

MAIN LINE FOR EUROPE

# Annual Report

2025

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# Dear readers

We did suffer a political setback this year – the German government's list of cuts and the reduction in night train services also affected the Magistrale for Europe. Nevertheless, we were able to make important progress: the completion of electrification between Vienna and Bratislava, the securing of financing for the Stuttgart digital hub and progress in individual sections of the expansion show that our work is paying off. With a great deal of energy, we have continued to drive our project forward together! Our events were also a particular highlight:

The annual general meeting in Karlsruhe, with exciting presentations on the WEST railway expansion and an extensive supporting programme, offered members the opportunity to exchange ideas and engage in discussion. We also had something special planned for Rail Day: an exclusive VIP trip on a historic steam locomotive to the Wintersdorf Bridge reactivation project. Wintersdorf Bridge.

Together with our members and partners, we were able to provide concrete impetus and take decisive steps towards strengthening European rail connections.

We would like to thank everyone involved for their commitment and support. We will continue our work with confidence and energy in the coming year and continue to advocate for a strong European rail infrastructure between Paris and Budapest.

We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter.

Your team at  
Main Line for Europe e.V.



# The initiative

Founded around 30 years ago, the Main Line for Europe initiative is committed to the rapid and continuous expansion of the Paris-Budapest/Bratislava rail axis.

The Main Line for Europe initiative now includes 24 cities, regions, federal states and chambers of industry and commerce, which are committed to "their" Main Line for Europe for reasons of location policy. Our members are united by the conviction that an efficient connection to the high-speed rail network for passenger and freight transport is a key location factor. This means that attractive rail connections such as the Main Line for Europe are becoming increasingly important in times of skilled labour shortages.

The name Main Line for Europe underscores the high transport significance of the Paris-Budapest/Bratislava rail link as one of the most important main transport axes in Europe. As the artery of east-west traffic, the Main Line for Europe connects important economic areas and enables 35 million residents and 16 million employees to enjoy fast cross-border mobility in Europe.



*Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, working together is success.*

**- Henry Ford**

# Our new board

A strong association naturally also needs a committed board of directors to steer the fortunes of Main Line for Europe e.V. and represents our initiative to the outside world. As part of the regular re-election of the board, we are delighted that Jeanne Barseghian, Mayor of Strasbourg, Dr Frank Mentrup, Mayor of Karlsruhe, and Thomas Bronnert, Head of Logistics at Wacker Chemie AG, are once again available to serve on the board and continue to contribute their experience to the work of the association.

At the same time, we would like to express our sincere thanks to Thomas Bopp, Chairman of the Stuttgart Region Association, for his outstanding and long-standing commitment to the association, in particular for his significant contribution to the Stuttgart-Ulm rail project.

We would also like to express our sincere thanks to Stefan Schnöll, Deputy Governor of the Province of Salzburg, who will unfortunately no longer be available to the Executive Board in future and who has shown great commitment to the initiative in the Salzburg area.

We are delighted to welcome Mr Wieland, Chairman of the Stuttgart Region Association and former Vice-President of the European Parliament, as new member of the Executive Board. With his many years of experience in European politics and his excellent network at EU level, he will significantly strengthen the Main Line for Europe initiative in terms of strategy and content.



**Dr Frank Mentrup**

Mayor of the City of  
Karlsruhe



**Jeanne Barseghian**

Mayor of the City of  
Strasbourg



**Rainer Wieland**

Chairman  
Stuttgart  
Region Association



**Thomas Bronnert**

Head of Logistics,  
Wacker Chemie AG

# Members' meeting in Karlsruhe

On 23 September 2025, our general meeting took place in Karlsruhe, where three highly interesting presentations gave participants an insight into the latest developments in cross-border rail transport between Paris and Budapest/Bratislava.



Phillip Langefeld, Head of Infrastructure Projects Southwest at DB InfraGO AG

Of particular note was his presentation of the planned general renovations on the Magistrale for Europe, which, in addition to the tracks, are also intended to advance the digitisation of signal boxes. Langefeld emphasised that this would mean no further operational interventions would be necessary in the next five to eight years.

Piotr Pawlowski, Country Manager, WESTbahn Deutschland GmbH

Phillip Langefeld reported on infrastructure projects along the main line in the Baden-Württemberg region.

Piotr Pawlowski reported on WESTbahn's successful market entry on the German section of the Magistrale.

The main topic was the widely varying track access charges: while these are significantly lower in Austria, rail transport companies in Germany pay up to seven times more in some cases. Pawlowski emphasised the importance of fair framework conditions for greater competition on the railways.

Rainer Schwarzmann, Managing Director of TTK GmbH

Rainer Schwarzmann spoke on the topic of regional added value and local opportunities for action on the Magistrale.

He emphasised that the expansion of the Magistrale is not only important for international transport, but also brings local economic benefits that are particularly relevant for small and medium-sized enterprises.

# VIP steam train ride on Rail Day

This year, we once again actively participated in the nationwide Rail Day. The event was held in cooperation with EURODISTRIKT PAMINA and Dampfnostalgie Karlsruhe e. V., a section of the Ulm Railway Enthusiasts Association.

As part of the campaign, guests and their families were invited to take part in a special trip from Karlsruhe via Rastatt to Wintersdorf. There was plenty to discover during the journey itself: participants were given exciting insights and background information about the route and vehicles by an extremely enthusiastic and friendly train attendant.

We as an initiative also took the opportunity to highlight the importance of the Rhine Valley Railway and to present our project to reactivate the Wintersdorf Bridge. A particular focus was placed on the opportunities that would arise from reactivating the Rastatt-Hagenau-Saarbrücken in the European rail network.

In addition to all the information, there was also plenty of fun to be had: the guests and their families enjoyed the journey together over coffee and cake. The ten children travelling with us contributed to the cheerful and colourful atmosphere. French guests Evelyne Isinger and Stéphanie Kochert were particularly enthusiastic, even spending the last few kilometres in the driver's cab. The fact that Dr Andreas Geißler from the Pro-Rail Alliance had travelled from Berlin especially for the event showed just how much interest there was in the event and our initiative.





A total of over 30 events took place along the Magistrale for Europe to mark Rail Day. This clearly illustrates how important the topic of rail is in the regions along the Magistrale and how great the public's interest in a sustainable rail infrastructure remains.

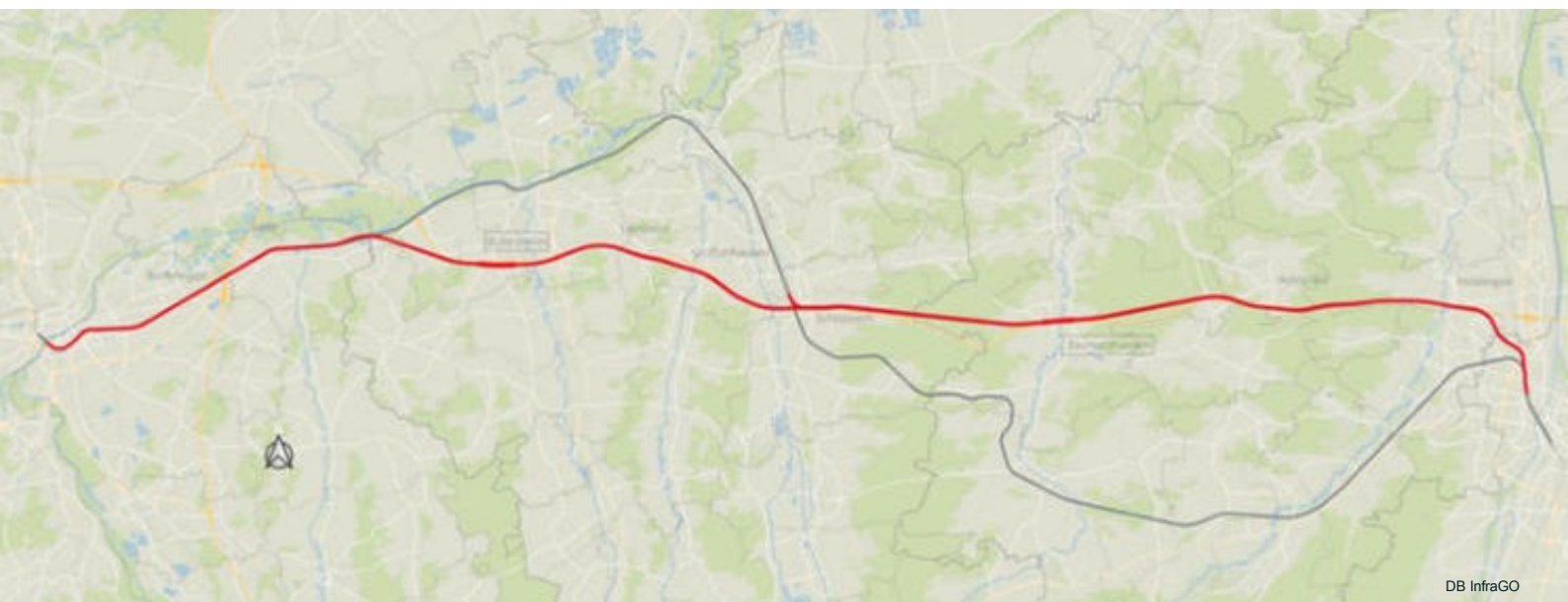
Railway Day is always held in September throughout Germany. On these days, the railway industry in Germany presents its diversity with special trips, festivals and other activities, with the aim of getting people excited about rail.

## **New Ulm–Augsburg line: Why we cannot accept the cancellation**

It was with great concern that we learned this year that the urgently needed new railway line between Ulm and Augsburg is being called into question for financial reasons. Halting the project would be a setback – not only for Bavarian Swabia, but for the entire European rail axis from Paris via Stuttgart and Munich to Vienna and Budapest.

The Ulm–Augsburg line is a key link in the Magistrale for Europe. It eliminates bottlenecks on one of the busiest rail connections in southern Germany, significantly reduces journey times, ensures the smooth running of long-distance, local and freight transport, and integrates the Ulm and Augsburg hubs into the Germany-wide integrated timetable. In short, it is an important building block for the transport revolution – both nationally and in Europe.

The broad local support is particularly positive: between Ulm and Augsburg, the district councils have given their cross-party backing to the route option specified by the government of Swabia. Such consensus is rare in Germany – and it shows how much support there is for the project. At the same time, it creates the necessary planning security, preventing delays and conflicts of the kind seen in other major infrastructure projects.



The new line is not a prestige project, but an indispensable investment in modern, efficient and climate-friendly mobility. Halting the project for cost reasons would send the wrong signal – especially now, when strengthening the rail network is so important. Only the new line will enable regional rail services to run at 15-minute intervals between Dinkelscherben and Augsburg and at half-hourly intervals between Ulm and Augsburg. In addition, barrier-free stations, effective noise protection and frequent connections would be available more quickly – and without the new line, all this would be delayed.

The Magistrale for Europe makes it clear once again: only if the Ulm–Augsburg bottleneck is eliminated can the high-speed axis from Paris to Budapest can develop its full potential. Withdrawal would not only halt a project of regional importance, but also seriously jeopardise the development of one of the most important trans-European transport axes.

### The federal government's

#### "cancellation list" Challenges:

- i** Numerous new construction and expansion projects are necessary in Germany.
- At the same time, there are major financial bottlenecks, despite a planning volume of around €45 billion.
- Prioritisation:** Funds are currently being channelled primarily into the renovation of the existing network, which means that new construction and expansion projects are often postponed or their financing called into question.

- SVIK special fund:** Invests primarily in maintaining existing infrastructure; no funds are earmarked for new construction and expansion projects.



Photo: DB AG / Thomas Klewning

- Consequence:** Projects under construction with existing construction financing agreements will be completed. Projects in planning without construction financing agreements will only be processed up to a suitable planning stage and then paused.

# Milestones 2025

## **Vienna–Bratislava now fully electric**

Since 11 October 2025, trains between Austria and Slovakia have been running fully electrically for the first time. The modernisation of the Marchegg East Railway is an important step towards sustainable mobility on the main line for Europe. The connection between Vienna and Bratislava is faster, more comfortable and more environmentally friendly. Following completion of the work on both sides of the border, the gap across the March Bridge has been closed, and the launch was marked by a maiden voyage with the Slovakian delegation led by Transport Minister Jozef Ráž. There are now 38 local trains running daily, with four Eurocity pairs added since December. The line is double-track, modernised and barrier-free, and new park-and-ride and bike-and-ride facilities make it easier to switch from car to rail. A real milestone for climate-friendly mobility between the twin cities.

## **ABS 38: Electrification and expansion take shape**

DB InfraGO has published detailed plans for the Fridolfing–Kirchanschöring section, part of the Munich–Mühldorf–Freilassing line. A second track, overhead lines, three level crossings to be removed and barrier-free stations and stops are planned. With the plans for all six eastern sections now finalised, around 125 km of overhead lines, 60 km of new tracks, eight stations and over 90 bridges and culverts have been confirmed. The double-track expansion and continuous electrification will enable speeds of up to 160 and 200 km/h respectively and will improve connections between south-east Bavaria and Munich, the airport and the region.

## Rheintalbahn: four-track expansion and new freight line

Progress is also continuing on the four-track expansion of the Rhine Valley Railway. The first construction contract has been awarded for the new line between Offenburg and Müllheim. A key project is the 11-kilometre Offenburg Tunnel, which is still in the approval process. Work on bridges is set to begin in the Nimburg area in 2026, and further structures along the A5 motorway are being prepared. Once completed, freight trains will be able to run on the new line, while long-distance trains will travel at speeds of up to 250 km/h on the existing line. Additional sections are to be renovated and expanded to four tracks in stages, with the Rastatt Tunnel marking another milestone at the end of 2026.

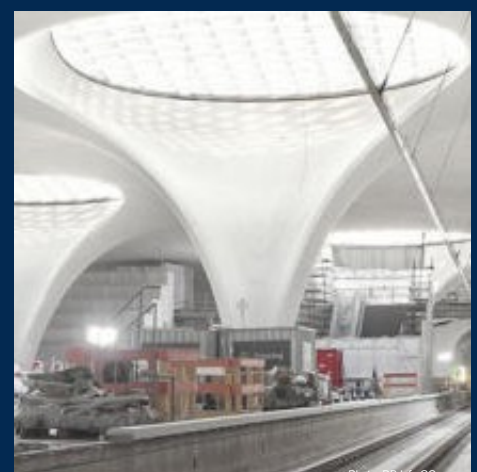
## DKS: Green light for financing

We have been waiting anxiously for a long time, but now the moment has finally arrived: the green light has been given for the final stage of expansion of the Stuttgart Digital Railway Hub. The financing reservation has been lifted and the final expansion can begin. The third stage will extend the digital network beyond the city limits and introduce additional digital components to increase punctuality, reliability and capacity.

Once implemented, it will be possible to run more frequent services, operate more trains on the same route and stabilise operations. The Stuttgart hub is particularly important for the Magistrale for Europe: it reduces bottlenecks, enables reliable international long-distance trains and increases the frequency on the Paris–Budapest axis, further strengthening transnational mobility and the European rail infrastructure.

## S21: What Next?

The Stuttgart 21 rail project, scheduled to go into operation at the end of 2026, has been postponed again. The reason for this is the complex construction and digitisation work, which is taking longer than planned. In particular, the complete digitisation of the rail hub means that stable and reliable operation will only be possible once all test phases have been completed. Realistically, full operation could start at the earliest at the end of 2027, while parts of the infrastructure are gradually completed and tested.



# In a nutshell: 2025 timetable change

Since the timetable change in December 2025, a lot has happened on the Magistrale for Europe and beyond: new direct connections and improved local transport services, but also some negative changes in the area of night train services.



From the timetable change in December 2025, the Westbahn will continue to run every half hour between Vienna, Linz and Salzburg, with some extensions to Munich and Stuttgart. In addition, there will be new stops in the Salzburg region, for example in Schwarzach-St. Veit, Lend and Zell am See, which will improve connections to the Magistrale.



Since the timetable change, there has been a new daily ICE direct connection between Berlin and Paris via Erfurt, Mannheim, Karlsruhe and Strasbourg, which can be reached in around six hours without changing trains. In addition, the availability of long-distance trains between Munich and Paris via SNCF TGV has been significantly improved, making cross-border travel easier to plan and allowing tickets to be purchased directly via DB Navigator.



Since the timetable change, there are two new Sprinter connections that take travellers from the major cities of Munich and Stuttgart to the German capital more quickly. Sprinter ICEs are long-distance trains that only make a few stops, allowing commuters and travellers to reach their destination much faster without sacrificing comfort.

# The end of night trains?

In December 2025, travellers and the Main Line for Europe e.V. initiative were sad to learn that night train connections from Paris to Berlin and Vienna were being discontinued. According to ÖBB, the reason for this was the cancellation of government subsidies in France – a setback for cross-border mobility, climate protection and the direct connection of European capitals. The popular Nightjet connections from two of the Magistrale capitals were in high demand.

At the same time, however, there is good news for night travellers: from March 2026, the historic Berlin–Paris route will be revived – this time by the Dutch night train company European Sleeper. The new Nightjet will run three times a week, departing from Paris on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings, with return journeys from Berlin on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings.

## **i** Background: Why night train tickets are so expensive

The cost of night train tickets depends heavily on track access charges – the fees that operators have to pay to infrastructure operators for using the tracks. These charges account for a significant portion of operating costs. Added to this are costs for personnel, train maintenance, energy and on-board services. If government subsidies are then also withdrawn, operation is often no longer economically viable.

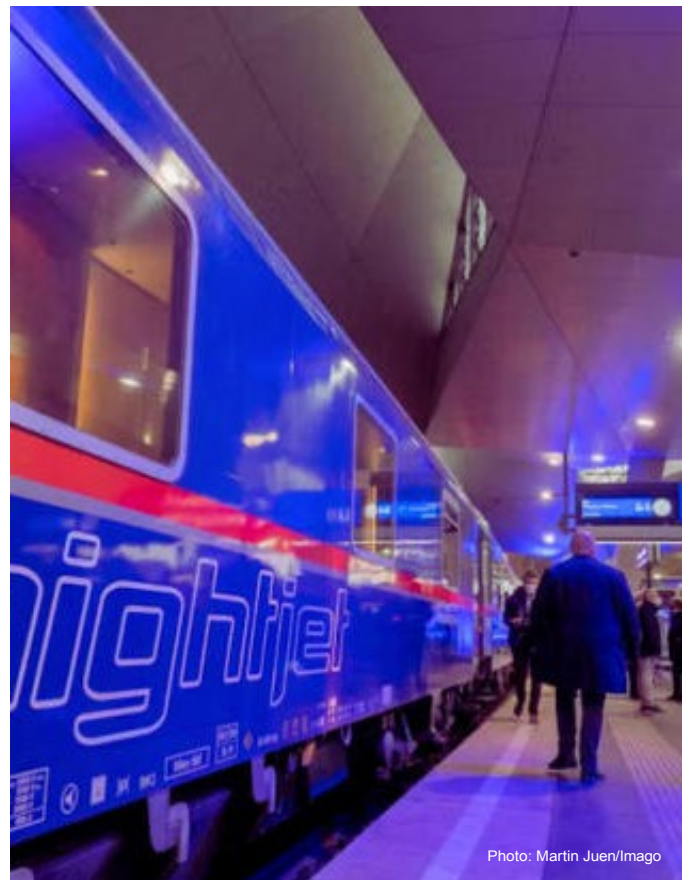
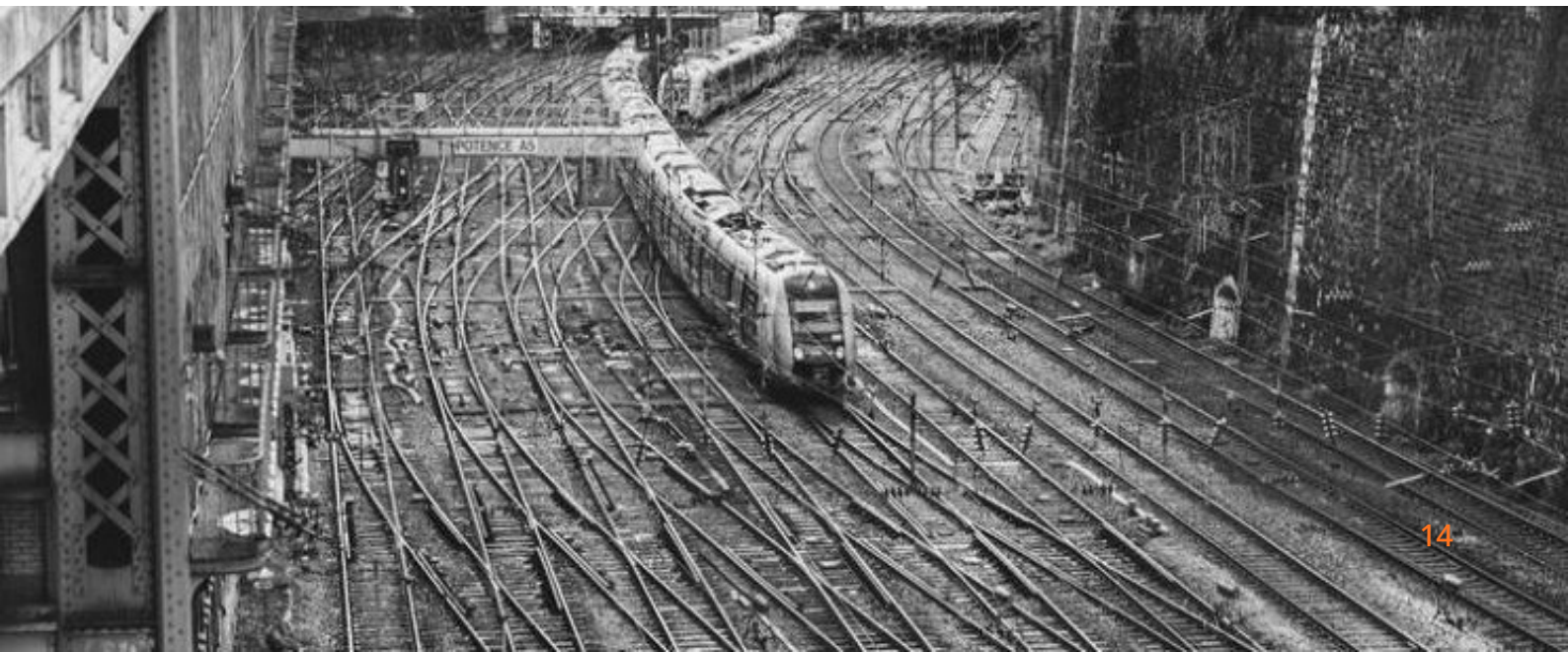


Photo: Martin Juen/Imago

# Our lobbying work

One focus of our lobbying efforts this year was on the Ulm–Augsburg and Karlsruhe–Basel rail projects. These routes are indispensable components of the trans-European transport network and crucial to the performance of the Magistrale for Europe. In several letters and discussions with political decision-makers at federal and state level, as well as in France, we emphasised the urgency of securing funding and rapid implementation. We made it clear that delays would not only cause regional bottlenecks and efficiency losses, but could also jeopardise the entire European rail network and climate targets.

Another key concern was securing the night train lines between Paris, Berlin and Vienna. Here, we approached the French Ministry of Transport and relevant political actors in Germany and Austria in particular. We not only pointed out the high demand for night trains, especially between Paris and Vienna, but also made concrete proposals for economic viability, including adjusting track access charges in line with the EU-wide recommended marginal cost model and introducing legally enshrined price stability.



## Strengthening communication: raising awareness of the Magistrale with students

Despite its strategic importance, the Main Line for Europe – the "Magistrale for Europe" – is often little known to the general public, especially outside political and professional circles. Different national interests, communication cultures and complex planning processes make it difficult to achieve a uniform perception of the project. At the same time, the Magistrale offers enormous potential to inspire people to embrace sustainable rail transport and cross-border mobility. Together with students from DHBW Karlsruhe, we worked on precisely this: the aim was to analyse the communication strategy surrounding Main Line for Europe e.V., define target groups and develop concrete ideas on how to make the "Magistrale" more visible in politics, the media and society. The students examined existing channels and messages, identified synergies between local, national and European actors, and developed recommendations for action for a consistent, activating narrative.

### Creating visibility and presence

The Magistrale should be given greater visibility in everyday life and public discourse through physical, digital and media formats.

### Promoting understanding and benefits

Communication should convey the added value of the Magistrale for commuters, occasional travellers and tourist users in an easily understandable way.

### Strengthening the European narrative

The Magistrale is communicated as a transnational project that symbolises European cooperation, mobility and sustainability.

### Cross-channel communication

Communication uses appropriate channels and formats to effectively reach and activate different target groups.



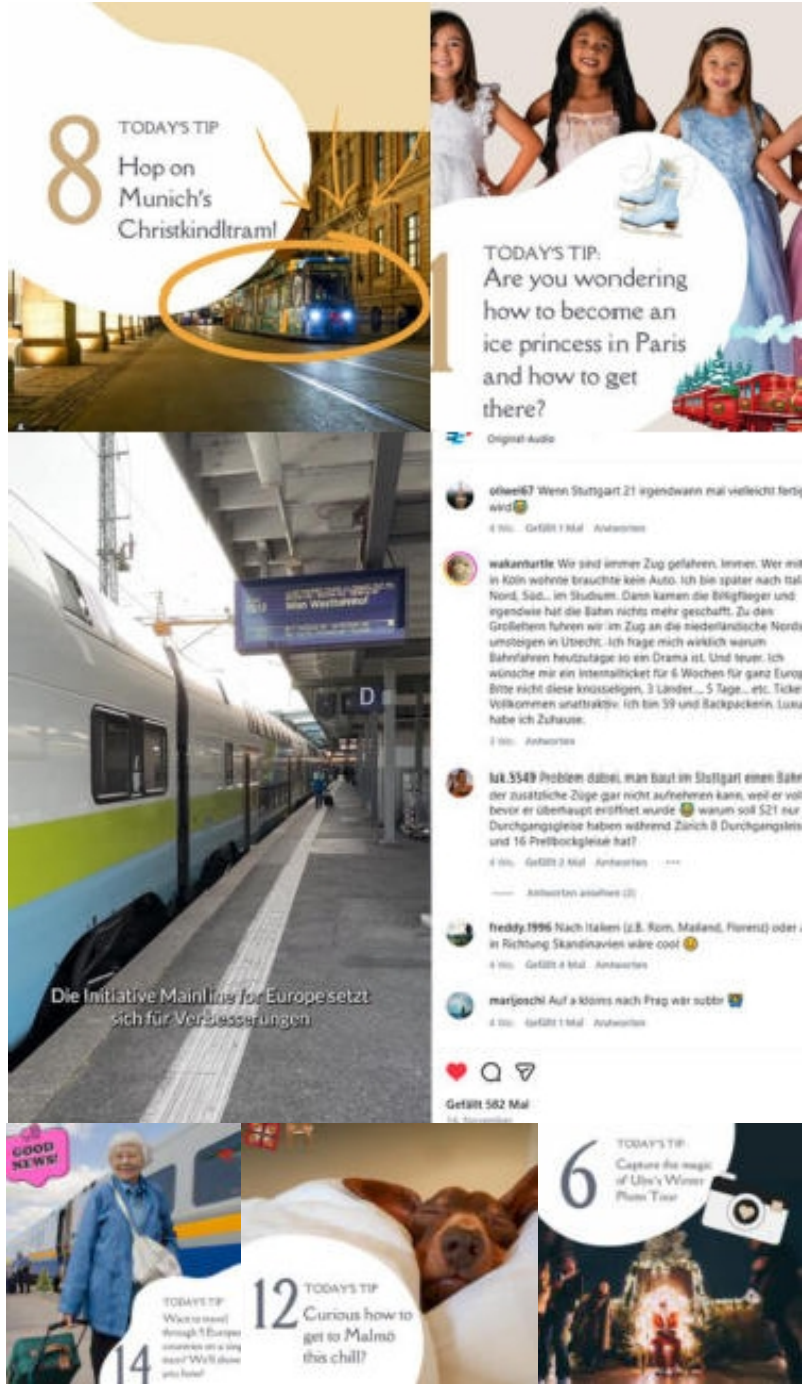


## Our social media work

To make our interests visible to a broad public, we focus specifically on (social) media and digital channels: our newsletter is enjoying increasing popularity and is recording a steady rise in subscriber numbers.

On Instagram, we use creative formats, such as an Advent calendar with daily travel tips along the Magistrale, which is fun and provides information about the route at the same time. The Instagram video by the Stuttgart Region Association on the importance of the Magistrale for Europe for the region shows how creatively our members are promoting the Magistrale to the public.

With the relaunch of our website, we also want to bundle all content in a clear and appealing way and make it accessible to all – a key step in making our communication even more effective.



# Imprint



## Responsible

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