

## **Minister Arriola ratifies 'the commitment to public transport as the cornerstone of mobility in the Basque Country' on the 40th anniversary of Euskotren**

- **Euskotren has organised a temporary exhibition at Atxuri looking back over the history of the company; an opportunity for the public to learn about items of great historical importance in the evolution of public transport (fixtures and fittings, route posters, clocks, lamps and old portable telephones, models, etc.)**
- **A similar exhibition will shortly be held at the Amara station on the Topo line**

On 24 May 1982, the Basque Government approved a new publicly-owned company, Eusko Trenbideak/Ferrocarriles Vasco, S.A., whose corporate purpose would be to streamline the management of the metric-gauge railways transferred by the Spanish central government between 1978 and 1979. Therefore, May 2022 marks 40 years from that first public initiative that has led to Euskotren becoming the leading transport operator in the Basque Country over those four decades. The current management of five rail lines, an underground line, the Larreineta funicular railway, two tramway services (Bilbao and Vitoria-Gasteiz) and several bus lines in Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa endorse Euskotren's track record. Its public service based on quality, sustainability, efficiency and safety thus meets the travel needs of millions of people a year.

An exhibition featuring the small and major milestones that have made Euskotren what it is today is being held at the former Atxuri station, home to the Euskotren headquarters and other facilities of Euskal Trenbide Sarea-Red Ferroviaria Vasca (ETS). The aim is to recognise and endorse its firm commitment to public transport as the cornerstone of mobility in the Basque Country.

The Basque Government's Minister for Territorial Planning, Housing and Transport, Iñaki Arriola, accompanied by the Euskotren General Manager, Javier Seoane, visited the exhibition this morning. Their tour of the exhibition included a large panel with the company's different milestones over its forty years. In 1982, Eusko Trenbideak/Ferrocarriles Vascos, S.A. inherited an old network, with obsolete facilities and vehicles, after years of private operators not being able to make the necessary modernisation investments. The service provided did not meet the required quality and there was a steady loss of passengers. Euskotren had to address the urgent need to upgrade the operations. The public commitment of the Basque

Government provided the main impetus and, step by step, one project after another, the network gradually achieved the solvency that it enjoys today and the future is now looking bright.

During the event to mark Euskotren's 40th anniversary, the Basque Government's Minister for Territorial Planning, Housing and Transport, Iñaki Arriola, pointed out that the current offer *"would not be possible without the citizens; without the millions of people that use its services to travel around and, of course, without the Company's workforce. Over a thousand men and women who, in the same way as in 1982, are very much committed to the future of the company and serving society"*.

Along with the overview of Euskotren's history, the exhibition also features items of great importance in the history of public transport: a set of stationmaster's kit, route posters, clocks, lamps and old portable telephones, the traditional railway pot or *putxera*, different models of the rolling stock, etc.

The temporary exhibition can be visited free of charge until the end of the year. The opening hours will be from 4.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. Monday to Friday and from 10.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. and from 4.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. at weekends and on public holidays. A similar exhibition will also be at the Amara station on the Topo line and the dates will be announced shortly.

Even though Euskotren is celebrating forty years as a publicly-owned company, its roots can in fact be traced back to 1882, when its oldest line came into service: the railway from Bilbao to Durango.

Down through these 140 years, the railway has generated a rich heritage in the Basque Country that Euskotren has always known how to showcase. Thus, it opened its Basque Railway Museum in 1994. It is based in the old Azpeitia station (Gipuzkoa) and boasts one of Europe's most important collections of narrow-gauge rolling stock.

### **Milestones: 1982 to 2022**

- 📍 **1982:** On 24 May 1982, Eusko Trenbideak/Ferrocarriles Vascos, S.A., the Basque Government's publicly-owned company and better known by its trading name of Euskotren, was incorporated and inherited all the metric gauge railway lines starting or ending in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC).
- 📍 **1983:** Floods that disrupted Euskotren operations until 1984.
- 📍 **1988:** First bus route in Gipuzkoa, between Zumarraga and Zumaia, a process that was consolidated in 1992 with the addition of new routes in the province.
- 📍 **1994:** Euskotren took over the running of the Larreineta Funicular Railway and the Basque Railway museum.
- 📍 **1995:** Euskotren split off its busiest line from Bilbao to Plentzia (22 million passengers per year) and sold it to Metro Bilbao, the new company of the first underground service.
- 📍 **1996:** Euskotren reintroduced freight transport as part of its commitment to sustainability and the environment
- 📍 **1998:** Opening of the Lasarte-Oria branch line to provide local residents easier access to Donostia-San Sebastián
- 📍 **2002:** Opening of the new Bilbao tramway, which meant a return to this means of transport in the city for the first time in 50 years
- 📍 **2004:** On 21 May 2004, the publicly-owned Euskal Trenbide Sarea was incorporated and included the Euskotren infrastructure area along with Imebisa, the publicly-owned engineering company that had built the Metro Bilbao underground
- 📍 **2007:** 125 years of the section between Bilbao and Durango
- 📍 **2008:** Opening of the Vitoria-Gasteiz tramway as the trunk system with greatest capacity for the city
- 📍 **2009:** Vitoria-Gasteiz tramway extended to Abetxuko
- 📍 **2011:** Euskotren's current logo
- 📍 **2017:** Opening of the third underground line in Bilbao operated by Euskotren
- 📍 **2019:** Last departure of trains from Atxuri to Duranguesado and Donostia/San Sebastián
- 📍 **2020:** Vitoria-Gasteiz tramway extended to Unibertsitatea
- 📍 **2022:** Bilbao tramway extended to Bolueta

## **Evolution in the demand: 1,200 million journeys**

During the 40 years that Euskotren has been operating, the passengers using its different services have made around 1,200 million journeys, with an annual average of 29.6 million passengers a year.

Over these four decades, Euskotren has undergone significant changes, from the lowest level of 22.8 million journeys in 1998 to the highest with a record of 41.1 million journeys in 2019.

During its first year (1982), Euskotren services totalled 30.6 million passengers, a figure that sharply dropped the following year due to the catastrophic flooding of the summer of 1983. However, the Basque company's investments to improve its facilities and rolling stock were rewarded with a steady increase in demand, which stood at 37.9 million passengers in 1994.

The selling off of Euskotren's busiest line, from Bilbao to Plentzia, to Metro Bilbao also meant the transfer of twenty million of its annual journeys to the new underground railway operator. Accordingly, demand was just over 24 million passengers in 1996, a figure that has mainly remained stable until 2009, when the positive results of the new Vitoria-Gasteiz tramway began to be clearly seen. Thus, the thirty million journey barrier was then exceeded for the first time since the opening of Metro Bilbao.

The steady increase in demand for the Vitoria-Gasteiz tramway, together with the opening of Line 3 of the Bilbao underground, operated by Euskotren, and the impact of the new infrastructure on the other railway services in Bizkaia, along with the progressive improvements in Gipuzkoa, with the opening of the new Intxaurreondo and Altza stations, meant that 2018 was a record-breaking year for the company with 39.5 million passengers. This record was smashed a year later with 41.1 million journeys. 41.1 million.

Unfortunately, and as was the case for all public transport operators worldwide, the Covid-19 pandemic brought the steady rise in demand for Euskotren services since 2005 to an abrupt end. In any event, the progressive return to normality, together with the forthcoming opening of new services such as extending the Bilbao and Vitoria-Gasteiz to Bolueta and Salburua, along with the upgrading of the 'Topo' line, point to a rapid recover of demand and future record-breaking performances.