



OPEN LETTER

Transport Minister Anu Vehviläinen
Ministry of Transport
PO Box 31
00023 FINNISH GOVERNMENT

RE Returning of the inland sleeper services

According to the chairman of the sleeper train working group that recently finished its work the inland sleeper services are not basic transport service but they are primarily related to regional development and economic policy. Thus, to fund their reinstatement new alternative financial models would have to be developed. However, according to an inter-ministerial document dated 15 June 2009 regarding the corporate governance of VR, these suggestions of a need for new financing options are not correct.

”Buying of (passenger) rail services necessitated by transport policy needs should be based on the needs of business life, economic framework and passengers, and rail service development especially if this enables stable economical activity and employment creation and development” (page five). Further, the public service obligation of VR is to “strengthen and support the working economic structures, and service supply based on passengers’ needs and thus promote an increase in passenger numbers” (page one). In addition to subsidised services, the Ministry of Transport may require VR to operate loss-making services in exchange for the exclusive-rights agreement (page seven).

We propose that the Ministry requires VR-Group to reinstate the inland sleeper services so that areas they serve are at least the same as when the services were cancelled in 2006. One additional condition must be that sleeper connections to Lapland will not worsen because of this reinstatement. Conditions set this loosely enable VR to organize the connections as economically viable as possible. It is common knowledge that such operations can be arranged either well or badly. Your predecessor, Minister Huovinen, stated in a reply to a Parliamentary question regarding the Kemijärvi sleeper service, that its economic losses

were only a possible threat¹. An enterprise acting sensibly attempts to minimize its losses.

We will not list the shortcomings of the working group's findings in this letter, because the services can in any case be returned utilising the current public service obligations. We only comment here on the allegation that the so-called blue-passenger coaches are at the end of their useful working life. When it has been possible in Sweden to refurbish sleeping coaches made in the 1950's² and the 1960's³, the quality of Finnish workmanship cannot be underestimated either. And if something can be deduced from the amortization period of generator van created from the same passenger coaches (page 55), renovation costs cannot possibly be a long-time burden.

On the other hand we are greatly amazed at the decision to withhold the inter-ministerial document dated 15 June 2009. How can an EU member state, that keeps documents concerning transport policy secret rightly call itself a western democracy? This is a question of relevance, as the document notes the reinstatement of the inland sleeper services could be considered by a cheaper means than simply demanding more subsidy money for the incumbent operator as the working-group's chairperson has done.

The reinstatement of the sleeper services has been demanded by several petitions, some also signed by provincial and municipal authorities. The chamber of commerce of North Karelia has commissioned a study that favours the reinstatement of the sleepers, as does also a report about utilising sleeper services to promote the tourism trade for the Kuusamo region. You could choose to take sides in this debate. Would you side with the claims and desires of a company owned by all of us but representing none of us, or are you willing to hear the concerned voices of the country's citizens and their representative bodies?

Kemijärvi, 25th March 2010

Finnish Rail Passenger's Association

Kemijärvi

(www.rautatiematkustajat.fi)

(Signature)

Kalevi Kämäräinen

Chairman

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Martti Vaskonen

Vice Chairman

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¹ http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/kk_1086_2005_p.shtml (in Finnish)

² <http://www.jarnvag.net/index.php/vagnguide/personvagnar-i-trafik/w15> (in Swedish)

³ <http://www.jarnvag.net/index.php/vagnguide/personvagnar-i-trafik/w11> (in Swedish)