



## Japan Local Government Centre, London

### Monthly Report September 2010 (Germany) – Stuttgart City station project meets civic resistance

For more than 15 years, city and traffic planners have been working on a project to redesign the central train station in Stuttgart from a terminus to a through-station, by burying the tracks underground and release the spaces now occupied overground by rails and sidings for more trees and the re-development of 'carbon-neutral' city spaces. This change is part of a longer-term vision to enable train traffic to move faster, and increase connectivity within Europe. The project combines longer-term ambitions for the improvement of public transport through the building of a new stretch of high-speed track between the city and the greater region with a new phase for urban development in the heart of Stuttgart City.

The first proposals were made in 1994, and since then the planning and consultation process has continued, so the plans were known and citizens and residents had many opportunities to engage with it and make their voices heard. However, the financial crisis which began in 2008 and developed into a severe economic crisis did change the landscape for investment on this scale. Nevertheless, it only became the target of popular protest once the preparation got under way, and work to remove some parts of the historic station building and the felling of trees in the adjacent park began. Since then, protests and demonstrations have taken place on a regular basis, and the controversy whether to continue or not has spilled over from a local concern for the city of Stuttgart and the *Land* of Baden-Württemberg to the federal level, where a meeting of the interior committee of parliament (Bundestag) discussed the policing methods employed against demonstrators. An urgent demand for a plenary discussion in parliament by the Green Party, which is in favour of halting the project, has however been defeated.

The arguments cited by the proponents and supporters of the project are numerous and can be summarised as follows:

1. Greater capacity – the current terminus in Stuttgart is a bottle neck for train traffic. In its current form, further improvement in speed and connectivity is severely limited. To change it from a terminus into a through-station would increase the number of daily trains, dissolve the current log-jams of trains having to wait before they can enter the terminus, and also security would be increased, as termini are inherently more dangerous than through stations, because trains drive straight in the direction of the terminus building.
2. Easier changing of trains – a terminus necessitates long distances for changing between platforms, therefore making quick connections impossible.

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By shortening the distance passengers have to walk, quicker connections can be built into the timetable.

3. International connections – through the changes envisaged by the project, a link to international rail connections, for example Paris-Budapest, becomes possible. Stuttgart airport could also be connected directly to the fast track and so would become more attractive.
4. By changing the terminus into a through station, regional trains can also move through the station smoother, therefore making the developments of a faster regional network possible. As a result, commuting would become easier and more attractive.
5. Urban development - Stuttgart's inner city will have new development potential by burying the rail infrastructure and releasing the land. Existing park and green spaces could be extended, and new building developments become possible. Currently separated quarters of the city would become better connected.
6. More jobs – the redesign of the inner city can lead to an increase in jobs. Deutsche Bahn estimates that it could be as many as 10.000. The high level of investment during construction alone will also have a positive impact on the region.

However the arguments against are also significant:

1. High cost of the project – the current plans are too expensive. It is possible to make smaller scale improvements to the terminus as it stands, using only a portion of the currently budgeted costs, and invest the remainder in education, health or social welfare.
2. Investment in this project will hinder or delay necessary investment elsewhere – Deutsche Bahn will have to spend so much on the Stuttgart21 project and the 60 km of new high-speed track that other equally urgent improvements, for example the chronically busy tracks through the Rhine valley and the track between Frankfurt and Mannheim as well as the improvement of freight transport will in all likelihood have to be postponed.
3. Noise and pollution – a huge building site in the centre of town will create chaos and a difficult environment for residents, who will suffer from noise, exhaust fumes and dust for many years to come.
4. Impact on the urban space – many hundreds of century-old trees in the park adjacent to the current terminus building will be felled, and currently open areas will be concreted over. Also there are questions about the design value of the proposed underground space – some people object to the light openings which will have a tower-like appearance above ground in some areas.
5. Transport improvements – the expected improvements are unlikely to materialise, because the number of tracks to be accessible underground as planned is smaller than the number of platforms currently available. Therefore it is likely that trains will still have to wait to enter the station. Only four platforms are currently planned for, at which trains will stop in short

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intervals one after the other, and this will mean that passengers will feel crowded.

6. Shorter travelling times and value for money – the planned fast-speed track connecting Stuttgart with Ulm is disproportionately expensive in regard to the slight shortening of travelling time envisaged. Furthermore, the planned route is beset with problems: some of the curves are too tight to achieve higher speeds, and inclines and slopes will necessitate lower speeds as well. Alternatively, improvements to the current track or the running of tilting trains would achieve faster speeds without spending as much money.
7. Neglect of rail freight – the planned new tracks do not include side tracks for overtaking, thus indicating that use for rail freight is not envisaged, although improvements here are urgently needed.
8. Insufficient link with projected European rail improvements – there is no mention of how the planned short new high-speed track will link on to the further strategy of connecting European cities. Possible routes through Bavaria are currently blocked by local authorities, so the future is rather unclear.
9. Construction risks – building 60 km of new tunnel in a geological difficult area is fraught with technical and financial risks.

The current extensive public protests also point to an increasing alienation between politicians, parties and citizens. There is a lot of talk that politicians do not represent or listen to the concerns of those who vote for them. In recent years, the use of state-level referenda has also increased, and their outcomes are more often than not inconvenient to politicians. In this case, it might lead to a change in political power in Baden-Württemberg, where elections take place next March, and that is likely to have further repercussions for the federal government too.

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