

Danish Debates Re-Magnetize Germans

by Rainer Apel

The massive, daily public discussion and media coverage on development of magnetically levitated (maglev) trains in Denmark, sparked by the April 12 testimony of the Danish Schiller Institute to the national parliament (see *EIR*, April 20), has spilled over into Germany. There has been a standstill of public interest in the maglev in Germany, since the horrible accident on Sept. 22, 2006, in which a Transrapid maglev test train crashed into a maintenance unit that was blocking the test track at Lathen, killing 23 technicians. Adversaries of the technology, including the Greens, rejoiced in the incident, as allegedly proving that “the system is unsafe.” The fact that the same system has been running safely, on the first-ever commercial maglev route in Shanghai, China, since 2003, was naturally left unmentioned.

It just happened, however, that April 24 was the date for the publishing of the investigation report on that 2006 accident, and the Federal Railway Supervisory Board (Eisenbahnbundesamt) experts found that no technical failure of the Transrapid was to blame. Which implies that the ban on maglev testing which has been in place since last September, can be lifted now.

Already before that report was published, the news from Denmark had reawakened interest in the system in Germany, with a prominent news item on the website of the generally pro-greenie Hamburg-based *Stern* weekly. Under the headline, “In 25 Minutes From Copenhagen to Aarhus,” it reported on the parliamentary hearing in Copenhagen and also gave a link to the website of the German-language weekly of the LaRouche movement, *Neue Solidarität*. The author of the *Stern* article added that, “the LaRouche campaigns are usually not paid much attention to in the media, although they address some very interesting themes. Regrettably, since they could be a big source for controversies in politics.”

The arrival of the first prototype of the new TR 09 model of the Transrapid system at the testing site at Lathen on April 19 was meanwhile eagerly awaited. The news on the TR 09 was covered throughout Germany, and *Stern* had a photo spread on the transfer of the maglev from the production site of Thyssen-Krupp in Kassel to Lathen.

As the TR 09 arrived there, news wires announced the existence of an expert report compiled recently for the Transport Ministry of Germany, forecasting a cost-benefit ratio of



Transrapid

A maglev demonstration train at the Transrapid facility in Germany. Now the company is producing the first prototype of a new model, the TR 09. The Danish enthusiasm for maglev is shaking up Germany's stalled effort.

2.5 for a new maglev project—like the one that is still in the planning from Munich to the Munich Airport. For Munich alone, this translates into a net benefit of 2.9 billion euros. On top of direct employment and production effects of the construction of a maglev track, the report sees a broader “industrial policy benefit,” involving domestic investments as well as export options.

International Ramifications

As for the export options, to which hints about discussions on a potential maglev route between Tehran and Mashhad, Iran, were added, the website of Transrapid International, the export marketing consortium of Germany's maglev producers, listed ongoing talks between Germany and both Abu Dhabi and Qatar since the Spring of 2005, for projects of several hundred kilometers each, especially a coastline route from Abu Dhabi to Qatar, with connections to the airports of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. In Western Europe, there are talks ongoing on the Netherlands' Randstad Rapid project, with a feasibility study commissioned by the Dutch Transport Ministry. This 230-kilometer circle line would connect the major cities of the nation—Utrecht, Rotterdam, The Hague, Schiphol (Amsterdam) Airport, Amsterdam, Almere, and Amersfoort. Also in Western Europe, an 800-kilometer Glasgow-London line is under discussion; no feasibility study has been done yet, but strong lobbying is under way, for example by the Association of Scottish Regional Councils. A British Transport Ministry review is scheduled for May. This route would connect Edinburgh plus its airport,

Newcastle, Manchester, with a branch to Liverpool, Birmingham, and London's Heathrow Airport.

Not least because of the regional parliamentary elections on May 3, an intense debate on maglev routes has erupted in Scotland, where the city councils of Edinburgh and Glasgow on April 21 passed a resolution calling on the British Transport Ministry to build maglev routes, and the councillors even offered to contribute to feasibility studies for the projects. This development in Scotland is important for Germans, because even if they have the stereotyped image of the Scots as turning every single penny ten times before spending it, the news that the Scots think they can afford the maglev train, teaches the Germans a lesson.

In Central and Eastern Europe, preliminary feasibility studies were

carried out by the European Union Commission, already at the end of the 1990s, on four potential major routes: 1) Berlin-Warsaw-Minsk-Moscow, over a distance of 1,850 kilometers; 2) Berlin-Wroclaw-Katovice-Kracow, with a potential extension to Kiev (Ukraine), an entire distance of 1,500 kilometers; 3) Berlin-Dresden-Prague-Vienna-Bratislava-Budapest, with a potential extension to Thessaloniki, an entire distance of 2,000 kilometers; and 4) Berlin-Dresden-Prague-Bratislava-Budapest, over a distance of 950 kilometers.

The next step in Germany would have to be the revitalization of the project for a maglev connection between the country's two biggest cities, Hamburg (1.8 million inhabitants) and Berlin (3.4 million). Designed in the wake of German reunification in 1990, the project not only met fierce resistance by ecologists, but ran into enormous bureaucratic obstacles over funding. The budget-balancing German government made the grave mistake of imposing a public-private partnership model on the project, which led to an endless back and forth, and indecision among government, industry, and banks; meanwhile, the expenses for the project increased significantly. By 1998, an extra 1 billion deutschemarks was required, bringing the total cost of the project to DM 10 billion, with none of the three partners, the banks the least, willing to provide that money. Then the newly elected Socialist-Green government of Germany buried the entire project in early 1999. In the new constellation of April 2007, a revived maglev project Berlin-Hamburg would be the most natural extension of the Danish project.