RDC to operate Sylt motorail trains?
Following the announcement that DB Fernverkehr intends to cease domestic motorail services in 2017 – with the important exception of the “Sylt Shuttle” car-carrying service between Niebüll and Westerland (Sylt) – a competitor has appeared, to challenge DB’s de-facto monopoly on this route: there is no road access to Sylt so the DB service (and a ferry from a minor Danish island) is the only current way to take a car to or from the island of Sylt. DB faced open access competitors seeking to operate this lucrative service (used by almost 1 million vehicles in 2013) previously when Veolia attempted to obtain access to the terminals about a decade ago. Hans Leister and Carsten Carstensen, two managers who led the effort for Veolia, are now running Railroad Development Corporations’ (RDC) European developments. Much has changed in ten years and the legal basis for third party operators using the DB-owned terminals in Niebüll and Westerland has been established, although not tested in practice. RDC has been operating the HKX open access intercity service since June 2012.

RDC applied to DB Netze for the long term train paths in early October to enable it to replace DB as operator of the car shuttle, promising up to 50% more services than now and, according to press reports, offering higher access charges than DB Fernverkehr currently pays. RDC says the route over the 11.3 km Hindenburgdamm, which opened in 1927 and was double tracked in 1972, needs modernisation to provide more capacity. Long sections on either side of the Hindenburgdamm between Niebüll and Westerland (Sylt) are single track, and higher access charges will help fund these improvements. RDC is proposing to take over the service for ten years and hopes to have a contract agreed with DB Netze by March 2015, overseen as required by the Federal Network Agency as regulator. Assuming it is successful RDC plans to buy six car-carrying trains and to offer continued employment to DB’s existing employees as the company does not envisage DB also operating competing shuttle services. RDC appears to have political support from Schleswig-Holstein Land which is reportedly dissatisfied with DB’s service. KF

Moskva to Budapest and Sofia services withdrawn
In mid-October RZD announced that on 12 December its subsidiary FPK (Federal Passenger Company) was to withdraw trains 15/16 “Tisza” from Moskva to Budapest and 59/60 from Moskva to Sofia, the final northbound services running on 14 December. The Moskva–Budapest run covers 2109 km, taking 37h50 southbound and 36h46 northbound. That from Moskva to Sofia covers 2643 km, taking 50h40 southbound and 49h38 northbound.

RZD stated that the withdrawals (described as “temporary”) were because of a “significant drop” in passenger numbers. MAV-START is in discussions with RZD and UŽ (Ukrainian Railways) over the continuation of the Moskva–Budapest service. The train was first established in 1949, with daily operation since 1954. MB/F

New line planned for Fehmarn Belt crossing
DB Netz and the Land of Schleswig-Holstein have agreed in principle to build a new double track electrified line from Lübeck to Puttgarden to connect with the new Fehmarn Belt tunnel. Germany and Denmark agreed in 2008 to improve access routes and infrastructure on either side of the new crossing and DB Netz plans to close the existing single track non-electrified route north of Bad Schwartau once the new line opens in 2021.

Several local towns on the existing route which rely heavily on tourism have mounted a campaign against the new line – they fear the new out-of-town stations promised will not be as attractive to potential visitors or residents and that the new line will be heavily used by freight trains running at night reducing the attractiveness of their towns to visitors in the first place! DB Netz now intends to finalise plans for its preferred route although further local opposition is likely. KF