

Stockholm, October 12, 2023

Subject: BT4Europe participation at the EU Commission Headquarters On Multimodal Digital Mobility Services (MDMS)

I recently had the privilege of representing BT4Europe and the Swedish Business Travel Association (SBTA) during a visit to the EU Commission Headquarters in Brussels. The purpose of our visit was to advocate for the advancement of Multimodal Digital Mobility Services (MDMS) within the European travel industry and foster collaboration with key stakeholders.

Upon arrival in Brussels on the red eye flight from Stockholm, I was greeted by the warm and sunny weather of the European capital. I was excited to the visit to the EU Commission Headquarters, a first time experience for me.

In the lovely company many colleagues from business travel associations from around Europe, we attended the opening speech delivered by Jan Christoph Oetjen from Renew Europe (Germany) and EU Commissioner Daniel Mes, who oversees the European Green Deal framework. Unfortunately, the initial sentiment was less optimistic, as there was mention of a high risk that MDMS might not be a priority for the EU Commission in 2024.

The day's proceedings included two insightful panel discussions, which were adeptly moderated by Sean Goulding Carroll, Euractiv's Transport Editor.

The first panel addressed the obstacles hindering the progression of MDMS, with esteemed panelists from various sectors, including David Frangeul from Advito and a GBTA member, Bon Bakermans from the Dutch Infrastructure Ministry, Robin Loos, a Sustainable Transportation officer, and Christian Möller from the European Travel Agents' and Tour Operators' Association (ECTAA).

The discussion emphasized familiar themes such as modern travel booking trends, the role of intermediary travel agencies, ensuring the best offers for multimodal transportation, enhancing market transparency, and providing stronger legal frameworks to protect consumers.

Notably, Bon Bakermans highlighted that technology is already in place to connect suppliers and transportation companies, facilitating the creation of comprehensive travel offers. However, a key challenge lies in the willingness of major European transportation suppliers, especially train companies, to participate.

In my personal opinion very little was shared that we did not know already, or have been highlighting in our position papers. We know, there are travel resellers packaging multimodal services already today, However, there are no legislations or frameworks to protect the consumer. This is more of a dilemma for leisure travelers, rather than business travelers.

The second panel explored potential game changers for MDMS, with panelists including Delphine Gradsaert from the European Passengers' Federation, Emmanuel Mounier from EU Travel Tech, Victor Thévenet from Transport & Environment, and Laura Lassila from the Finnish Transport Ministry. The discussion concluded that MDMS holds the potential to offer sustainable alternatives across European travel markets. It was noted that the solution extends beyond trains, as the source of electricity for train travel in some regions, such as Germany, relies heavily on the coal industry, counteracting efforts to reduce CO2 emissions.

Dilemmas surfaced during the discussion, particularly concerning consumer protection, local market developments, and fair competition. Laura Lassila highlighted that collaboration between different modes of transport is commendable in Finland, but there is a lack of legislation to protect consumers across the entire journey.

The issue of commercial and legal complexities was further underlined, as exemplified by the varying load capacities of Dutch and Deutsche Bahn trains and their differing stances on engaging in MDMS.

I also had the pleasure of a personal meeting with Mr. Jakop Dalunde from the Green Party of Sweden. His counsel to BT4Europe was to exert pressure on European train companies to foster cooperation, collaboration, and commercial agreements across all markets, working on consumer legislation in tandem with airlines and bus companies.

However, despite extensive discussions, the path forward for MDMS implementation remains unclear. While MDMS holds the potential to simplify ticket purchasing and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, there are concerns that some rail companies might increase ticket prices.

In conclusion, I share the sentiment that MDMS is a promising concept for the EU, yet its realization is hindered by political indecision and commercial interests. If MDMS can contribute to our sustainability goals, it is imperative to overcome these challenges and make it a reality.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Fredrik Hermelin

General Manager

Swedish Business Travel Association (SBTA)