

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

New options open for maglev trains

The growth in transport demand is expected to be so huge that magnetically levitated trains must be built.

On Oct. 3, the day of reunification, Germany resumed its traditional role as the central pivot of transport between east and west, as well as the north and south of Europe.

Already before the fall of the Iron Curtain, West Germany's railroads, highways, and waterways transported 3 billion tons of commercial goods every year. At the end of 1989, experts estimated at least a fivefold increase in volume through Germany by the late 1990s. Now, it is estimated that there will be a tenfold increase of transport volumes between the united parts of Germany alone, during the same period. There is, at present, no clear forecast of what long-distance transport of commercial goods between East and West Europe will look like 5-10 years from now, but the increase will be immense, and it will place great demands on German railroads, highways, and waterways.

In response to this vague forecast, railroad-building options are being revived in the minds of transport policy planners after three decades of emphasis on the extension of the highway system. The bureaucracy is slow, and this has an impact where all public transportation is under the control of the state. But a new emphasis on railroads is there, and one may even speak of a new era in transport policy in Germany.

The new era began on Oct. 3 when, after the state ceremony for German unification in Berlin, Chancellor Helmut Kohl met with Heinz Duerr, the chairman of the AEG corporation, and told him it was a "national duty" to take the job as chairman of the German state railway, the

Bundesbahn. Kohl's choice was a good one: Duerr's background at AEG, a high-tech firm with a tradition in the rail sector, is very helpful.

Assuming the post on Oct. 18, Duerr declared: "I am entering my new job with a total commitment, because I am convinced that the railways, being a technologically challenging system, are entering a new era of flourishing."

Interviewed on German national television the same day, Duerr said that he took the job only on condition that the government make a clear commitment to the railways as a top priority. Kohl, who gave that promise, told the cabinet session two days before that with the feared increase of transport bottlenecks in the late 1990s, "the railways would have to be invented again, if they weren't already there."

The government will take over DM 12 billion in old debt on the railways and is considering taking over the considerable cost of track maintenance, which would put the railways on an equal status with road transport and internal shipping, where the state pays corresponding costs. This will offer the railway system, with its accumulated debt of about DM 50 billion, some breathing space and enable it to regain competitiveness with road and waterway transport.

Once the bureaucratic hold on railway projects was removed by the chancellor, an acceleration of the new ICE (Inter-City Express) high-speed train project, which will begin to operate along the Hanover-Würzburg route at an average speed of 200-260 kilometers per hour in June 1991, has

started. The shift of increasing numbers of personnel from the older railroads to the new ICE, which will run on an entirely new, separate track, will relieve the old structure, which also serves to transport commodities.

But given the expected increase in transport demand, the relief created for commodity transport will only be temporary. Demands upon the ICE grid will become critical, and at this point, the option of yet another, separate structure that operates on the magnetic-levitation train technology is entering the picture.

The first generation of the maglev system, the Transrapid, which has already been developed and tested in Germany and can travel at 400-500 kilometers per hour, is back on the agenda in Bonn. Reporting the results of the Transrapid experimental model, Dieter Spethmann, chairman of Thyssen Corp.—one of the companies in the industrial group that constructed the train—proposed in Bonn on Sept. 25 that the maglev system be used on a long-distance track to be built in the next few years between Berlin and at least one of two big cities in eastern Germany, Leipzig and Dresden, or even all three.

Several months back, a similar proposal by Thyssen was discarded in Bonn as too exotic. But after the selection of Duerr as Bundesbahn chairman, chances for the Transrapid have improved, an aide to the transport policy commission of the Parliament told *EIR* on Oct. 23.

Duerr's former company AEG is involved in maglev technology projects, with emphasis on intra-city systems for mass transit. AEG produced the M-Bahn that has run successfully for several years in West Berlin, and the firm is presently developing a maglev system for computerized transport of raw materials and commodities.