

PRESS RELEASE

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SLOVAKIA: Yet another suspicious competitive tender where only the state rail incumbent ZSSK is able to bid - using rolling stock paid for by EU & national taxpayers

Since 2010, the passenger rail service between Bratislava, Dunajská Streda and Komárno has been the only public service obligation ('PSO') in Slovakia carried out by an operator that is not the state-owned rail incumbent ZSSK.

The independent rail operator RegioJet has been providing PSO rail services on this line for the past 10 years. Last summer, RegioJet even bought additional coaches to deal with the passenger growth¹, a move that has brought about further modal shift to rail – completely in line with the EU Green Deal.

Then, on 10th October 2019, the Slovakian Transport Ministry announced a new competitive tender procedure for the provision of rail transport services on this route for a follow-up period of an additional 10 years from 2021 until 2030.

Meanwhile, between 2007 and 2013, state incumbent ZSSK got hold of 12 motor units for interregional transport and also 10 double deck “push – pull” sets for suburban transport under a EU Commission Operational Programme², co-funded predominantly from subsidies granted by Slovakia and the European Regional Development Fund.

It is now very suspicious that the terms of the new competitive tender for Bratislava-Komárno can only be fulfilled by this taxpayer funded rolling stock that is solely in the possession of ZSSK. If only state-owned incumbents can benefit from the public resources – based on their historical role – this renders taxpayer subsidy capable of causing a lot of damage to any new competition.

ALLRAIL Secretary General Nick Brooks sums up: “this is the 2nd recent competitive tender by the Slovakian Ministry that has only had the pretence of opening the market. The other one was annulled last month because only one bidder was left over – ZSSK”.

This whole issue shows the shocking lack of level playing field between privately owned operators and state rail incumbents when it comes to rolling stock availability. Brooks continues: “if incumbents bid with rolling stock that is financed from public resources, then it should be made available to any winner of that competitive tender”.

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¹ <https://www.railwaygazette.com/traction-and-rolling-stock/regiojet-buys-double-deck-coaches-to-cope-with-ridership-growth/54240.article>

² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2007-2013/slovakia/operational-programme-transport-6