

# Správa železnic

CARETAKER OF THE  
CZECH REPUBLIC'S  
PROUD RAILWAY LEGACY





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RESEARCH BY *Joseph Philips*



As a landlocked country in the centre of Europe, the Czech Republic has long looked to rail as a means of trade with its neighbours. During the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the country - then known as Bohemia - was responsible for developing first public horse-drawn railway in continental Europe (being built during 1827 - 1832), running gradually between České Budějovice in the southern Bohemia and Linz in Austria. Just a few years later, the construction and operation of a

steam-engine locomotive railway started in the line sections Vienna - Břeclav and Břeclav - Brno in 1839.

Although the Austro-Hungarian Empire is now just a memory, the country's railway lines have gone from strength to strength in the near two centuries since the first line appeared. These days, the maintenance, development and modernisation of the railway lines in the Czech Republic is the responsibility of Správa železnic. Business Excellence recently had the pleasure

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#### **Overview**

As the introduction mentioned, the Czech Republic had a head start on other countries where railway development is concerned and this is reflected in the scale of its current stock. As Mr. Jiří Svoboda says: “The railway network in the Czech Republic is one of the densest in the world; In terms of numbers, there are

9,400 kilometres of lines, 6,700 bridges, 2,500 railway stations and 166 tunnels.”

With some relatively rare exceptions, Správa železnic has sole responsibility for the maintenance and development of this infrastructure. Mr. Svoboda says: “we are responsible for the operation of the railway infrastructure, ensuring its development and modernisation, as well as its maintenance and repairs. In addition, we allocate the railway infrastructure capacity to carriers and manage buildings at railway stations and stops.”

**Investments and Financing**

Naturally, all of this involves ongoing coordinated investment. The organisation has a series of such investments running concurrently. Of these, Mr. Svoboda is keen to acknowledge the modernisation of several line sections in the arm of the fourth transit corridor from Prague to the south of Bohemia to České Budějovice and towards Linz in Austria (once again). This includes work, which includes long line relocations, which will enable the company to significantly increase the line speeds.

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Of this, Mr. Svoboda says: “Contrary to the existing single track lines, trains will be able to use the modern double track railway. We are also building the first four-track line on the Czech railway network on the same branch, as part of the modernisation of the metropolitan corridor between the Praha-Vršovice and Praha-Hostivař stations. Trains will start serving the completely new Praha-Eden stop there already in December 2020.”

None of this comes cheap. One project alone, the rejuvenation of the main railway station in Pardubice, will cost 6 billion crowns. But this is where Správa železnic pedigree in project delivery gives it an edge; as Mr. Svoboda tells us: “We are also starting to implement the first projects co-financed by CEF Blending, which combines funding from

**Did you know?**

Správa železnic has already secured the financing for construction of another 100km of railway line.

the EU’s Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and a credit provided by the European Investment Bank (EIB).”

This will open up a whole new range of options for the company. It is already using some of the financing for the modernisation of eight sections of the main railway corridors and more will follow. EU funding is also designed to encourage cross-border cooperation between railway systems. As Mr. Svoboda puts it: “Particularly gratifying is that we have already ensured the financing of constructions, thanks to which we can start the reconstruction of another more than 100 railway line kilometres.”

**Covid-19**

Although Europe’s airlines ground to a halt during the Covid-19 pandemic that swept the continent, the same cannot be said of



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its railway infrastructure. As Mr. Svoboda explains, rather than bring everything to a standstill, Správa železnic set out to inform its customers and create a set of procedures for them to follow to ensure their own safety and the safety of their fellow passengers.

He tells Business Excellence: “We coordinated the whole process within the sector of the Ministry of Transport; That was the reason for the distribution of leaflets with information from the Ministry of Health in Czech and English on what passengers should do if they return from risk areas and show typical symptoms of Covid-19 disease,

at stations where international trains stop, already on March 4.”

He continues: “We have started to use the electronic departure boards for notifications of the current situation. We have also increased the intensity of cleaning of station buildings in publicly accessible areas at all important stations almost immediately; of course, we pay great attention to the hygienic facilities in the stations. As another precaution, we started installing disinfection stands. And of course, we prioritized the safety of our own staff, providing them with the necessary protective and disinfectant equipment,”



And the future? Has the pandemic changed anything permanently within the organisation? He says: “The best way to deal with the consequences of a coronavirus pandemic is to invest in the future through investments in transport infrastructure. We are managing a record sum this year, and it is set to increase again next year. We should spend more than 30 billion crowns on investments in 2021.”

### The Future: To Czech Borders and Beyond

As a central member of the European Union, the Czech Republic’s railways are an important link between east and west and north and south. In this vein, Mr. Svoboda mentions ongoing project cooperation with German partners on a cross-border connection between Prague and Dresden (which includes a 26-kilometre cross-border tunnel under the Ore Mountains) and a partnership with France’s SNCF, which will help it with its planned high-speed lines (Svoboda says: “I believe that we will master it with French know-how.”)

The high-speed lines and international connections are emblematic of a company, which is keen to keep pace. Mr. Svoboda says: “Although we are a state organisation, we want to be a modern company that is not only a good manager of railway infrastructure, but also ensures its constant development, which allows us to increase the quality of railway transport in the Czech Republic. We closely follow modern trends and actively use them ourselves as well.” It’s a long way from horse-drawn rail in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. **BE**

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