HackerTrain – the first real (and distributed) train trip from N places on M routes to Brussels

"train delays are just bonding opportunities"

HackerTrain community (slides by Matija Šuklje)

2026-01-31

FOSDEM 2026

what is the HackerTrain

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train ... with hackers on it (and plushies)

10k-ish hackers @ FOSDEM

many from Europe

many going by train

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… let's meet and hack on those trains!

goals

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short-term goals

ecological and comfortable(ish) travel

meet other hackers along the way

goals

long-term goals

get more people on the train

more financially affordable

more convenient and easier

omega plan: book a custom train line

preparations for HackerTrain 2026

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infrastructure = enabled

www: https://hackertrain.org/

org & tasks: https://codeberg.org/HackerTrain

communication (bridged):

- IRC: ircs://irc.libera.chat/#hackertrain
- Matrix: #hackertrain:kompot.si
- (XMMP: as soon as enough interest pops up)

how does infrastructure fit the need?

it worked (surprisingly) well (enough), considering:

- distributed system (cca. 20 routes)
- 80+ people
- the IRL disaster

the trip itself

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baseline

things happened

- Belgian railway strike
- technical issues
- weather
- miscelaneous

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"our Train is not compatible with Belgian electricity"

rail replacement *trains* from Luxembourg to the rescue

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[1] terminus technicus

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- technical issues
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"our Train is not compatible with Belgian electricity"

rail replacement *trains* from Luxembourg to the rescue

i.e. clusterfuck[1]

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[1]terminus technicus

the trip itself

report from routes

12 train routes to Brussels

4 return routes + 2 exciting routes to elsewhere (peafowl & nightingale)

2 meet-ups at Brussels

summary from the routes

in ascending order of "excitement"

- hedgehog: no issues
- "shaddow" route: no issues
- pidgeon route: no issues, but was alone

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- seal route: 3h delay
- boar and hippo route: 3h delay, technical issues, fire alarm during the night

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- diplodocus route: technical issues, 3h waiting for a bus, train reversed to München due to a knife stabbing on the tracks, didn't get the ticket back

what did we "hack" on the trains

Matrix

malware detection

unconference

lots of discussions and planning

our chat suddenly became a help-line for the 80+ people in it plus all the dozens of people around them

suggestions for the future

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for organisers

how to make the HackerTrain better

start planning (some) groups sooner

simplify group bookings with more operators (help!)

improve map (e.g add stations)

integrate map with ticket system – so people's stations show on both and you can see on the map which route/ticket passes through

use codeberg to track train (and other) issues too, not just for organising

train travel beginner tutorial on the website

try to subsidise the trip (at least for "starving hackers") – sponsors would be nice

maybe expand to other conferences (volunteers welcome!)

suggestions for the future

for railways

ÖBB needs to fix their SMS notification
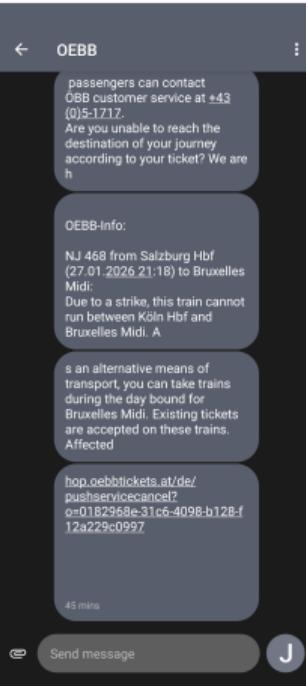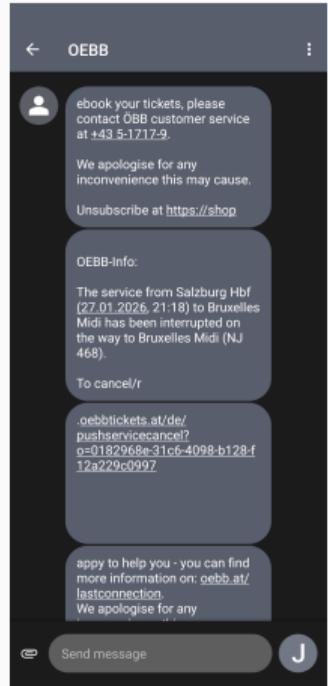
specifics: DB

*"but bahn.de keeps calling me a
bot so I can't actually check"*

– neobrain

"but bahn.de keeps calling me a bot so I can't actually check"

– neobrain

diplodocus route did not get their tickets back!
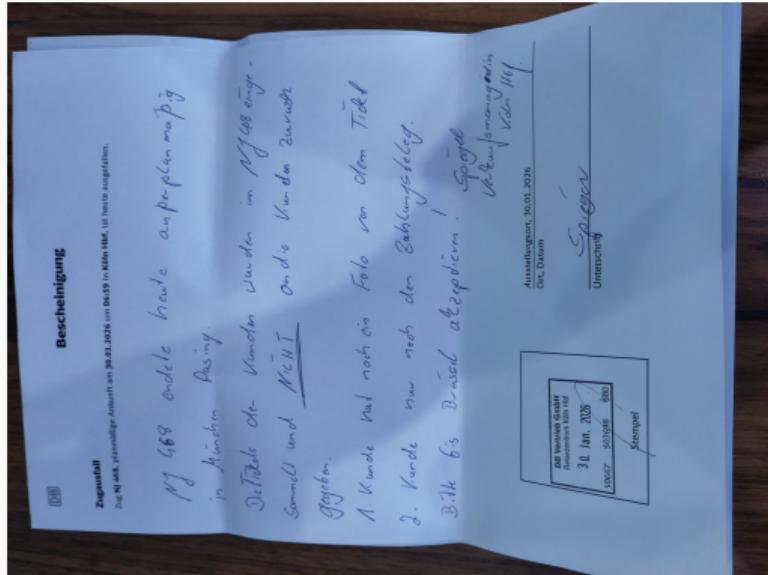
make sure that the referral / booking link works throughout

cancellations or changes require a phone or an in-person visit to a train station

if booking from abroad $=$ big headache

generic wishlist

make cross-border booking easier

make cross-provider booking easier

make group booking easier

(make booking in general easier)

December schedule change is a pain

delays are a pain (for some railways) & better communication is needed

better prices (for some railways)

future plans?

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yes, this is fun (and useful)

expanding

you can use the same infrastructure for train travel to (and from) **other events** already

if anyone wants to use it for **other continents** – let's talk, so we can optimise a version for that use case together

Figure 1: HackerTrain homepage: https://hackertrain.org