

Between Lleida and La Pobra: an on-demand train in the Pyrenees

In the High Pyrenees of Catalonia, an on-demand railway line connects 17 rural villages every day. The model of the service was reshaped by regional authorities to keep the line efficient and viable while maintaining the transport offer to the population and visitors. Efforts in terms of multimodality and modernity of equipment also helped to make the train line attractive to people.



The [train line](#) between Lleida and La Pobra de Segur, in Spain, is an 89 km long line covering 17 villages in the High Pyrenees. Operating in a mountain area, the railway line faces the natural constraints and counts in total 41 tunnels and 31 bridges to connect these rural communities. Natural constraints, coupled with the demographic decline of some villages and the increased use of private cars, limit the viability of train connections in some mountain areas.

Although Lleida - La Pobra de Segur is a historic line in the region, opened in the 1920s, it was identified in the 1980s as unviable and therefore to be closed. In 2004, the region of Catalonia decided to acquire the train line to maintain the service.

Flexible and intermodal transport

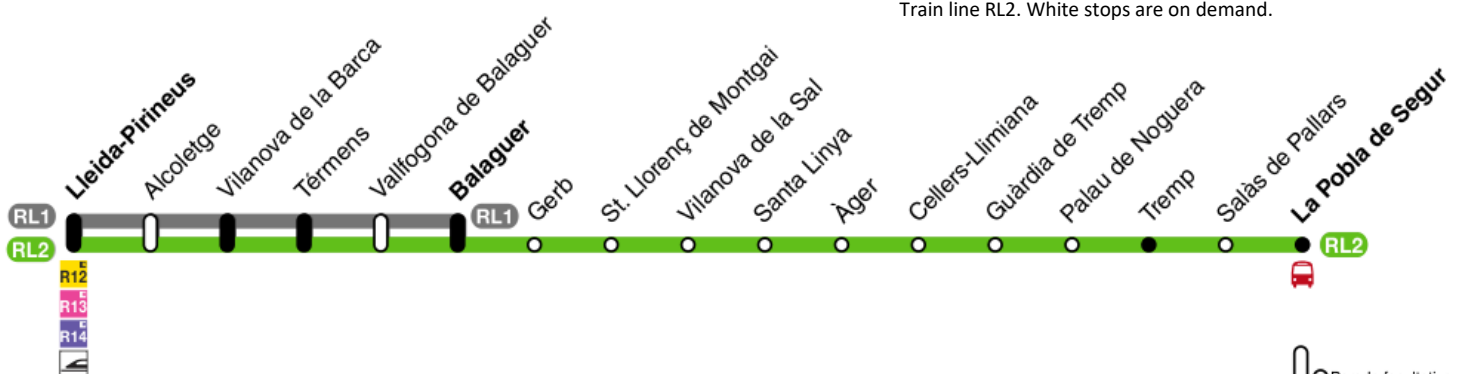
To maintain the operation of the train line Lleida - La Pobra de Segur, some changes were introduced to better meet the needs of rural commuters while keeping the line viable on the long term.

The offer was adapted to the demand for transport. Therefore, timetables are based on the most popular time slots among local communities; the line does not operate at time of least demand or when villages are covered by buses.

Moreover, an effort was made to increase the multimodality of transports in the region. The train timetables have therefore been adapted to correspond to the connections with buses and with the mainline trains to Madrid and Barcelona.

Last but not least, to improve the flexibility and efficiency of the service, some stations are on-demand. In practice, this means that the line includes fixed stops and, in between, others for which passengers can request a stop. Passengers can push a button either in the train or in the station to alert the train driver. 11 of the 17 stations covered are on-demand and were selected based on the analysis of previous demand from users. This allows more rural stations to be covered and offers more people an alternative mode of transport, collective and more sustainable. This solution improves the quality of life of local communities and offers a last mile transport to visitors - as the route also passes through villages, sites and lakes that are popular among tourists.

Train line RL2. White stops are on demand.



Resources and governance

Since 2005, the infrastructure is owned by the regional train company [Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya](#) (FGC). In 2016, the company also took over the operation with the purchase of trains specifically for this line.

Since the acquisition of the line, the Catalan government bought 3 new trains for a total of € 15 million to replace old equipment. It also invested another € 15 million to improve the stations and the accessibility for people with disabilities and cyclists for instance. Such investments might of course impact the line's frequentation, which is constantly increasing (from 90.000 annual passengers in 2000 to 220.700 in 2018).



Credits : Jordi Verdugo



Innovative aspect

By applying the “on-demand” option to train transport, this initiative found a solution to keep rural train lines attractive and viable. In mountain areas, transport is the key to territorial attractiveness, especially if efforts are made to improve the speed of the service and the connection with other lines or transport. In the framework of the European Year of Rail, this is a good example for other regions of rail transport adapted to the needs of mountain communities and visitors.

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