

**Question for written answer P-010418/2012
to the Commission**
Rule 117
Frieda Brepoels (Verts/ALE)

Subject: Axing of the Benelux Train

From 9 December 2012 the 'Fyra' high speed train link will finally – five years behind schedule – connect Brussels to Amsterdam (via Antwerp, Rotterdam and Schiphol). At the same time, however, the so-called 'Benelux Train' is being scrapped. The axing of this Benelux Train is causing considerable concern both in Flanders and in the Netherlands, particularly owing to the following issues:

- fares for a single journey are to rise by 34% for the longest trip (Brussels-Amsterdam) and by up to 82% for the shortest (Antwerp-Rotterdam);
- there are to be no season tickets, so commuters will have to buy a separate ticket for each journey. Over a year this would amount to a doubling of their travel costs;
- compulsory reservation, with all that this implies for commuters who miss their train in the evening because, for example, a meeting has overrun. The counter-argument used is the wish, for reasons of safety and comfort, to guarantee a seat for every passenger. However, for domestic journeys there is no reservation requirement;
- frequency: Fyra will run considerably less often than the Benelux Train;
- lack of suitable alternatives; the stopping train that links Antwerp and Rosendaal every hour (with 11 stops) can hardly be called an alternative.

All these factors seem likely to make cross-border rail passenger travel between Flanders and the Netherlands significantly more difficult, which is bad for travellers, but also for the economy.

In the light of the above, I should like to ask the following:

1. Is the Commission aware of this situation, and what is its overall assessment?
2. What does the Commission think in particular about the issue of fares? What is the Commission's view of the expected fare rise in the context of liberalised international passenger transport, which was expected to bring about a fall in fares?
3. Does the Commission consider that compulsory advance reservation constitutes an obstacle to cross-border transport, and that the least well-off will be the first to suffer from a more restricted freedom of choice?
4. What is the Commission's opinion of this development in the context of competition?
5. Is the Commission prepared to take action on this matter? If so, what action, and when? If not, why not?