

Deutsche Bahn plans further major cutbacks and redundancies

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In September, the CEO of Deutsche Bahn (DB) Richard Lutz presented a new “General Renovation Programme” to the company’s supervisory board. The intention of the so-called S3 programme is to restore the fortunes of the ailing German rail system within three years in three different areas: infrastructure, rail operations and economic efficiency.

The details of the 110-page plan remain unknown and have only been made available to selected media editorial offices. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* comments that the latest plan is “neither new nor realistic.” Lutz made the same promises five years ago for 2024, but failed to keep them.

The third goal is evidently at the centre of the plan: i.e. profitability. By 2027, the railway is to return to profitability and generate an operating profit of €2 billion. To achieve this end, further cuts are to be made, more outsourcing will take place and even more pressure put on employees.

In the spring of this year, Lutz, (annual income €2.2 million) announced the first measure to be implemented, namely the loss of 30,000 jobs. Now his new restructuring programme explicitly confirms that 10,000 to 15,000 full-time positions are to be cut by 2027, with more than 15,000 jobs to go in the following years.

This alone makes clear that the new restructuring plan will intensify attacks on the workforce. Management is acting in the interest of the German government—the sole owner of Deutsche Bahn AG. In order to comply with the government’s debt brake and finance its rearmament and war plans, the government is tightening the screw on all spheres of social infrastructure. To this end the two main rail unions, the EVG and GDL, fully support the cuts at Deutsche Bahn.

The Rail Action Committee in Germany has warned that the cutbacks will further increase work pressure, ruin the health of employees and increase the risk of catastrophic accidents for employees and passengers. Even prior to the

planned cuts, serious, life-threatening and fatal occupational accidents have taken place on the railways.

In an interview with the *FAZ* newspaper on September 20, Lutz explained that the backlog of maintenance work now amounts to more than €90 billion. He said that “around 80 percent of this unpunctuality can be attributed to the state of the infrastructure.” In this situation, the new S3 programme, which is supposed to provide the basis for the renovation of large sections of track, bridges, junctions and signal boxes, is at best a drop in the ocean. Transport Minister Volker Wissing (Free Democratic Party, FDP) has promised a mere €27 billion for the renovation between now and 2031.

Deutsche Bahn faces enormous problems: more than 200 signal boxes are in disrepair, according to the rail union EVG. Forty-one busy railway lines are in urgent need of renovations. In an interview with the *FAZ*, Lutz admitted that “the capacity utilisation on highly used lines and junctions is sometimes more than 125 percent: With unplanned construction sites, we quickly reach critical levels.” That is why “traffic jams and congestion are a constant occurrence.”

Some of the measures envisaged in the plan are simply stopgaps to circumvent acute problems that have been accumulating for years. According to RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland (RND), the S3 programme envisages withdrawing more long-distance trains from overloaded main stations in Frankfurt/Main and Berlin and having them start and end at Frankfurt Airport or at the local Berlin station Gesundbrunnen.

One controversial cost-cutting measure is already partially in place on trains: in addition to the driver, there is to be only one attendant for over 900 passengers in a high speed, 400-metre-long ICE train.

Other measures planned are simply counterproductive. In order to comply with the debt brake, the government and DB are sticking to the decision to sell the DB

subsidiary Schenker to the Danish logistics company DSV. The sale means that new job cuts are inevitable. Despite DSV's promise to respect existing employment contracts for two years, a programme to cut around 1,000 jobs at Schenker has already been launched. So far, the freight forwarding company employs 15,000 people in Germany and more than 70,000 worldwide.

The plans for DB Cargo transport, based on recommendations by the Roland Berger management consultancy, also amount to a devastating cutback.

The monthly €49 ticket (Deutschlandticket), which was originally available for €9, will cost €58 in future. Not only is the ticket constantly becoming more expensive and thus excluding those in need; it is also no longer available as a plastic chip card, thereby excluding anyone who does not have an e-ticket-compatible mobile phone. It is another example of how the DB management and the government are dismantling popular measures aimed at encouraging environmentally friendly means of transport.

As far as digitalisation at Deutsche Bahn is concerned, the management plans are simply risible. On September 6, the SWR media outlet reported on an internal paper, according to which Deutsche Bahn plans to save money by refraining from equipping digital signal box technology by 2028. The only exception is the new Stuttgart station, which will have digital technology.

The internal DB paper states that the "faulty old signal boxes" will initially be equipped with conventional and therefore "quickly available" technology from the 1990s. This means that trains passing through Stuttgart will have to be equipped with both digital and analogue technology in future.

Such a decision underlines the narrow-minded, nationalist approach of the DB management and the German government. Stuttgart is already integrated into the European Train Control System (ETCS). This system is intended to coordinate more than 20 different train systems in Europe as a standardised Europe-wide train control system. Two years ago, Deutsche Bahn management hired a special digitisation officer with ETCS in mind. Now, however, the Deutsche Bahn wants to do without ETCS for all areas except Stuttgart and has apparently recently dismissed its digitisation officer.

In a recent mocking commentary on the Deutsche Bahn, the *FAZ* asked: "Can the traffic gridlock still be averted?" The frustration has "reached historic proportions" and will "continue to grow due to cuts in funding, which are hardly reducing congestion." The newspaper, which advocates staff cutbacks, points out the contradiction that

Deutsche Bahn is cutting staff in the name of digitalisation, while at the same time refraining from providing any new modern technology.

The management plan highlights the major dangers facing train drivers, rail workers and other employees: every possible advance is being reversed. Modern technology, which would actually make it possible to ease heavy and dangerous work processes, reduce long working hours and make the railway profession attractive once again, is being cynically abused to worsen conditions for employees and customers.

Tens of thousands of railway workers, train drivers and other rail employees are prepared to take up the fight against the attacks on wages and working conditions. In France, a rail strike on Tuesday demonstrated this fundamental willingness to fight. Rail workers, however, not only confront the railway management and government, but also their servants in the trade unions: in Germany in the form of the EVG and GDL, which have made all the attacks of recent years possible in the first place.

That is why railway workers have to take matters into their own hands. Independent action committees are needed to break the grip of the union and network internationally to defend wages and conditions. Anyone interested in a functioning railway system is obliged to support rail workers!

We call on all rail workers and all those who want to participate in the building of independent action committees to send us reports on conditions in their area and to contact us: Get in touch via Whatsapp at +49-163-337 8340 or register using the form below.



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