

For rail passengers, modern travel means convenient, fast and trouble-free connections from door to door, with one ticket for everything. Digitalization is helping to make this a reality. ©Deutsche Bahn AG

Rail Passengers on the Right Track

23/06/2025 Not everything can happen all at once, especially with a system as complex as the railroads. However, important steps must be taken now in terms of digitalization to transform passenger transportation. Some great examples already exist.

European rail operators are experiencing a resurgence, especially in passenger transportation: this means of transportation is popular with all generations – on personal and business trips, and for both local and long-distance journeys. The fast connections between European metropolises are particularly attractive to travelers. Compared to cars and planes, rail can often score points in a number of areas. But this is only true when everything runs smoothly and when the quality, convenience, availability and price are right.

In Europe, the use of the railroads reached a record level following a pandemic-related slump in 2023. An equivalent total distance of 429 billion kilometers was traveled by passengers. By 2028, the forecasts predict a further growth of four to six percent per year. Plus, with the European Commission's Green Deal climate protection package, the share of European high-speed transportation is set to

double by 2030 and triple by 2050. The racetracks, as they are referred to, that offer the most modern trains, the best rail routes and the fastest connections are a magnet for passengers.

Making rail travel more attractive

The rail industry can build on this momentum. “Can” being the key word, because this is not possible unless some important prerequisites are met. One of these key measures is the urgent need for digitalization. First of all, let's address the important points. For passenger transportation, this means that a strong focus on the customer is crucial. If new technologies that offer reliable door-to-door connections and a convenient booking (and cancellation) system can be implemented throughout the rail network as quickly as possible, the railroads will be able to play a major role in networking different modes of transportation. This also means that, in the longer term, rail travel can become economically successful enough that the system will have plenty of resources to keep up with the increasing speed of technological innovation into the future. In other words: maintain attractiveness and continuously expand.

So, what would be the first key steps toward digitalization that would also be tailored to the needs of passengers? Customer experience is an important lever for increasing the number of passengers who travel by train. This starts at the planning and booking stage. Passengers want convenience and efficiency, and digitalizing the customer interface provides exactly that. It revolutionizes the passenger experience by proactively identifying customer needs: Passengers benefit from personalized travel options that take into account their individual preferences such as the fastest, most convenient or cheapest connection.

The destination: from regional to international

Cross-regional apps enable customers to book travel from different transportation providers in a single process and make integrated mobility a reality. There are some good approaches already being implemented around the world, but the solutions are usually regional and not networked. Multi-regional and multi-provider solutions are necessary. Examples of this type of digital platform are Moovit from Israel, which is available in more than 3,400 cities worldwide, or Citymapper from the UK, which offers local public transportation, rail transportation, bicycle hire and taxi services in 31 European countries.

In Germany, third-party mobility platforms such as Trainline or Omio have been providing direct access to live data from Deutsche Bahn since 2024. This allows users to combine different modes of transportation and display the best route. The two platforms also simplify ticket management and purchasing. They provide real-time information, personalized travel recommendations and handle the booking process. Mobility data makes it possible to adapt travel plans according to the situation. Updates on train connections, delays and disruptions are provided in real time. Integrated, cross-border solutions are needed here. Rail operators are pursuing an omnichannel strategy – digital channels are being developed, but providers are also being mindful not to exclude passengers who do not frequently

use the Internet, and want to continue to provide face-to-face assistance.

Intelligence travels with you

New technologies, such as artificial intelligence, help to improve services and make them more individual. The needs of different customer groups, such as those aged over 50 or with reduced mobility, are covered by digital platforms that can provide information on accessible travel options and allow passengers to book support services in advance. Analyzing user data makes it possible to tailor communications and special offers and send them directly to passengers – for example, ticket price perks on frequently used routes or recommendations for tourist attractions.

Intelligent control systems use passenger flow data to allow transportation providers to distribute their capacity optimally and avoid overflowing passenger trains. For example, flexible pricing can be used to control demand in order to minimize capacity peaks. Forecast data can be used to adapt resources at an early stage to cope with any unusual situations. Blockchain technology increases the security and transparency of booking systems by allowing transactions to be processed in a traceable manner and by minimizing the risk of fraud.

The examples show that users benefit from the use of new technologies in passenger transportation. They have more positive opinions about rail travel when they feel their needs are being met. And the trains? They don't just benefit from the compliments. The more accurate data can be directly integrated into the management of quality, offers, capacity utilization and expectations in order to make train travel a consistently positive experience across the board. Incidentally, rail does not have to provide all of these services itself. Certain features are also suitable for implementation by service providers acting as partners.

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Title: Rail Passengers on the Right Track, 2025, Deutsche Bahn AG
Subline: High-performance and high-speed transportation calls for the latest technology to be implemented in trains and rail infrastructure. Seamless rail travel across borders throughout Europe is only possible with unified systems. © Deutsche Bahn AG

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Title: Rail Passengers on the Right Track, 2025, Deutsche Bahn AG
Subline: An Italian Trenitalia train and a Railjet from the Austrian railroad company ÖBB meet at Bolzano station (South Tyrol, Italy). The future belongs to networked cross-border transportation without obstacles. © Deutsche Bahn AG

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Subline: Digital tickets have long been standard, as they simplify on-board checks. However, thanks to artificial intelligence, additional functions accessible via smartphone could make rail travel more attractive to passengers by providing valuable information and personalized services and offers throughout their journey. © Deutsche Bahn AG

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