

How Poles built Austrian railways

History of railways

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One of the most beautiful railway stations of that time was located in the territory under Austrian rule. This is where, apart from industrial purposes, railway connections were used for the purposes of ...tourism. The first railway connection in Austria, Floridsdorf-Wagram, was put into service in 1837 by the Emperor Ferdinand Northern Railway (KFNB).

Kraków striving for railways

Later, the company was granted a licence to build a railway line from Vienna to Bochnia, where salt mines were located, with branch lines to Brno, Olomouc, Opawa, Dwory and Wieliczka. When the Upper Silesian Railway was making attempts at establishing a connection with the Emperor Ferdinand Northern Railway, excluding Kraków, to prevent this, the Kraków-Upper Silesia Railway Company was established on the initiative of the senate of the Free City of Kraków. In 1844 the company commenced the construction of a railway line from Silesia to Kraków through Szczakowa. The local conditions were difficult: there were steep slopes and numerous bridges had to be erected. On 13 October 1847 the "first Kraków steam locomotive with a considerable set of passenger and transport carriages successfully set off for Prussia at ten o'clock" from the railway station in Kraków which at that time was believed to be one of the twelve most outstanding structures worth seeing in Kraków and one of the most beautiful railway stations in Europe (J. Demel, "Początki kolei..."). Thus, the first railway line in the territory of Poland under Austrian rule was put into service. The train headed to Mysłowice, pulled by a steam locomotive named "Kraków" (Borsig No. 76/1847). 4 days later the inhabitants of Kraków could go on a "stroll" journey to Krzeszowice. Trains on that route operated in summer, on Sundays, and could take several hundred passengers each time.

Origins of the European railway network

The railway line was connected with the Warsaw-Vienna Railway in Maczki in spring 1848. When the Upper Silesian Railway was connected to the William Railway (Koźle-Racibórz-Chałupki), by means of the Chałupki-Bohumin section, from autumn 1848 the journey from Kraków to Vienna took only 13 hours. The journey to Warsaw, with a night-time stop at the Border station, took 23 hours. The connection between the railways of three states - Prussia, Russia and Austria - gave rise to the European railway network. In spring 1850 the Austrian state forced the Kraków and Silesian railway line shareholders to sell their shares and set up the Imperial and Royal Eastern State Railways. As early as 1868, fast trains on the route from Vienna to Kraków could reach speeds of up to 50 mph (80 km/h). After 1893 the speed increased to 62 mph (100 km/h), the carriages had an electric lighting system, there was a restaurant car in the train and the journey took about 8 hours.



The opening of the Kraków - Kocmyrzów line - 1899

Railway transit put into operation

At the end of 1852, the Emperor Ferdinand Northern Railway commenced the construction of a line from Bohumin through Dziedzice to Oświęcim, and later from Oświęcim to Trzebinia and from Kraków to Dębica, with branch lines to Wieliczka and Niepołomice. They were put into service in 1856, and two years later KFNB bought the lines from Mysłowice to Kraków and from Szczakowa to Maczki from the state authorities. The Galician Railway of Archduke Charles Louis, established in the same year, that is, in 1858, bought the railway line from Kraków to Dębica (with branch lines to Wieliczka and Niepołomice) and completed the construction of the route from Dębica through Rzeszów (1858), Przeworsk (1859), Przemyśl (1860) to Lviv (1861) and the border station in Brody (1869). The tracks were laid in a south-eastern direction through Zolochiv (1869), and Ternopil (1871) to Pidvolochysk (1871) on the borderline. The resultant connection with Russian railways enabled the transit of goods, in particular the transit of Russian grains to Prussia. The commencement of the exploitation of oil reserves in the area of Boryslav and Drohobych, and the export of cattle and meat to Vienna, had an influence on the considerable profitability of these railways.

First state-owned railway line

In 1864-1866, a consortium with English capital, known as the Lviv-Chernivtsi Railroad Company, built a railway Lviv-Chernivtsi-Jassy line to the border with Romania in Suceava, thus initiating the export of Romanian grains to Prussia. This way, the first stage of the construction of railway connections in Galicia came to an end.

The experience of wars waged by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy increased the interest of military communities in railways. Therefore, decisions to build new connections were also determined by strategic reasons. In Galicia, such a line was the railroad from the 1st class fortress in Przemyśl to the border with Hungary in Łupków. The licence document for the First Hungarian-Galician Railroad Company Ltd was issued in 1869 and was valid until 1959. The route, passing through a tunnel bored under the Łupków Pass, leading to the Hungarian Plain, was put into service in 1872. At that time a private consortium built the Dniestr Railway from Khyriv to Stryi, with a branch line from Drohobych to Boryslav (1872), but soon, due to financial losses, it assigned it to the state. Thus, this was the first state-owned railway line in the territory under Austrian rule.

Railway nationalisation plan

The Austro-Hungarian government implemented a railway nationalisation plan under which the lines from Przemyśl to Łupków - owned by the First Hungarian- -Galician Railroad - and the Lviv-Chernivtsi Railway were transferred to state administration in 1889. They reported to directorate districts formed in 1884 in Kraków and in Lviv (and to the superior State Railways Directorate in Vienna). The Emperor Ferdinand Northern Railway was bought from private owners in 1906 and put under the direct administration of the directorate in Vienna.



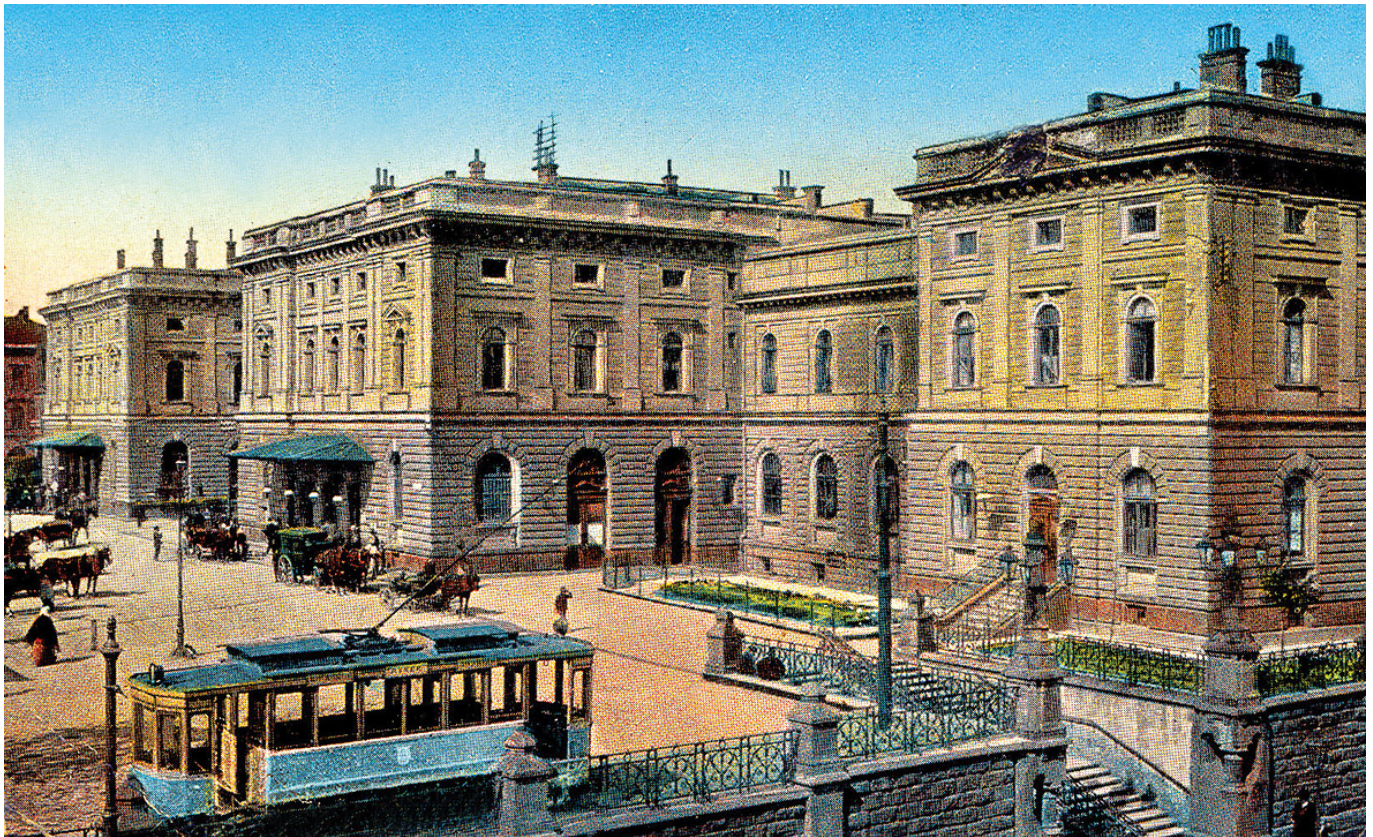
Inspection of the progress of works on the Galician Railway construction site - end of the 19th century

The Lviv-Kraków route was located close to the border with Russia. It ran in difficult conditions with an unfavourable profile (high elevations and downgrades, sharp curves). In order to protect the country against railway traffic being interrupted in the event of an armed conflict, the government decided to build a parallel west-east route from Zwardoń to Husiatyn, including the existing

Bielsko-Żywiec, Nowy Sącz-Stróże, Zagórz-Khyriv, and Stryi-Stanyslaviv sections. The new connection, with a length totalling 343 miles (552 kilometres), referred to as the Galician Transversal Railway, was built in a very short time, that is, in over 2 years (1883-1885). Next, it was connected to Podgórze and Kraków through Skawina.

Polish investors and stockholders

In subsequent years new, both privately and state-owned, railway lines were built. To increase their capacity in the 1880s second tracks were added on some sections. Poles were predominant among investors and shareholders of railway companies. They were also considered the best directors of state railways. Among other directors, these included: the engineer Wiktor Kolosvary - the director of the Railway District in Kraków, and Ludwik Wierzbicki - the director of the Railway District in Lviv. The lines were usually designed by the National Railway Bureau organised by Kazimierz Zaleski in Lviv and the works were carried out by outstanding engineers such as: Stanisław Rawicz-Kosiński (under his management in Yaremche, on the Stanyslaviv-Voronenko line, a 28-metre-tall vaulted bridge with a span of 65 metres was erected), Ferdynand Gisman and others. In 1891 the General Railway Directorate in Vienna was headed by Leon Biliński, PhD. He was an outstanding economist and organiser and also a social and economic activist.



The 19th century postcard: the Neo-Gothic railway station in Kraków

Railways supporting local economy

Local workers were employed and local resources were used for the construction of respective sections. Stone was taken from the local quarries, gravel from the nearby rivers, and timber for construction purposes - from the local forests. The construction of railways provided employment to local inhabitants. Also, the sale of land generated a source of income and the economy was generally revitalised.

Development of rail tourism

Comfortable railway connections at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century contributed to the development of tourism. Austrian state railways issued a series of guides to the imperial railway lines. Tour trains ran to holiday resorts. The connection provided by the local railway between Muszyna and Krynica (1911) contributed to a significant increase in the number of holiday-makers in that resort. Also, a popular health resort in Truskavets was connected by railway line to Drohobych (1912). The railway lines of Galicia before the outbreak of World War I were nearly 2,672 miles (4,300 kilometres) long in total.



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