



Built Environment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Public transport in towns and cities

Tuesday 5 April 2022

10 am

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Members present: Baroness Neville-Rolfe (The Chair); Lord Berkeley; Lord Best; Lord Carrington of Fulham; Baroness Cohen of Pimlico; Lord Grocott; Lord Haselhurst; The Earl of Lytton; Lord Moylan; Lord Stunell; Baroness Thornhill.

Evidence Session No. 8

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 90 - 104

Witnesses

I: Dr Erich Forster, Former Chief Executive Office, WESTbahn and Rail Holding AG, Chair, AllRail; Pauline Cassette, Transport and Mobility Director, SIMOUV.

Examination of witnesses

Dr Erich Forster and Pauline Cassette.

Q90 **The Chair:** Welcome to the House of Lords Built Environment Committee's public evidence session on our inquiry into public transport in towns and cities. Our inquiry is considering the impact of technological and digital developments on travel behaviours, future trends in public transport innovation and how our public policy should be shaped in the light of these trends. We are particularly interested in connectivity between modes and better integration of data and innovation. We will then make recommendations to the Government later in the year, but in this session we are very fortunate to be talking about international examples from the cities of Vienna and Valenciennes.

Our witnesses today are Dr Erich Forster, former chief executive officer of WESTbahn management and Rail Holding and chair of AllRail, who will talk to us about Vienna, and Pauline Cassette, transport and mobility director of SIMOUV, who will focus more on Valenciennes.

Our session is being broadcast on parliamentlive.tv. A full transcript is also being taken and will be made available to our witnesses to make any corrections shortly after the session. Can members and witnesses keep their questions and responses brief, as we have a lot to cover?

I will kick off the questions. Dr Forster, can you tell us a bit more about the context for public transportation systems in Vienna? How big is Vienna? What is the population, the density—that seems to be very important in public transport provision—and the geography, and what transport modes are available now? I will then ask Pauline a similar question about Valenciennes.

Dr Erich Forster: If you look at Vienna, we are talking about 2 million people, so it is a lot smaller compared to London or other big centres in Europe. If you look at the public transport modes, on the one side you have the metro underground system in Vienna, which deals with only five lines and about 83 kilometres of line length in total. The best way to figure out data is to look pre Covid, so, at a maximum, we are talking about 465 million people in the metro underground in 2018 in Vienna.

There is a big tram network, which is around 225 kilometres in length and transported about 310 million people in 2018. Then there is a bus system, which has a length of approximately 660 kilometres per day, so day traffic. Additionally, they are offering a night bus system of around 200 kilometres, and approximately 200 million people are transported in this mode per year. Those are the main figures.

If you look at the city system, this is additionally supported by our S-Bahn system. The first three were on the Vienna lines, and then you have the S-Bahn system that connects the surroundings with the city and crosses the city several times, north-south and a little bit east-north-west. These services are not easy to account only to Vienna, because they are transporting in and out. There are a lot of commuter services,

and with the S-Bahn system approximately 90 million passengers are transported per year, and there are about 900 trains going in and out of and around the city per day.

Those are the basic figures for public transport. Clearly, we are still talking about a lot of people going by car, but this is minimised every year because of parking restrictions, which we can talk about later.

The Chair: Thank you. I remember the local trains from when I was at school there many years ago. They were very good. Could you sum up how many of the transport journeys, if that is the right word, are in the car, how many are on the bus, and how many by train or metro, to give us a feel for the shares?

Dr Erich Forster: Since 2015, the official data show that the majority are on public transport, but the modal split is not completely clear. It is very difficult to measure exactly in the city, but, as I say, the official data show that since 2015 a majority have been travelling on public transport.

The Chair: Pauline, would you like to introduce Valenciennes?

Pauline Cassette: It is a much smaller network, because Valenciennes is a much smaller town in northern France, near the Belgian border, and SIMOUV, the transport authority that I represent today, covers 82 towns. It is a bit like a community working together on the transport policies, transport planning and the transport network. The territory is a bit complicated, because you have a part that is very rural and a part that is much more urban. There are three main urban centres. Valenciennes has 45,000 inhabitants, so it is one of the bigger ones, but it is very small compared to Vienna. Then you have Denain, which has approximately 20,000 inhabitants, and Saint Amand les Eaux in the north, which also has 20,000 inhabitants.

In terms of the transport network, we have two tram lines. The first started in 2005 or 2006, if I am not mistaken, and the second one started in 2015. The second one is interesting, because it is a single-track tram, compared to the first one, which is a double track. The first one is 20 kilometres long, and the second one is 15 kilometres long.

I will give you the number of trips pre Covid. Pre Covid, for 2019, there were over 16 million trips per year, about half of which were on the tram network only. For the rest of the network we have buses—classic buses, and special services in the city centre and to hospitals, as well as to the bigger companies such as the GSK centre. We also have a dedicated line going there, a semi-floating bike scheme, which I might talk about later, and park and ride car parks. That is about it for the network.

The Chair: Are there restrictions on parking in the city, as we heard about Vienna?

Pauline Cassette: They are quite recent in Valenciennes city centre; they started perhaps three or four years ago. Parking used to be free for

ages, and now there is this parking levy for most of the day. I think it is from 7 am to 5 pm, or something like that.

The Chair: Is that like the London system?

Pauline Cassette: No. You park and you pay for one, two or three hours, or you can have a monthly ticket. If you are living in the neighbourhood, you have a special ticket for the year. I think the first car is free, and if you have a second car you have to pay for it.

Q91 **Lord Berkeley:** Thank you to the witnesses for some very interesting introductions. I have known both your cities for probably over 50 years and I have seen changes, and you have obviously seen massive changes yourselves.

Is the purpose of what you have achieved to remove car? Is it to give people who do not have cars better transport? Or is it for net zero? I am sure you have views on all of those, but which of the improvements that you have outlined have worked in your cities—I want to include maybe the last 200 or 300 metres on bikes or scooters, or something like that—and which do you need to do more about?

Pauline Cassette: In Valenciennes, and in France in general, we do not use the tram as a transport link; we use it as an urban regeneration tool. In Valenciennes, this was very much the case, because it was a means to improve the urban quality of the city. In this aspect, it is very good and it achieves what it wanted to achieve.

I do not think it was a tool to remove cars from the city centre, because, as I just told you, the car park was free until three or four years ago and the tram came 15 years ago. It was more a tool to help people without a car to move. I did not talk about it, but Valenciennes is part of the old coalmining area in northern France, so it is a territory that needs urban regeneration. For people with economic issues, that can be a bit of a problem, especially people who do not own a car, so it was a tool to help those people to achieve mobility, and it was also about improving the quality of the city.

Lord Berkeley: Valenciennes, in the old mining days, was very similar to some of our northern cities, and I think we have a lot to learn from you, because you made a lot of changes and maybe we should look at a few more.

Pauline Cassette: What is interesting in the T1, the first line, is that it is using part of an old railway from mining. It is in the middle of nowhere, so when you are on this tram it is more of a tram-train at this spot, because it is in the middle of fields, but it is connecting Denain with Valenciennes and it is using this corridor. It is an interesting previous route for this new link.

Dr Erich Forster: If we are talking about innovations that work, one is the 24-hour underground and bus offer, which, especially on weekends, leads to a lot of additional public transport use by young people and minimises the risks of car accidents. That is one point. We will talk later

about the €365 ticket, which is absolutely a success story, now additionally supported by the KlimaTicket for all of Austria.

What has worked best is in fact restrictions on parking. You cannot park if you are a commuter traveller in Vienna, because all districts now have limits on parking, such as three hours for short-term parking. That means that you cannot park even if you pay all day. You will get a fine, so you only have the chance to use a parking garage if you come into the city, or you have to use public transport. The last step covering the whole city was the parking restrictions that started on 1 March 2022, when the last two districts entered the complete restricted system for parking. You can pay for a parking permit for the district where you live, but if you are a commuter traveller entering the city you have no chance of getting such a permit, so you have no possibility to park, except in parking garages.

Lord Berkeley: Pauline mentioned that one of the benefits was improved quality of life, which one can understand. Is that also evident in Vienna with the parking changes?

Dr Erich Forster: Yes, because the people who want to go for a short trip with their car now find parking places. Before, the city was crowded. Now, in a lot of districts, you have no problem finding a parking place because of the big number of commuter travellers—we are talking about more than 300,000 people daily going into the city and back out again because they work in the city—moving to public transport. Years ago, more or less all, or 80%, took the car. Now, there is a complete move to public transport. There were all the problems during the Covid crisis, but now public transport is working perfectly because you cannot take the car. That has worked much better than some actions to heighten the use public transport.

Q92 **Lord Haselhurst:** I note, looking at the situation in Vienna, that there is subsidisation of plans for extending the U-Bahn between the Federal Government, the city of Vienna and Wiener Linien. I understand that it is a purposeful thing to do to inject money into the system in order to extend it, but operationally at the moment, is the system working at a heavy loss or does it cover its costs?

Dr Erich Forster: No, it is impossible to cover the costs. If you look at Vienna, especially now with Covid but even before, the system had to be subsidised by around €360 million. If you are looking at the real costs, it is even higher, because you have a lot of payments to Wiener Linien or to ÖBB for some reduced fares or for transporting people at a lower price level. To be honest, if you take all the costs into consideration, it is far from covering the cost.

A 2018 study showed that the €365 ticket should cost more than double. Now, in 2022, maybe it should be around three times the price to cover the costs. On the other hand, looking at public transport costs is a very specific way of analysing what central government or city government is doing, because you also have costs for using cars and for building and repairing streets, which you never look at in the same way because there

you have no dedicated company that is subsidised. There, you automatically have costs that you must cover.

Lord Berkeley: The motive of the city of Vienna, or the Federal Government, is not simply to hope that in the end an enlarged system will produce more revenue and reduce costs. Is it more to do with getting people to give up the use of their cars when there is a public transport system, and for a clean atmosphere?

Dr Erich Forster: Yes. The target is not to make a profit but to have a decreasing amount of cars used, so providing perfect support for the climate, to be absolutely clear.

The Chair: What is the public attitude to this? I am thinking of people with four children or the disabled, people who must use the car having to go on public transport, or people who are old and fearful. Have you had any backlash from the people of Vienna, or is everybody supportive of this move?

Dr Erich Forster: The trend to reduce car traffic started in the 1980s and 1990s, when there was a special programme to build special aisles for the pedestrian space and to reduce parking spaces. That was the very beginning of work in Vienna against cars, and there were a lot of protests. Since then, more or less everyone has been fine with the strategy. It was long-term learning and now people like public transport. The quality is high; there are very short intervals on the underground, tram and bus, so people have absolutely no problem. Even if you are handicapped, there are special offers to transport you, and the tram system is steadily being developed so that you can enter without level differences, so if you are in a wheelchair you have no problem entering the tram. It is not perfect at the moment, but the route is completely clearly designed, and I think it is going in a good direction.

Q93 **Lord Grocott:** This question is more about Valenciennes. We have in our notes that construction began in 2006 to reopen a Victorian tram system that had been closed in 1966. Can you tell us a bit about the economics of that? I am not clear from our notes whether this was on parts of the system, or at least that the route protected the old one, or whether in effect a brand-new system was being built there. If so, can you tell us about the economics of that? What was the total cost of installation, and what impact has the tram network had, if any, on car usage and other transport modes in the region?

Pauline Cassette: It is a brand-new system. The old one closed last century, and it was decided in the late 1990s to bring back two lines in two phases, so four phases in total. That opened in 2005. Nine kilometres are between the university south of Valenciennes and just north of Valenciennes, and then it was extended to Denain through the old mining railway that I talked about earlier. What we call the T1, the first tram line, is 19 kilometres, and that was opened in 2005. The second one is a bit different, because it runs through the historical network towards Belgium and is a bit more constricted in terms of space. That is why it is

a single-track tram link and the tramway can only cross at a station, so there is a central platform and the trams cross, and then they go back on the single track. The second line is 15 kilometres long, and it has a common route with the first line through Valenciennes city centre and going to the university in the south of Valenciennes.

The first phase, T1, cost €300 million in total for the 19 kilometres that I have talked about—the double track with all the depots and the works on it.

The second line cost €160 million, so a bit less. It cost roughly €10 million per kilometre compared to the first one, which is more like €15 million or €16 million. It is not that expensive for a tram system, because the mean cost for a tram system per kilometre is roughly between €20 million and €30 million. Here, it is more €10 million or €15 million, so it is a bit cheaper than the common tramway networks. There is one new one, but, as I said earlier, we are using part of the old railway from the mining industry, so it is a bit cheaper in this case.

In terms of modal share, it is tricky for us because of the territory we are covering. It is so big, and the survey usually covers the whole territory. If we are just considering the territory in the vicinity of the tram lines, there has been an increase in PT usage of 20%. In the whole territory, car usage is nearly 60% and PT is about 10%. Walking is nearly 30%, and the rest is cycling and so on. The tram has had an impact on the usage of PT, but given the size of the territory and the fact that it covers only part of our territory, it is a bit complicated to get exact numbers on the entire usage.

Lord Grocott: What about the level of public subsidy towards the payment of the construction and running costs? We have already heard about the subsidy in Vienna. How much is paid for out of general taxation?

Pauline Cassette: In France, ticketing is only 25% of the total cost of a PT ticket. Most of it comes from something called the versement transport, which is a transport levy. A lot more tax is paid by a company with more than 11 employees in order to fund urban public transport. The basic rate is 1% of payroll costs, and it depends on the investment that the transport authority wants to make. That represents a massive part of the investment in public transport. The other part of it is where the French Government help the Valenciennes tramway. I think that 15% of the cost comes from the French Government and 40% comes from Valenciennes transport and SIMOUV investment in it. Part of it is a loan and part of it also comes from the European levy. That is about it.

Lord Grocott: Overall, if it is not too general a question, would you say that the system has been a success and that it is popular? Maybe one measure of that is whether further routes are planned.

Pauline Cassette: The T1 is rather popular. With the T2, there was an issue for a time due to the single-track system, because there was an

issue with the technology used for detecting whether another tram was coming. So it was a bit of a problem for a while and people were put off using the T2, because you were never sure that you would get to the point you wanted to get to. Now it has been resolved, and it is a shame that there was a Covid period, because use of the T2 was going up. We will have to check to see if that is still the case in 2022.

It is well used, but I mentioned the four phases. At the moment, we have the two phases in T1 that are finished. Phase 1 of the T2 is also finished. There was supposed to be a phase 2, but that is not planned for the moment because it is not a priority. The priority is more bus lines and on-demand buses for the rural territories, because the urban area is well covered by regional train lines, so for now there are just these two tramway lines and no more public investment is planned for the tramway in Valenciennes.

The Chair: Lady Thornhill is interested in the political structure in these cities and will ask a question later.

Lord Carrington of Fulham: Before I come to road usage, which is what interests me, on the question of trams, one of the debates that has been presented to us is about the cost of trams versus buses, coupled with the flexibility of buses. We had trams in London years ago, but they were done away with, and I imagine the same is perhaps true elsewhere, because they were so inflexible if anything went wrong. If you needed to move the tram on to a different route, you could not because of the rails. People moved away from them and then moved to buses, and we have had evidence suggesting that buses were a lot cheaper to run than trams. Is this your experience, both in Vienna and in France?

Dr Erich Forster: In Vienna, there was a short phase where there was a reduction in tram lines and they were substituted with buses, but the Government then stopped this strategy and went back to trams, because during peak times you have a lot more capacity on trams. You are right that, in part, you have more flexibility with buses, but the load capacity of a tram, even if you have a hangar, is much higher, so during peak hours you have a lot more possibilities for transporting more people by tram, and during the day you can reduce the frequency of the trams. It is very much dependent on the city, because if you have very narrow streets or big curves, a tram automatically has problems, especially if you run low-level trams with very small wheels, but in general the tram system has a lot of advantages compared to the bus system.

Lord Carrington of Fulham: Is it worth the extra cost of running the trams to get the extra load?

Dr Erich Forster: Yes. If you look at the capacity and the possibility of transporting people with a lot of seating, it is useful. If you only look at the costs, the bus very clearly has an advantage.

Lord Moylan: On the question of capacity, surely if you have a bus network you simply put more buses on in the peak and you run fewer of

them in the off peak. That is how London works. Of course, a tram, probably a two-car tram, will have more capacity than a bus, but then you can have two buses.

The Earl of Lytton: Good morning to both of you. I am interested in the tram versus the bus issue. I understand that the tram has rails and must therefore be respected by other road users, but there is obviously a prioritisation process here. Certainly I am familiar with the Vienna tram system and the priority that it has. Is that not equally a priority that can be given to buses on specific routes, or is that just not possible because the available road space is not there? Dr Forster, you are probably best placed to answer.

Dr Erich Forster: In Vienna, there are some streets where you have special bus lines, and they clearly have the advantage of being able to pass through traffic jams. Vienna also developed a lot of streets with special lanes for trams, so, on the one hand, trams are fast; they speed up to 60 kilometres or 70 kilometres per hour, with a slightly longer distance between the stops. It is not a question of this or that. In some districts, especially with longer trips, the tram has a very clear advantage. Vienna also runs a bus system in the city centre, which has smaller streets and very short distances between the stops. In the first district there is only the bus. It depends on the district and the nature of the traffic.

Q94 **Lord Carrington of Fulham:** Can I move this on slightly? I want to explore road usage a bit, because, particularly in an old city like Vienna, and indeed like London, there is a lot of pressure to get different modes of transport down very narrow streets. Whether it is trams, buses, motor cars, delivery vans, bicycles, e-scooters these days, and so on, they all go down the same road space. I can understand that it is possible to get rid of the discretionary use of motor cars—the commuter, the leisure driver, the person who is using the car to do shopping, perhaps, if they do not have too heavy a load—but there is a lot of car usage, a lot of van usage, a lot of bicycles all competing for the same space as buses and trams.

How do you balance between the different uses? How do you balance the ability to move people on public transport against the need for people to make deliveries, get taxis through, to use their bicycles because they want to keep fit, and all the rest of it? How do you get that balance right so that the city does not become more congested than it was before, because of the spaces given over to buses and trams? Dr Forster, perhaps. It is a Vienna question, I suspect.

Dr Erich Forster: Even pedestrian zones are open for some time for the loading and transporting of goods and so on, so there is a clear possibility to enter these zones. In the last few years especially, Vienna has also tried to support biking. At the moment, Vienna has approximately 1,700 kilometres of a special bike network in order to reduce the use even of public transport, not only the car, and move it to the bike, because bikes use minimum space compared to other transport modes. In Vienna, there

are special counting points that deliver data about bike and car traffic, and in the last 10 years on a lot of these points bike traffic has doubled, so I think Vienna is trying to give more space to bikes, trams and public buses, always trying to reduce the possibility of parking in Vienna. That is the general way.

Lord Carrington of Fulham: What does, say, an engineer do who is going in to repair a lift or something? How difficult is it, in an emergency, to get into Vienna by car, because an engineer would usually be in a car or a small van?

Dr Erich Forster: It is no problem. You enter the city and then you look for a parking garage. There are big parking garages at the beginning of underground lines where you can park your car and then finish your travel into the city by underground and tram or bus. There are a lot of big parking lots at the points where underground lines start, and it is easy to enter these. They are not free, you have to pay, but it is possible to come to the edge of the city and then finish by tram or underground.

Lord Grocott: With a lot of the things that have been mentioned, if you are a plumber who has come to repair a tank that has gone in the loft of some property in the centre of Vienna, you cannot just get on a bus, a tram or anything else on the outskirts of Vienna. You have a lot of equipment that you need to do the job. I think that is what Lord Carrington was aiming at. How is that kind of demand met?

Dr Erich Forster: If you are an engineer with a lot of things in your car, you have to stop and unload and maybe find a parking place afterwards in one of the garages. There is a lot of parking space in garages where you can stand your car all day long, and in the short-term parking zones there is a restriction of three hours, so unloading or loading your car is no problem, but then you have to move because there is the restriction of three hours' maximum parking time.

Q95 **Baroness Cohen of Pimlico:** I have a question that bears on how you feel about trams. This is a Vienna question, so I will ask Professor Forster to comment. Our notes say that the construction of the Vienna U-Bahn in the 1970s has led to extensive line closures on the tramway network because of a policy that trams are not to operate in parallel with the U-Bahn. I cannot quite understand that, because after all the U-Bahn goes underneath any conceivable tram track, so has it to do with making it easier to finance the U-Bahn, or how does that work?

Dr Erich Forster: No, I think it was at the beginning. There was a very special point where there was a so-called line 8, which was running parallel to underground 6, with additional stops in between, and then the city decided to stop it, with a lot of protest from the public. Later, they introduced additional underground stations to minimise the distances in between, but they did not reintroduce it. It was at the beginning of the underground development in the 1970s and 1980s.

Now there is no further restriction on the tram if a new line is opened. At the moment, underground 5 is under construction, but there is no plan to reduce any tram or bus system that runs parallel. I think it was at the start-up phase, although it was not a financing issue. At the beginning, the state government paid 80% of the costs of building the Viennese underground system, because it was support for the city, so it was not a financing issue but a strategic plan, although it was not perfectly successful.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: I thought that was one point that I ought to pick up. I would like to ask a bit more about the finances, the subsidy that is inevitable in what you are doing. I think you said earlier that if you doubled the €365 charge you would probably get somewhere near remunerating the running costs. Are you just remunerating the running costs, or are you making a contribution to capital and renewal?

Dr Erich Forster: Just the running costs. Investments are completely separate. Viennese Lines are not obliged to take the investment cost. They are still partly taken if it is underground, at the moment 50% by the state and the rest by the city, but that is their strategic planning for traffic development, and they do not have to be covered by the Viennese Lines company. They are subsidised only for the running costs.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: So the rest comes from some other public source.

Dr Erich Forster: Yes.

Q96 **Lord Stunell:** The €365 is certainly the most eye-catching feature of the Viennese system to those of us who are reading up on it. What is the take-up of that? One would suppose logically that the people who would buy it would be the frequent travellers, who would get a lot of value out of it, and the less frequent travellers would not worry about purchasing that. Does it have a net revenue gain or a net revenue loss? Do you see it as being a successful policy, or just one that now you are on the escalator it is impossible to stop?

Dr Erich Forster: It is both. The €365 was one of the basic decisions. It was about having a very attractive price so that everyone can enter the public system, because it means that even if you do not travel very often, it is cheaper and easier, especially easier, to have a network card. Nearly 1 million network cards have been bought. I do not think there was ever any discussion about needing to be in profit. The idea started when the Green Party entered the government in Vienna. The target was only to get more people into the public transport system and to support the climate. That was it, no more.

Lord Stunell: Is it possible to measure whether that has been successful? Are cardholders making more journeys than people were making before they bought a card, and is there additional traffic?

Dr Erich Forster: Yes, but the difference is that if the system is designed with an attractive public transport system, additional traffic is

not a problem. If someone takes an additional tram ride, it is no problem because the tram is running automatically. If you make an additional car journey, you pollute additionally with CO₂. It is now the same for all of Austria, because with the KlimaTicket, shortly at a price level of below €1,100 for all of Austria for all public transport, it is the next step in encouraging people to stop driving their car and enter even national public transport systems. We have had the Green Party in our government for two years now, and introducing the KlimaTicket was one of the major points for this party.

Lord Stunell: You have multiple operators. You are operating a separate company to ÖBB, so how do you do revenue sharing and so on in relation to the additional costs or whatever that come out of that?

Dr Erich Forster: The KlimaTicket is a good example here. When I was CEO, we signed a contract with the government. We get the same revenue per passenger kilometre as ÖBB, and the government pays per passenger kilometre. We are obliged to count everyone. With WESTbahn, we have a special system where you can check yourself in—it is automated—and additional surveys are done by the government. So even for private companies it is absolutely fine and interesting to be in the system, because there is no loss from passengers using the KlimaTicket. The passenger pays a low amount, but the government pays for every trip on a real cost level for the company, so we are not losing money with these people.

Q97 **Baroness Thornhill:** That is a perfect segue for my question to you both. I found your contributions fascinating, because our questions and your responses show me that we are talking about a completely different mindset when it comes to the use of public transport and a reduction in car use, which clearly influences your decisions about subsidy and policy.

I am interested in where the politicians come into all this. I am particularly interested in the system of mayors, and the balance between city mayors, the city government and national policy, and the particular powers. How does that partnership work, and what helps things to move along? What politically do you find hinders things in moving along? Perhaps Pauline can answer first, having worked with the politicians.

Pauline Cassette: That is a big question. As I said earlier, SIMOUV is the transport authority for two communalities, if you like: Valenciennes Métropole in the east, and Porte du Hainaut in the west. They all have a number of towns within them, and there are, I think, 15 Valenciennes Métropole representatives and 15 Porte du Hainaut representatives on the committee deciding what happens on the transport network.

The two areas are different. Porte du Hainaut is much more rural and Valenciennes Métropole is more urban, so you must balance all the decisions about what each territory wants for its own transport network. SIMOUV is a bit like a mediator bringing together all these different political opinions on what needs to be done. They all have a different

point of view, and it is about being a neutral structure and being able to do what is best for people and users.

Baroness Thornhill: Who holds the power? We would say, "Who holds the ace card?"

Pauline Cassette: It is SIMOUV and the president of SIMOUV, who at the moment is a representative of Valenciennes and is running SIMOUV with a committee. They are managing and taking the decisions for the territories, if that makes sense.

Baroness Thornhill: Are they elected?

Pauline Cassette: Yes, they are elected, but in their own territories. Some of them are part of SIMOUV and the smaller committee taking decisions.

Dr Erich Forster: If you look at Austria and Vienna since 1999, there is a special law that clearly defines the financing of public transport. It is clear who can take decisions about offers and investments, and who is obliged to pay which part of that. It is completely clear what is the right of the national Government, what is the right of the different governments of the regions, and what is the right of the mayor in a city, and who has to pay for it? Some things are financed completely, or 80%, by the state and so on, and if money is down, even as mayor it is a regional problem, because the state does not finance more. In that case, they must find additional financing. The state defined an additional financing line only for the KlimaTicket, which partly relieves the payment necessity for the regions and for the city of Vienna. This is the basis for decisions and for financing.

Baroness Thornhill: You talked about several instances of public protests, understandably. In your areas, who fronts the protests in the public eye and who promotes policy changes in the public eye? Where does that come from?

Dr Erich Forster: I think at the moment the national Government are designing the way on climate change. Most of the regions follow, based on the financing that is given by the state.

Pauline Cassette: Compared to Vienna, maybe we are more like a local decision process. The French Government have no impact on local authority decisions at the moment. There is no state direction, unfortunately.

Baroness Thornhill: That is fascinating. Thank you very much indeed.

Q98 **Baroness Cohen of Pimlico:** Somehow we let you go without asking about the tixiPASS. I would like to ask Dr Forster the same question that we asked him earlier. Did you find that it increased the number of people travelling when you introduced the tixiPASS? What effect has it had? Do you have any views on it?

Dr Erich Forster: There has been a big increase in annual cards in Vienna. In 2010, about 350,000 people had an annual card, and at the moment it is close to 1 million, so there has been a big increase, starting with the €365 card in 2012. From 2012, the development was exponential. Before that, there was a very flat curve.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: Are you finding the same with the tixiPASS? Has it made that sort of difference? Has it increased traffic and increased numbers of people travelling? Sorry, I am not getting through.

Dr Erich Forster: What do you mean by “with the tixiPASS”?

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: Is there a pass in Valenciennes called the tixiPASS?

Pauline Cassette: I am sorry, I am not aware of it.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: Oh, dear.

Pauline Cassette: Yes, that is slightly embarrassing.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: It says in our notes that it allows passengers to book and purchase tickets on the Transvilles network and that it can be used on 20 other networks in France. I assume it has a targeted pricing policy. It also offers concessions, no?

Pauline Cassette: I think we might call it the M-ticket now and not the tixiPASS. I am sorry, but I will have to get back to you.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: Yes, that would be very kind.

Pauline Cassette: I do not want to say anything wrong about that.

The Chair: That would be great. We are very interested in what makes people get on to public transport.

Q99 **Lord Best:** My question is about data. In this digital age, we now have access to mounds and mounds of data that we could not get our heads around before. First, are you using data? Do both of you have data analysts who are looking at the facts and figures and trying to get behind this to understand how this can lead policy?

Secondly, following on from Baroness Thornhill’s comments about local politicians, is the way to persuade the general public and the politicians—they go together—of the rightness of particular policy actions showing them the facts, the actual data that shows what makes a difference and what works?

Thirdly, what are the big things, if you are using data creatively, that that data has revealed for you that you did not have a grasp of before? How useful is data to you, and how much use are you making of it?

Dr Erich Forster: In Austria and Vienna, there is a very intensive analysis system for data. At the level of the Government, or the ministry for climate protection and traffic, there are very detailed traffic stream

analyses for all the regions of Austria. Data from all the regions, all the cities, is brought together so that you have a complete picture; you have prognosis systems and you very clearly have future targets for politicians.

On the one hand, politicians are supported by very good data. Every company delivers data. When WESTbahn entered the KlimaTicket system, although we are a private company we gave the Government all our data from the last 10 years—all the details and all the ticket use—on the one hand to help them develop a system to predict what the future impact of the KlimaTicket could be, and on the other hand to measure the real success story and the development of passenger rights.

My company has daily data, and at the moment we see that, during the week, nearly 50% of revenue is from KlimaTicket passengers on our trains. It is the same at ÖBB, with special accounting on public transport for cities, because there you have completely different measuring systems for data. It is very data-based, and the decisions to develop pricing, strategies and offer planning for the future are data-based.

Lord Best: Does that take the politics out of some of the decisions?

Dr Erich Forster: It helps them. It is the basis for making good decisions, because without data you have no basis for a decision.

Lord Best: Absolutely. Pauline, is it the same with you?

Pauline Cassette: Yes, it is the same for us. SIMOUV is the transport authority, but we are not operating the network. Network operation and maintenance are delegated to a private transport operator, which collects data on a number of things such as ticketing, trips and which lines are used more. Every year, we have a review on the most used lines, the most used stations, and as Dr Forster said it really helps politicians to make decisions if they want perhaps to change a line or move a station, or stuff like that.

I would just add that you can only rely on digital data. We have a number of freedom tickets for people under 25 years old. Sometimes they do not tap in when they come on to a bus, and we have parents at high school saying that the bus is full and children are not able to board, but we will not know that, because sometimes when you are not paying for the ticket you forget to tap in. Digital data is useful and we have to use that, but having material from other fields and people is also very useful.

Lord Best: It is the quality of stuff too, yes.

Q100 **Lord Moylan:** I have two areas to explore. The first is probably only for Dr Forster. Transport for London has moved heavily away from promoting our Oyster card, which is a dedicated Transport for London payment method, in favour of contactless payment using any credit card or debit card. The main reason for that is the reduced cost of collection, so money is saved as a result, which TfL can retain for its own transport purposes.

It seems to me that you have yourself trapped with your €365 card. Are

you moving towards contactless payment? Do you see any attraction in that, or are you trapped with your card because of its sort of sexy brand? You have trapped the price for the last 10 years despite the ravages of inflation, which are now being unleashed on all of us.

Dr Erich Forster: €365 for Vienna is surely not easy, because if you move away from that price you lose the idea of €1 per day for public transport. On the other hand, having a special card is one of the Viennese government's strong points. In the decision phase of the KlimaTicket it fought a lot to keep all Viennese customers' data. People have a lot of additional advantages with this Viennese annual card, and the city has a way of giving people information in order to be in contact with them, so I think that this special card and its data use is one of the Viennese government's strong points, although I am not from the Viennese government. I cannot say what the whole story is behind it. If you want that, you need to talk with a Viennese politician.

Lord Moylan: It has drawbacks for the visitor and tourist economy compared to contactless payment. I can see that it is very nice for people who live in Vienna, but Vienna is also—we hope again after Covid—a tourist city. It depends heavily on the hospitality sector for its income, so there are inconveniences there. Of course, as London does, you can have daily, monthly or annual caps on expenditure combined with contactless payment. You could still have an annual cap of €365 if you wanted, as long as people used the same contactless card every time.

Dr Erich Forster: But Vienna has a lot of tourist offers for city trips using the public transport system, so this is all additional to the annual card. The annual card is typically for Viennese people, and there are a lot of different and easily usable offers for tourists: one day, two days, four days, two weeks and so on.

Lord Moylan: If I were running the Viennese transport system—I used to be deputy chairman of TfL here in London—I would be trying to find a way of breaking away from the €365 cap financially, simply in order to try to get back some of my costs. I would be attracted to contactless because of the reduction in collection costs, but Vienna seems to rise above these considerations.

Dr Erich Forster: I think there was a phase, four or five years ago, where the management of Viennese Lines tried to increase the price of the €365 annual card. However, it was a clear decision by the government not to increase but to subsidise, and as the company is 100% owned by the city the management have very limited ability to go against the owner's decisions.

Lord Moylan: We will have to see how that withstands inflation at 6%, 7%, 8%, as it appears to be at the moment.

Dr Erich Forster: Yes, but on the other hand at the moment the Government have decided to support commuters and so on with an additional payment because of inflation. The Austrian way is very clearly

to keep public transport costs as low as possible and to subsidise people using public transport directly so that only a few commuters have to use a car for going to work.

Q101 **Lord Moylan:** My second question concerns the use of apps in the Vienna system for the purpose of information, tickets and so forth. Is there a Vienna city app on which you can do all your business, all your transactions—a transport app?

Dr Erich Forster: We have apps. We even have apps for the so-called VOR, the Verkehrsverbund for the eastern region, which covers Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland. As in London, there are big suburbs 80 to 100 kilometres around Vienna, and they are more or less integrated into one system. You have integrated tickets for that. You have an app. You have information systems and so on.

Lord Moylan: Are these official apps put out by the Verkehrsverbund, or are there private sector apps?

Dr Erich Forster: It is the official app of the traffic association of the eastern region.

Lord Moylan: Do you have private sector apps providing similar or competing information?

Dr Erich Forster: There are very few, and they are owned by the cities. There is wegfinder—wayfinder—but it is also owned by all the companies of the cities. To be honest, public transport in Austria is very much in the hands of the state and the regions.

Lord Moylan: So you have nothing like Citymapper that we have here, which is a private sector app. Do the eastern Austrian transport authorities make their data open source? Back in about 2014, maybe earlier, TfL made all its data open source, so any app developer can have access to its data for nothing, for free, which has generated a large number of private sector apps.

Dr Erich Forster: It is possible for Trainline to get all the data, all the prices and so on, for international traffic, but at the moment there is no private sector app that I know of.

The Chair: Perhaps I could just come in for clarification. You mentioned that there were no private apps, but we had evidence on something called Whim, which also operates in Vienna. Are you aware of that? It brings together all transport into one app, a MaaS—mobility as a service—app. What is your comment on that, Dr Forster?

Dr Erich Forster: I can look up Whim, but to be honest I do not know it.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: Going back to my earlier question, Pauline, I should perhaps have made it clear that the tixiPASS is an app, not something you run.

Pauline Cassette: Yes, I just checked it out and it is what we call the M-ticket. That is why I was confused; tixiPASS is the name of the app. Yes, there is the ticket and the app. It is clear. I do not have the data on breakdown by type of ticket on the app, but I can send it to you.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: That would be useful, but my original question was: do you think that the use of that app has increased the number of people travelling on SIMOUV?

Pauline Cassette: To be honest, I do not. I will have to check, but contactless and phone payments in our territory is not a trend at the moment. People rely on a paper ticket. Well, it is not a paper ticket anymore—it is like a card that you can reuse—but it is not a habit of people to use contactless payments or those kinds of apps. I will check.

Lord Moylan: Do you offer a contactless payment option?

Pauline Cassette: No, we do not. It is a card that you can reuse.

Lord Moylan: Is your transport authority's data made open source for developers?

Pauline Cassette: It is not. We have a GTFS that can be used by the private transport operator that is managing our network, but it is not open to the public.

Lord Moylan: No.

Q102 **Lord Berkeley:** Pauline said earlier—I think I recorded it right—that the central government in France has no role in financing local transport projects such as railway or metro schemes. If central government does not have a role, where is the money raised from? Is it from a regional council or more locally, and it is through local or fixed taxes? How is it raised?

Pauline Cassette: A small part comes from the Government, but it also comes from the regional council and the European levy, and most of it comes from local taxes. As I said previously, there is a transport levy on companies with more than 11 employees. That is the main source of revenue for transport networks in France.

Lord Berkeley: Central government has no role at all in deciding how much money you are able to spend on capital projects, for example.

Pauline Cassette: I guess it depends on the projects, but that is a tricky question.

Lord Berkeley: Thank you.

The Chair: Did you decide on the levy yourselves, or is there some national levy enablement that means that that employee levy is in other cities like yours as well?

Pauline Cassette: Yes, the transport levy can be adjusted depending on your territory. It is usually roughly 1% of the overall cost. You can raise it to 2% if you have a major transport scheme coming on. It depends on the decisions that politicians from the transport authority want to make.

The Chair: Thank you.

Q103 **The Earl of Lytton:** In this country we have a legacy of things growing up in different ways, not all of it public and controlled; some of it privatised. It may have become public and then been privatised on subsequent occasions. I think it would be fair to say that this has been a challenge to us in connectivity between the different modes.

Maybe you do not have that legacy to deal with, or you have it in different ways, but what have been your successes in getting real connectivity so that the passenger using your system has a seamless experience across the various different transport modes? What has worked well, and perhaps what has worked badly, and how have you tried to address those? Perhaps I could ask Pauline Cassette to start, because she has, as it were, the smaller and probably more difficult-to-manage empire to look after.

Pauline Cassette: In terms of connectivity, the main two modes used are trams and regional trains. We have a number of train stations in our territory. The main one is Valenciennes. Of course, it is the central Valenciennes station.

What is being done to improve connectivity is making sure that timetables for trams are in line with the arrivals and departures of regional trains. Also, you can now use regional trains within SIMOUV perimeters for the price of a single ticket or your monthly ticket. It is like the regional trains inside the perimeter that are part of our network. That is a contract between the regional council and SIMOUV, but it is also the case with other transport authorities in northern France and in France in general. It is the same between buses and trams. We try to adjust the timetable so that it is working well. Obviously it is easier between the trams and buses, because it is our network, than between the trams and the train stations. Sometimes you discover on the internet that the timetable for regional trains has changed and you were not aware of it, so that can be a bit of a problem.

Also, the train station near the University of Valenciennes in the south does not connect to the tram station, but it is not that far away, so we created an active mode route between the station and the university. There is also a park and ride carpark at the station. The problem is the timetable. The original council train offer diminished by 12 trains per day, so 12 trains do not stop at the station anymore. It is a shame, because we have invested so much in this part of the territory. At the moment, we are trying to have these trains stop again.

The Earl of Lytton: Is it difficult getting the authorities running the trains to rethink?

Pauline Cassette: It can be, because it is part of a very long train line from Lille to Valenciennes and further south. It does not go to Paris, but it is a long line, so just adding a stop there can be a problem further along the line. It will take time, but hopefully we will manage. Maybe we will not get all 12 trains back, but at least some of them.

The Earl of Lytton: Thank you. Dr Forster, have you had anything like that where you have paid money and there has been a sudden paradigm shift that altered the geometry of what you are doing?

Dr Erich Forster: With regard to connectivity for public transport, we have a basis in railway law with a priority rule for all traffic that is done in a systematic TAC system. As long as you run trains in a TAC system, which automatically means connecting in hubs, you have priority against all other traffic. For a private company like WESTbahn, we entered into a TAC system with dedicated hubs for the chance to have very short travel times, because in this case you have priority.

This also means that there is a connecting plan and a TAC system for all the regional traffic in Austria. Then you have buses in the surrounding areas and even in other parts of Austria connected to the train. Within the city and Vienna it is very clearly because of the short intervals that no special plan for connectivity is necessary, except in the way of information. You get key information and you have a lot of information system apps, where you can see how much time you have to change to a train if you are using transport like the underground in the city.

The basic plan is to have very good and close connectivity in the system and to have information systems for the customers so that they know when they enter an underground station, for example, how many minutes or seconds they have before the next train arrives so that they are clear: "Now I have to rush", or, "I can go slowly".

The Earl of Lytton: Is that system robust if you have what all transport authorities fear, like a breakdown of a train or a tram? Does that respond rapidly to tell people that they need to take another route?

Dr Erich Forster: You have real-time information that is integrated with the information system, so you see if there is a delay or a special problem, and if you are on this train you get information on alternatives and what time you will lose because of this problem. It does not always work perfectly. That is very clear. You have some situations where even the best information systems fail because the breakdown takes longer than originally planned and so on. However, there is a basic system for giving passengers the best information possible. As I say, it is not perfect, but it is quite reliable.

Lord Haselhurst: Just on a small point, where you have a MaaS transport system, have you been able to measure any benefit that is derived from discounted ticketing systems to go with it—let alone, as in the case of Vienna, discounts on the museum and, for all I know, the State Opera House—that the frequent traveller will obtain as a result and

whether there will be an overall beneficial effect on your revenues?

Dr Erich Forster: Vienna has no real economic benefits from the additional services or attractions that they give to the customer. It is only an idea to bind them, not to lose them, in case they are not travelling as often as needed so that the annual card is worse for them. I think it is more or less about customer relationships.

Lord Haselhurst: Thank you very much.

Q104 **Lord Grocott:** To each of our two witnesses, many thanks for your evidence. Are you able to give us an overview as to the level of public satisfaction with urban transport in your two areas? I think it is fair to say that in Britain, although some of my colleagues may not agree with this, there are quite high levels of dissatisfaction at a range of levels with urban transport in this country—with fares, congestion, commuting times, overcrowded trains and sundry other things that I could mention.

Can you say in general terms for your two systems whether travel in the city/town is not a particularly controversial issue and whether people are broadly satisfied and happy with what they have?

Pauline Cassette: I can only give you the figures. Our transport operator conducts surveys of transport users every year, and last year 94% of people answering the survey said they were happy with the transport network. I think that is quite a high percentage. Of course, there are always people who have issues with some of our services. They can raise queries through our website and we try to answer them within three weeks. It can be quite a long process, but we always try to respond to people when they have an issue with the network. I think it is important to answer when people are not happy with the service.

Dr Erich Forster: There is a special survey every year by the so-called Austria travel club for all modes of public transport, which shows very high satisfaction among customers. Additionally, the different railway or city companies do surveys about the satisfaction of customers. In general, customer satisfaction is very high. People know that it is a highly subsidised system. That it is far away from any cost coverage, and people like it because the quality is very high. We have very few breakdowns or problems.

If there is a problem once in a week on one of the metro lines, it is reported in the newspapers because it is such a sensation because it happens so rarely. This means that people know there is a lot of investment. A lot of taxpayer money is put into the system, but it works well. It helps them to have good quality and very short travel times if they are going by public transport mode, and it is accepted. It is even more accepted now that the climate discussion has entered this very intensive phase with the common strategy to reduce CO₂. I think people have no problem, while knowing that it is very costly.

The Chair: Thank you. That is a very good and positive note on which to end and my question fits in very well. I was interested in the cost-benefit

ratio of your two systems relative to the quite high investment in terms of subsidy that you have had to put in. Customer satisfaction is obviously very important, as is quality, which you have just mentioned. The safety of passengers and helping the disabled and so on are also important issues, as are other costs and benefits. You may be able to follow up. If you have any information on those sorts of costs and benefits, we would be very interested to have it, because it would help us in looking at the UK and what we might do, particularly in the levelling-up areas in the north of England.

Pauline, you mentioned that there was a regeneration element that looks like a benefit to help to justify the cost. I will not delay you now, but if you were to think about that final question, perhaps we could be in touch through the clerk to make sure that we have enumerated properly the benefits of your system, because you have understood that it is costly and you both think it is worth while, which is very interesting.

That concludes matters. Thank you so much for giving us so much of your time and your brilliant English. It was fantastic.