



# Study on providing public transport in cross-border regions – mapping of existing services and legal obstacles

Case Study report

Rail link RB 26 Berlin (Germany) – Kostrzyn nad Odrą (Poland)

Contract: 2019CE160AT093



Christian Lürer, Spatial Foresight  
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## 1. Introduction

This case study report presents the business model for the cross-border rail service between Berlin (Germany) and Kostrzyn nad Odrą<sup>1</sup> (Poland). This report is part of a series of 31 case studies developed in the framework of the study 'Providing public transport in cross-border regions – Mapping of existing services and legal obstacles'. Spatial Foresight in cooperation with TCP international, TRT trasporti e territorio and EureConsult completed this study for the European Commission's DG REGIO.

The case studies highlight a variety of business models for cross-border public transport services. This includes governance arrangements and operational provisions to develop the service and address demand in border regions. These aspects will be introduced in section 2, as well as the territorial scope of the service. Section 3 presents key obstacles related to the business model as well as solutions. Section 4 is about lessons learnt from this case.

This case study presents the rail connection between Berlin (Germany) and Kostrzyn (Poland). It is an important German-Polish cross-border service which connects the metropolitan region around Berlin and the Polish network. This report emphasises different national legal and administrative frameworks and language barriers as key challenges when developing and implementing cross-border public transport services. This case study is based on publicly available reports and websites as well as interviews with experts from the regional transport association for Berlin-Brandenburg, Verkehrsverbund Berlin-Brandenburg (VBB) and Lubuskie Voivodship.

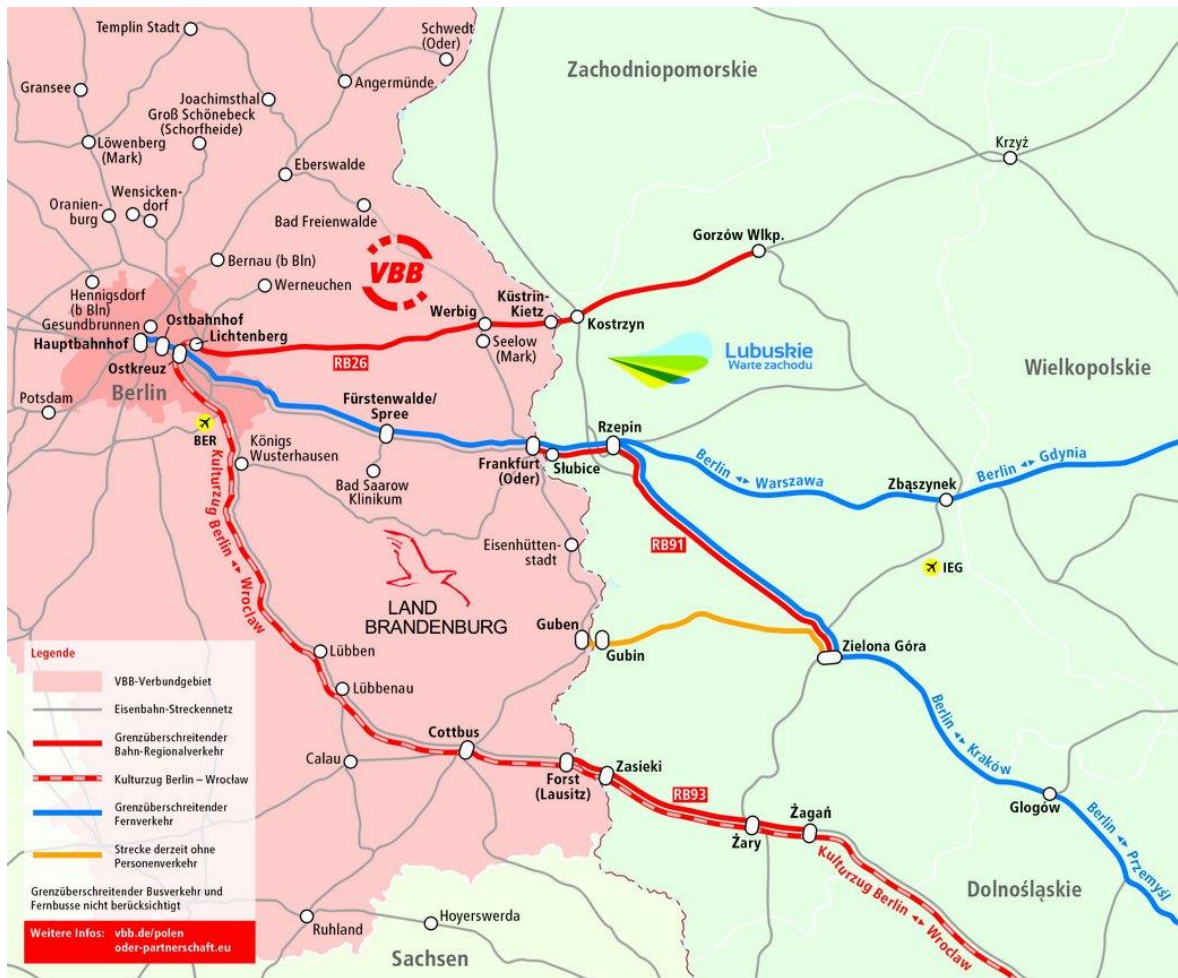
## 2. Features and benefits of the service

**Table 2.1 Main characteristics of the business model**

Transport service	Regional train (RB26):
Mode of transport	Berlin (Ostkreuz) – Küstrin-Kietz – Kostrzyn nad Odrą
Service provider(s)(operator)	Train (complemented with a cross-border bus service until December 2022 due to construction at the border railway bridge)
Location	NEB Niederbarnimer Eisenbahn Betriebsgesellschaft
Date when the service started	German-Polish border region

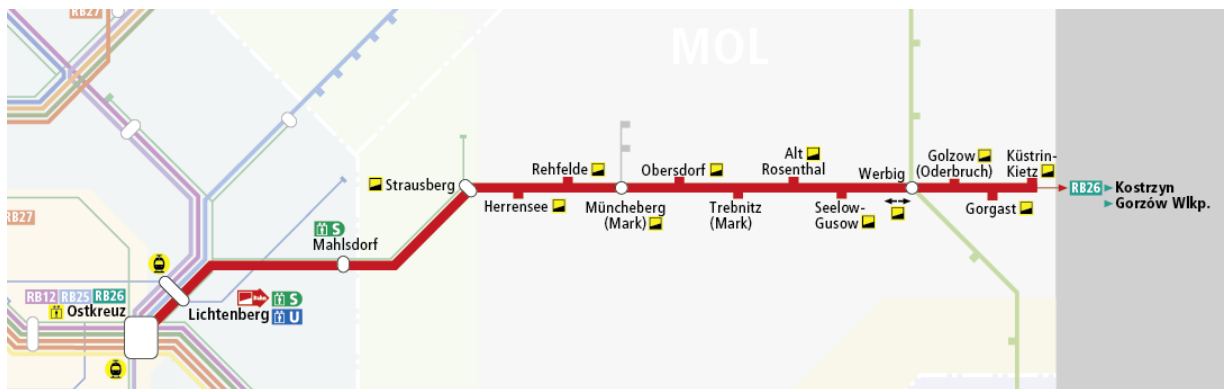
<sup>1</sup> Hereafter: Kostrzyn

**Figure 2.1 Train connections along the German-Polish border**



Source: VBB, n.d.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 2.2 RB 26 Berlin – Kostrzyn nad Odrą**



Source: VBB, 2021 (edited)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vbb.de/vbb-themen/forschung-und-projekte/railblu/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vbb.de/unsere-themen/qualitaet/qualitaet-im-regio/meine-linie-rb26> (edited)

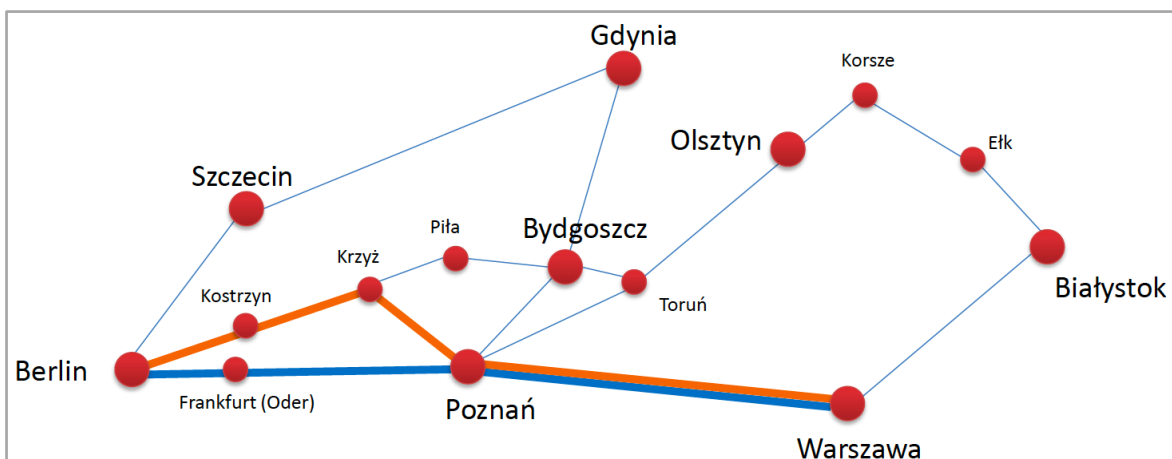
## 2.1. Geographic context and scope of the service

Regional train 26 (RB 26) connects Berlin, the capital of Germany, with Kostrzyn nad Odrą, a border town in western Poland close to the German-Polish border. Kostrzyn is the final destination and only stop in Poland. From here there are connections to Gorzów Wielkopolski, Szczecin and Poznan. On the German side, the train has 15 stops, three of which are in Berlin (Berlin Ostkreuz, Berlin Lichtenberg, Berlin Mahlsdorf). Hence, the main purpose of this connection is to link the city of Berlin to its functional area in eastern Brandenburg. Trains operate hourly, alternating between stopping at all stations and an express service which skips six smaller villages in Brandenburg.

The train connection is embedded in the Berlin and Brandenburg regional transport network and links Berlin with surrounding sub-urban and rural regions in eastern Brandenburg. Every day, 223,000 people commute from Brandenburg to Berlin and 88,000 from Berlin to Brandenburg (VBB, 2020b). Thus, the connection mainly serves the highly integrated metropolitan area around Berlin. By extending across the German-Polish border, the service enables commuting from Poland to Berlin without additional changes. Vice versa, it connects Berlin and eastern Brandenburg to the Polish railway network.

Beyond the regional perspective, the railway link between Berlin and Kostrzyn is also part of the North Sea – Baltic TEN-T corridor. However, planning procedures focus on single measures but do not consider the corridor from an integrated perspective. Nevertheless, as part of a large-scale corridor the link offers considerable potential for European freight transport (IHK Ostbrandenburg / ETC Gauff Mobility, 2018). For passenger transport, the link can be used as an alternative to other railway routes, e.g. between Berlin and Szczecin (an additional 61 km), Berlin and Poznan (22 km) and Berlin and Warsaw (22 km) (Figure 2.3).

**Figure 2.3 Berlin-Kostrzyn as cross-border link to the Polish railway network**



Source: Perner, Lübke & Cupryjak, 2018

## 2.2. Demand for and benefits of the service possible

The Berlin-Kostrzyn connection mainly aims at commuters between Berlin and surrounding sub-urban and rural regions in Berlin/Brandenburg. With particular focus on the cross-border section, Polish cross-border commuters are the most important target group, especially those using the trains on Fridays and weekends (IHK Ostbrandenburg / ETC Gauff Mobility, 2018). Tourists who come from Poland to Berlin or travel from Germany to Poland wanting to explore the tourist area along the railway



or change to connections in Brandenburg also play a role. There are also train connections to the new Berlin Brandenburg Willy Brandt Airport (BER) from Berlin Ostkreuz. Border area inhabitants from the German side use the train for shopping trips to Polish hypermarkets ('Polenmarkt'). The new Tesla factory in Brandenburg planned for the end of 2021 might further increase (cross-border) commuter flows. The factory could be reached by bus within 30 minutes from the station in Strausberg, for example.

The connection between Berlin and Kostrzyn is the most used German-Polish regional train connection. On weekdays, about 1,000 passengers cross the border each day (IHK Ostbrandenburg / ETC Gauff Mobility, 2018). There are two main reasons. First, the train is the only public transport service in the immediate border region, there is no alternative bus line. Second, the travel time (even including the replacement bus for 2020-2022) is similar to the travel time by car (about 80-90 minutes) which makes it an attractive alternative for both tourists and commuters. For the coming years the regional transport association for Berlin/Brandenburg, VBB, expects further increases in demand. Still, low-quality rail infrastructure is a limiting factor. It prevents not only regional public transport but also long-distance passenger and freight transport from fully exploiting the potential demand for cross-border services. Current problems are (a) single tracks reducing the capacity for freight transport, (b) track sections with a maximum speed of 120 km/h and (c) lack of electrification entailing diesel railcars with significant air and noise pollution.

### 2.3. Governance

The regional transport association for Berlin/Brandenburg (VBB) and 'Niederbarnimer Eisenbahn' (NEB) as transport provider are the main players involved in organising and providing the train connection between Berlin and Kostrzyn.

VBB is owned by the state of Berlin (33.3%), the state of Brandenburg (33.3%), and 14 counties and four cities from Brandenburg (33.3%). VBB opened a public procurement procedure to commission an operator to provide regional transport services in east Brandenburg from December 2015 until December 2024. The connection between Berlin and Kostrzyn is part of this contract.

NEB won the contract and operates trains for the connection. The main NEB shareholder (67%) is 'Industriebahn-Gesellschaft Berlin' which is owned by 'Captrain Deutschland', a member of the French state-owned SNCF/Geodis railway group, and BEHALA, an enterprise that operates port infrastructure and is owned by the city of Berlin. 'Städte- und Gemeindebund Brandenburg' and 'Landkreistag Brandenburg' are the Brandenburg associations of 10 municipalities and four counties respectively. Together, they hold the remaining 33%. NEB is responsible for 16% of annual train kilometres in Berlin-Brandenburg and is thus the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest train operator in the region, after DB Regio (65%) and the east German railway company ('Ostdeutsche Eisenbahn' (ODEG)) (19%) (VBB, 2020a). Other relevant players are:

- POLREGIO (previously 'Przewozy Regionalne'), the Polish company that operates the connecting train from Kostrzyn via Gorzów to Krzyż,
- Lubuskie Voivodship (Marshal's Office), the regional authority responsible for public transport on the Polish side,
- DB Netz, the German infrastructure operator and
- PKP Polskie Linie Kolejowe, the Polish infrastructure operator.

The connection is operated in cooperation by NEB as the German railway operator, VBB as the German regional transport association and POLREGIO as the Polish railway operator. Operating costs in Germany are fully borne by VBB. The cross-border section between Küstrin and Kostrzyn is not subsidised by the Polish operator and is treated as a commercial service. Services between Kostrzyn and Gorzow Wojewodzki are co-financed by Lubuskie Voivodship.

VBB and the Lubuskie Marshal's Office continuously exchange information. They also organise an annual meeting to agree the new timetable and discuss development perspectives, room for improvement and planned construction works.

## 2.4. Operational provisions

The legal framework for public transport differs between Germany and Poland. Hence, the service cannot be operated based on a specific legal contract. Instead in October 2009, the state of Brandenburg and the Voivodship Lubuskie signed a joint declaration of intent on cross-border public transport which provides further guidance for cross-border connections. The declaration consists of four paragraphs, each covering a specific cross-border connection (State of Brandenburg and Lubuskie Voivodship, 2009):

- Zielona Góra in Poland via the twin border city Guben/Gubin (the train station is in Germany) and Cottbus in Germany.
- Gorzów and Berlin, perhaps extending the connection between Berlin and Kostrzyn with three train pairs. Lubuskie Voivodship and the state of Brandenburg express their willingness to support certification for the trains.
- Improving the Berlin-Frankfurt/Oder-Zielona Góra connection in the long term. First optimising the existing connections, then introducing a direct connection.
- The fourth paragraph refers to infrastructure revitalisation and upgrade for Berlin-Cottbus-Żary-Legnica-Wrocław. As a first step, the state of Brandenburg and Lubuskie Voivodship will carry out a joint feasibility study.

The regional transport association for Berlin/Brandenburg, VBB ('Verkehrsverbund Berlin/Brandenburg'), issues the concession for the German part for twelve years following a public competition procedure. VBB pays the German train operator NEB to operate the train connection but only for the German segment. NEB has to fulfil obligations regarding the timetable and train schedule. In addition, NEB operates the cross-border section independently without any public subsidies following a procurement procedure for two years in Poland. Revenues from ticket sales are split between NEB and POLREGIO only for cross-border add-on tickets. Revenues from domestic tickets remain with the respective domestic operator.

Travel time between Berlin and Kostrzyn is 80-90 minutes, depending on the number of stops. According to the summer 2021 timetable<sup>4</sup>, the train runs once per hour in each direction. No distinction is made between working days, weekends and public holidays. The first train leaves Berlin at 5.30 arriving in Kostrzyn at 7.00, the last is at 23.30 arriving in Kostrzyn at 1.00. In the other direction, the first train leaves Kostrzyn at 4.00 arriving in Berlin at 5.30 and the last at 22.00 arriving in Berlin at 23.30. From December 2020 until probably December 2022, the train from Berlin ends in Küstrin-Kietz, which is the last stop in Germany. Here, passengers must change to a replacement bus that takes them to the rail station in Kostrzyn in 9 minutes. This is necessary because of joint Polish-German construction on the railway bridge over the Oder/Odra border river.

In the following, the ticket prices for four different cross-border connections are presented. These four combinations of cross-border trips between Berlin and Küstrin in Germany, on the one hand, and Kostrzyn and Gorzów in Poland, on the other hand, illustrate the complexity of bringing together two domestic fare systems.

Fares for Berlin-Kostrzyn are based on the VBB fare system for Berlin/Brandenburg. Different single and time-based tickets are available (Table 2.2). There are reduced tickets for children 6-14 years old, pupils, apprentices, rail pass holders and dogs. In addition, VBB regional tickets like the full-day or weekend ticket for Berlin/Brandenburg can be used. However, some customers with particular discounts (e.g. students, disabled, pensioners) have to buy an add-on for the cross-border segment from Küstrin to Kostrzyn.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.neb.de/fileadmin/redakteure/Fahrpl%C3%A4ne/2021/RB26\\_Fahrplan2021\\_web.pdf](https://www.neb.de/fileadmin/redakteure/Fahrpl%C3%A4ne/2021/RB26_Fahrplan2021_web.pdf)

**Table 2.2 Ticket prices for Berlin-Kostrzyn as of January 2021 (EUR)**

	Single	Day	Monthly	7-day
Standard	12.40	24.80	175.40	61.00
Reduced	9.40	18.80	130.70	46.60

Source: own elaboration, based on VBB, 2021<sup>5</sup>

The fares for the immediate border link between Kostrzyn and Küstrin-Kietz have the same structure. Different single and time-based tickets are available, including discounts for children, apprentices, etc. (Table 2.3). Because of the construction site, these tickets are currently no train but bus tickets.

**Table 2.3 Ticket prices for Küstrin-Kostrzyn as of January 2021 (EUR)**

	Single	Day	Monthly	7-day
Standard	2.10	4.20	48.10	16.30
Reduced	1.60	3.20	35.90	12.10

Source: own elaboration, based on VBB, 2021<sup>6</sup>

As the train has only one stop on the Polish side and the connection is not embedded in a joint cross-border transport system, travellers from Germany who want to travel to any other destination in Poland must change to connecting trains in Kostrzyn, e.g. to Gorzów. Only single and day tickets can be bought for the cross-border connection between Küstrin-Kietz and Gorzów. Time-based tickets for a full week or a full month are not available (Table 2.4). Regional VBB tickets cannot be used.

**Table 2.4 Ticket prices for Küstrin-Gorzów as of January 2021 (EUR)**

	Single	Day	Monthly	7-day
Standard	4.40	8.80	Not available	Not available
Reduced	3.40	6.70	Not available	Not available

Source: own elaboration, based on VBB, 2021<sup>7</sup>

Before construction at the border bridge started in 2020, two direct trains per day ran between Berlin and Gorzów. The travel time between Kostrzyn and Gorzów is 40 minutes so the full trip from Berlin to Gorzów takes 120-130 minutes (plus waiting time in Küstrin and Kostrzyn until December 2022). Different tickets are available for this connection. In contrast to the other connections, only single and day tickets can be purchased. In addition, single and day tickets for groups of up to 5 people are available ('Gorzów Spezial') (Table 2.5). They can also be used for local transport in Berlin and Gorzów.

**Table 2.5 Ticket prices for Berlin-Gorzów as of January 2021 (EUR)**

	Single	Day	Single – group	Day – group
Standard	12.70	25.70	39.00	77.80
Reduced	9.60	19.30	Not available	Not available

Source: own elaboration, based on VBB, 2021<sup>8</sup>

Comparing the fares for the four different cross-border connections shows that prices for public transport are significantly higher in Germany than in Poland. While a day ticket for Berlin-Kostrzyn (80-90 minutes) costs 24.80 EUR, it is only 8.80 EUR (35%) for a day ticket for Küstrin-Gorzów (9 minutes by bus + 40 minutes by train). The day ticket for the full trip from Berlin to Gorzów (25.70 EUR) even requires only an additional 0.90 EUR compared to the ticket for Berlin-Kostrzyn (Table 2.5).

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.vbb.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/VBB/Dokumente/Tickets-Abonnements/vbb-tarif-reisen-nach-polen-2021.pdf](https://www.vbb.de/fileadmin/user_upload/VBB/Dokumente/Tickets-Abonnements/vbb-tarif-reisen-nach-polen-2021.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.vbb.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/VBB/Dokumente/Tickets-Abonnements/vbb-tarif-reisen-nach-polen-2021.pdf](https://www.vbb.de/fileadmin/user_upload/VBB/Dokumente/Tickets-Abonnements/vbb-tarif-reisen-nach-polen-2021.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.vbb.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/VBB/Dokumente/Tickets-Abonnements/vbb-tarif-reisen-nach-polen-2021.pdf](https://www.vbb.de/fileadmin/user_upload/VBB/Dokumente/Tickets-Abonnements/vbb-tarif-reisen-nach-polen-2021.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.vbb.de/tickets/sondertickets/fahrausweise-von-und-nach-polen>

### 3. Obstacles and solutions

Three main types of obstacles were identified that hamper smooth development and implementation of the cross-border train connection. First, a strong national focus in transport planning and divergent national legal and administrative frameworks hamper a strong cross-border dimension in public transport. This obstacle can be further subdivided. Some elements are relevant primarily for the analysed link Berlin-Kostrzyn, others are relevant more generally for rail services between Germany and Poland. Given their interrelations, they are considered together (section 3.1). Language barriers between German as a Germanic language and Polish as a Slavic language pose another important obstacle for authorities and operators as well as for potential users (section 3.2). Finally, a third obstacle is the lack of modern distribution channels (section 3.3). Table 3.1 provides a detailed overview of all obstacles, their impact and solutions to overcome the obstacle including the level of success of the respective solution.

**Table 3.1 Overview of obstacles**

Obstacle		Impact on service delivery	Impact on the cross-border region	Solution introduced / proposed	Level of success of the solution
National focus in transport planning and overall frameworks	No joint legal basis	Reduced planning reliability	No direct impact	Pragmatic approach to legal differences	High
	Technical standards	Reduced economic viability	No direct impact	Trains approved in both countries	Medium, it works but comes at a cost
	National timetables	Lack of integrated connections	Longer waiting and travel times	Early and continuous exchange	Medium, sometimes it is not possible to make short-term adjustments
	Infrastructure development	Services temporarily suspended or with longer travel times	Construction works longer than necessary reducing accessibility	Early and continuous exchange	Low, more and better coordination between railway operators needed
	Lack of incentives	Fewer services	Reduced accessibility	EU funding to establish/operate cross-border services	(Not yet implemented)
Language barriers		No direct impact	No direct impact	Employment of Polish speaking staff at VBB and external interpreters	High, but the solution entails high dependency on single persons
Lack of modern distribution channels		Reduced accessibility and user-friendliness	Less attractive public transport	Pilots for digital ticketing systems through Interreg projects	(Not yet implemented)

### 3.1. National focus on transport planning

Major obstacles are the national legal and administrative structures and processes which require a high level of coordination and cooperation. This concerns a joint legal agreement and technical standards, national timetables, national plans for infrastructure development and a lack of financial incentives for small-scale cross-border public transport.

The legal framework to operate the rail connection differs between Germany and Poland (see section 2.4). While VBB in Germany runs a public competition procedure for a 12-year concession, the Marshal's Office of Lubuskie Voivodship issues a license to operate the train in Poland for two years through a direct procurement procedure. This difference in the duration of the contracts and the type of procurement procedures have so far prevented an official German-Polish agreement on a joint legal basis for long-term commitment and more planning reliability. The absence of such an agreement increases the need for coordination and negotiations as issues arise. It also creates stronger dependency on the willingness of the players and requires continuous and early exchange between authorities and operators which can be limited by language barriers (see section 3.2).

Another aspect refers to the availability and compatibility of vehicles with technical standards on the other side of the border. National provisions partly prevent vehicles being equipped with technology that meets the standards in both countries. This is of particular relevance for any national or EU funding. Such measures need to fulfil detailed provisions without further exceptions, which can prevent neighbouring country standards being met as well. It is a particular challenge to develop and produce vehicles that fulfil the standards in both countries. Players in the German-Polish border region addressed this obstacle by using vehicles with internal combustion engines. NEB uses vehicles produced by the Polish manufacturer PESA LINK that are homologated in both Poland and Germany. Lubuskie Region also has vehicles with double homologation so trains can generally cross the border without major problems. This challenge might require more attention in the future if the railway line is to be fully electrified.

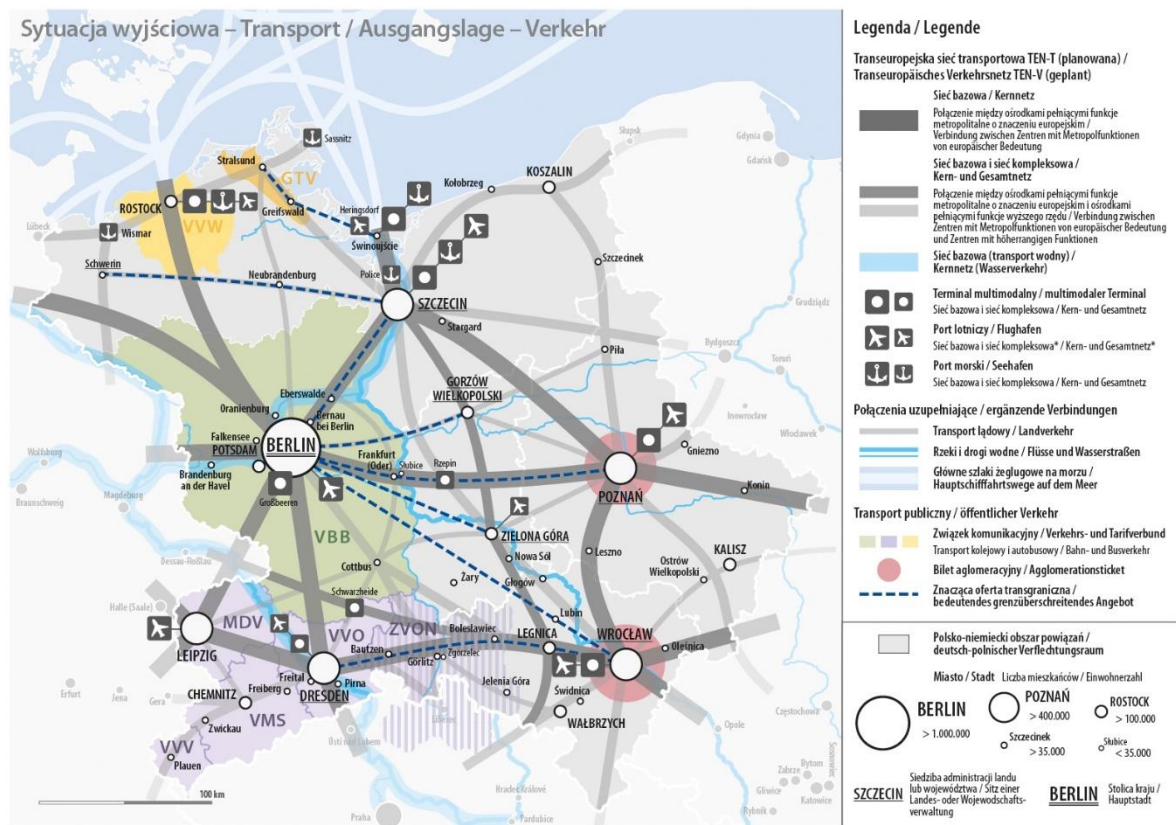
A third aspect refers to integration with national timetables. The objective is to offer many connections to/from the Polish network in Kostrzyn without long connecting times. However, national timetables are modified more often in Poland than in Germany. This can lead to short-term mismatches and a lack of integrated national timetables requiring short-term adjustments. German and Polish partners coordinate their timetables on an annual basis considering connecting trains as well as other national trains operating on the same railway infrastructure. An early and comprehensive exchange of information and mutual consultation is important to preserve flexibility before the train connections are formally submitted to the national infrastructure operators. This again requires a high willingness to cooperate and coordinate activities. For this, VBB and Lubuskie Voivodship (represented by Marshal's Office) organise an annual coordination meeting. Since the Covid-19 pandemic started, more regular meetings have taken place to exchange on developments and changes in timetables. VBB and the Marshal's Office of the Lubuskie Voivodship are in constant and frequent contact using an online tool and communicating in Polish.

A fourth obstacle goes beyond the train operators and transport associations as infrastructure development activities on both sides of the border are often not coordinated. This is of particular relevance for works to upgrade or extend railway infrastructure for connecting trains. To establish an integrated transport system across borders and beyond single transport modes requires considering the development of other corridors and infrastructure. However, recent feasibility studies are too small-scale and do not include such a comprehensive perspective or even measures recently implemented or soon to be implemented in the neighbouring country (IHK Ostbrandenburg / ETC Gauff Mobility, 2018).

A fifth obstacle resulting from the national focus is the lack of financial incentives to support cross-border public transport. Additional EU funding would increase the

willingness to cooperate and develop a joint regional transport plan including an integrated timetable. A previous study by the European Commission on cross-border rail transport showed that most cross-border rail connections require revenue support in at least one country (Sippel et al., 2018). The joint vision for transport in the cross-border region could be the starting point for elaborating a joint regional transport plan and providing better financing for cross-border transport services. The vision was formulated by the German-Polish spatial planning committee which brings together national and regional authorities from both countries (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1 Transport in the German-Polish border region**



Source: German-Polish Spatial Planning Platform<sup>9</sup>

## 3.2. Language barriers

Another important obstacle is the language barrier. German as a Germanic language and Polish as a Slavic language share hardly any commonalities. While transport operators mainly communicate in English, no common working language could be established between the regional authorities and transport associations. German VBB therefore relies on its own Polish-speaking staff who are responsible for communication with the Marshal's Office of Lubuskie Voivodship and other Polish authorities and players. This includes emails, translation of official documents and interpretation for face-to-face or online meetings. If no Polish-speaking staff are available in-house, external interpreters and translators are involved. However, this entails additional challenges as external interpreters are more expensive, need to be briefed before a meeting and require time to prepare and familiarise themselves with the specific topic. Furthermore, involving external interpreters usually implies that the exchange is more formal. This, in turn, hampers informal exchange and first acquaintances between German and Polish

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.kooperation-ohne-grenzen.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/llc.jpg>

staff which is an important success factor as it helps build trust and intensify personal relationships.

Language is also important for train users. Especially because the train mainly operates in Germany, information in Polish is limited. Announcements on the train are in German and Polish only for stops along the route (including welcome and farewell), but not about connecting services. Announcements in train stations are not in Polish so non-German speaking passengers might face additional challenges after leaving the train. Flyers and posters are usually available in German, English and Polish. Recent flyers and/or posters covered long-term construction works, Covid-19 protection measures and tourism events in the border region. Furthermore, NEB employs some Polish staff and responds to Polish requests in Polish. In the connecting train service from Kostrzyn to Krzyż, no announcements are in German and information is only in Polish and English (Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2 Information on the train between Kostrzyn and Krzyż**



Source: Kinal-Swadowski, 2021

### 3.3. Lack of modern distribution channels

A last obstacle with a stronger future dimension is the lack of modern distribution channels, especially online tickets. So far, cross-border tickets can only be bought at ticket machines, counters or on the train but are not available online or through an app. The lack of such solutions hampers accessibility of the cross-border rail service compared to domestic services which have such solutions. Furthermore, ticket machines do not always function and staff might lack the necessary language skills. The combination of inconsistencies in distribution channels, language and technical barriers reduces the accessibility and user friendliness of this cross-border public transport for all target groups. Important aspects needing joint solutions include barcodes and control devices that allow staff in both countries to validate tickets. This also includes protection against forgery.

VBB, the Lubuskie Voivodship (Marshal's Office) and the State of Brandenburg joined forces to tackle this challenge. They are partners in the EU-funded Interreg project RailBLu<sup>10</sup> aiming at reducing barriers and better use of existing strengths in cross-border public transport between east Brandenburg and Lubuskie Voivodship. The project creates incentives to discover the neighbouring country by rail and, thus, contributes to cross-border integration and the switch from cars to rail in cross-border transport. The RailBLu project runs until December 2022 and has three main pillars, all of which cover the Berlin-Kostrzyn rail connection:

- Analysis and strategy: Analysis of practices from the German-French border region, transport model based on data from mobile devices (e.g. mobile phones, smartphones, tablets), analysis of accessibility and potential demand for 2050, model-based prognosis for 2030, concept for five German-Polish connections, analysis of capacities, bottlenecks and investment needs and a joint vision for 2030 and 2050.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.vbb.de/en/vbb-themen/forschung-und-projekte/railblu/>



- Distribution channels: Analysis of preconditions for digital ticketing, development of digital ticketing system, pilot for six months, evaluation of the pilot phase, strategy to introduce digital ticketing on a regular basis.
- Shuttle transfers: Identification of places with a high potential for shuttle transfer between train stops and (remote) settlements, a German and a Polish pilot for shuttle transfers, running the pilot for six months, technical and organisational evaluation including passenger surveys.

## 4. Conclusions and lessons learnt

The train connection between Berlin and Kostrzyn nad Odrą fulfils three purposes. First, it is an important link that connects Berlin to its wider hinterland in east Brandenburg. Second, it links Berlin to the Polish railway network. Third, it improves cross-border accessibility in the border region. Despite the clear focus of train stops in Germany, the connection serves target groups from both countries and contributes to cross-border integration in the border region.

The train operator, NEB, the German transport association VBB and the Polish Marshal's Office of Lubuskie Voivodship are the key players. Obstacles result from national differences between the two countries. These range from legal and administrative ('no common administrative procedures and legal basis') to practical obstacles ('no common working language'). Handling these obstacles in a pragmatic way and working towards acceptable solutions are a key success factor for the train service. The joint declaration between the state of Brandenburg and Lubuskie Voivodship and the employment of Polish speaking staff at VBB are good examples of this pragmatic and solution-oriented approach. They illustrate commitment and political support for cross-border cooperation on transport.

Still, the case study also shows room for improvement. A joint legal framework would increase commitment and improve reliability for planning. This would facilitate the development and implementation of both existing and new cross-border services. It could define the framework for future cooperation, e.g. through harmonised procurement procedures, obligatory exchanges of information on infrastructure development and a stronger and more stable long-term perspective. Additional financial incentives to establish and operate cross-border services, e.g. through EU funding, are an important cornerstone in this regard.

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## Interviews

Interviewee	Organisation	Interview date
Max Göthel	Verkehrsverbund Berlin-Brandenburg GmbH	07.06.2021
Adam Kinal-Swadowski	Verkehrsverbund Berlin-Brandenburg GmbH	
Wojciech Majdański	Lubuskie Voivodship, Department of Infrastructure and Transport	16.07.2021

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