Long-Distance Traffic Routes to and from Berlin

Concepts of Division and Duplication; Concepts of Unification

Rutz, W., Prof. Dr., Ruhr-Universität, Geogr. Inst. POB 102148, 4630 Bochum, Germany

ABSTRACT: After the reunification of Germany on October, 3rd. 1990 Berlin became a unified city again. Most of the ambitious plans of the pre-war time concerning the urban infrastructure could not be taken up again after forty years of division. The article describes the long-distance traffic system in the former capital of the Reich, the division and duplication of the transportation facilities in the decades of division and gives an overview of concepts of reconstruction and new plans for the reunited Berlin and its hinterland.

Introduction

From the 12th to the 14th of April 1991, the Geographical Society of Berlin held a conference on the topic “BERLIN: Divided City Double City United City.” The following lecture was the present author’s contribution to this conference. When presenting a paper to this conference, I had two reasons. The first is my feeling of helpless rage over the humiliations and injuries inflicted upon this city and its people particularly in 1945, 1952, 1961, and in all the years thereafter. The second is the spatial understanding of the location and structure of Berlin which I almost unconsciously developed at a very early age, and which led me to become a geographer.

I proceeded from the assumption that the venerable Geographical Society of Berlin, which I joined forty long years ago as a student from the East, wished to use this conference in order to show the general public the spatial structures and functions of the city as the capital of Prussia and as the later imperial capital before its decline, the ruptures in its organisation and operations due to its division into sectors and the subsequent strict division into two separate halves and to the political collapse of the Reich, ruptures whose effects can still be seen today, and, finally, to indicate the new perspectives that opened up in the late autumn of 1989.

As a part of a general survey of the areas affected by the division, areas such as the settlement pattern, the central functions, the industrial structure, the spatial patterns of supply and disposal, and finally, the transportation links to the outside world and the web of routes within the metropolitan area, I should like to give a brief presentation of the long-distance traffic links of the imperial capital and of the city during its forty-year period of division. In conclusion, I shall have the pleasure of indicating some of the prospects offered by new and reconstructed systems which will serve the reunited Berlin in the future.

Let me begin with the division of Berlin and the cordonning off of the western sectors. I must note that I have always found expressions such as “the cordonning off of Berlin” and “Berlin-Capital of the GDR*” equally painful. In both cases reference was being made only to parts of Berlin, and I am bound to say that it is a sign either of slovenliness or opportunism that such distorted concepts were taken up on both sides, even in academic circles. This was detrimental to the city and to the Berliners on both sides of the wall. At any rate, the cordonning off of the western sectors affected the three branches of road, rail and air transportation to varying spatial degrees; I cannot

* GDR = German Democratic Republic = Soviet-controlled eastern part of Germany (1949–1990)
deal with inland water traffic for lack of time. Rail traffic suffered the most profound changes, with significant spatial consequences; air traffic was no less affected by the division, but the spatial consequences were somewhat less widely felt; the diversion of road traffic resulted in effects which were primarily local in nature.

**Long-Distance Traffic Systems in the Pre-War Capital Berlin**

What were the defining characteristics of the metropolitan area of Berlin with regard to long-distance traffic in the period before the war? Let us begin with the railways: By 1866 there were five terminal train stations, later increased to eight. After 1879, eleven main lines approached Berlin and terminated at these stations, all of which lay on the periphery of the city center. From 1851 on, there was a track for freight trains at street level which connected the terminals, and in 1871 this track was replaced by a new connecting line which was completed in 1877 to become the Berlin “ring railway.” In 1882 a city through line, the so-called “Stadtbahn,” began operations as a line from east to west. This, along with the other five terminal train stations, provided for long-distance transportation (Fig 1).

This structure remained essentially the same until the middle of the present century. The last train schedule issued before the war shows 170 long-distance trains leaving Berlin, of which more than 50 used the Stadtbahn tracks (in both directions), and the same number departing from the Anhalt Station. About 30 departed from the Stettin Station, just about 20 from the Lehrte Station, 15 from the Potsdam Station, and 5 from the Görlitz Station.

It was primarily the operational problems of the terminal stations, along with considerations related to urban building plans, that led shortly after 1900 to proposals to construct a second south-north through-line (Fig 2).

---

**Fig 1** “Expansion of Berlin rail network II, 1882” in: Berlin und seine Eisenbahnen 1846-1896, ed. in commission of the Royal Prussian Ministry of Public Works, 1. vol., ill. 8 (after p. 136), Bild 1882, Berlin 1896 (and reprint 1982).