

California Rail News

Volume 16 Number 3

Sacramento, CA

August 2002



Frankfurt-Köln ICE Line Open

Inaugural of a new high-speed InterCity Express (ICE) connection between Frankfurt and Köln (Cologne) has transformed German rail travel by removing one hour. The high speed Köln-Frankfurt line along the A3 autobahn began service August 1 as an isolated shuttle on two-hour headways between the two cities. Because European timetable changes are infrequent, the integration of the route into the German rail network will wait until the December 15 network-wide change. On that date, the new line becomes the "centerpiece of the European high-speed network," says Hans-Gustav Koch, the Deutsche Bahn (DB) marketing chief.

The 177 kilometer line is notable because its aggressive engineering through the Taunus Mountains pushes the limits with maximum grades of 4 percent. The passenger-only bypass of the congested Rhein rail corridor cost six billion euros, in addition to two billion euros for new trains. [The euro currently is about par with the dollar]. DB projects Köln-Frankfurt corridor ridership will rise about 25 percent by 2003 and about 50 percent by 2007 compared to today. The previous Rhine line will continue to be served by conventional IC and EuroCity trains.

On the first day of regular service on the new ICE route, reports of smoke in one of the tunnels near Idstein delayed two runs in each direction by about one hour. Inspection of the tunnel found no fire. Delays persisted through that evening, but the line was

Hartmut Mehdorn, Board Chairman of Deutsche Bahn AG, carries the marketing message of one hour savings at the July 25 ceremonial first run. Photo: DB AG/Kramer

released the next morning for normal traffic.

First week reports are that passengers are fairly enthusiastic. Business commuters save time with the new route and direct connection to Frankfurt airport, making price considerations secondary. Many passengers took advantage of new laptop hookups. The 98 leather first class seats were almost completely sold out, a railway spokesperson said. Despite the forced transfers at the two endpoints, peak trains were two-thirds filled.

German rail passengers, however, are notoriously picky about details of changes, and have criticized DB for fare increases, surcharges and a new reservations requirement, which applies from December 15. The cost of a second class Köln-Frankfurt ticket rose about one-third from 39 to 53.60 euros. This is because of the surcharge (and the DB's popular 50% discount card doesn't apply to it). For riders with the BahnCard the ICE trip costs 34.10 euros, 77 per cent higher than the 19.30 euros via conventional service along the Rhein. Loyal customers especially resent the penalty.

Berlin's *Die Welt* criticized the new line as being "braked by local politics." To ease opposition in the Rhineland-Palatinate, route of the high speed segment, stops at Limburg

an der Lahn and Montabaur im Westerwald have been added to the timetable. Each stop costs ten minutes because of deceleration, acceleration and station dwells.

The German rail passenger association

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MAKES HANKYU
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**HELPING PUBLIC
LEARN TRAINS**

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