railway network, at the same time carrying out international long-distance transport and reaching two very important urban centres of our country (UBB trains reaching Świnoujście move on a line independent of PKP, so that is a slightly different situation). An increase in the competition will be the result, and this always brings benefits to passengers. A new player on the market will try to convince to its services, while competitors will be doing anything possible, to keep travellers with them. So far road and rail carriers were organising between themselves such races for passengers. Now we will witness a similar competition on the railway itself. At last, because it was the highest time for that. ■

Michał Wróński | journalist
of Local Governments Portal
(www.portalsamorzadowy.pl)
e-mail: michal.wronski@portalsamorzadowy.pl

