

PRAGUE, 29 November 2023

## **Opinion poll: only 20 percent of the public supports the repair of the old railway bridge at Výtoň**

Is it necessary to modernise the railway traffic, or should we take into account the heritage protection instead? Is it better to build a new bridge at Výtoň or to repair the old one? These and other opinions of the public were surveyed by Správa železnic in a representative opinion poll, which was attended by over 1,500 respondents from Prague and Central Bohemia. The results showed that only one fifth of the respondents prefer to repair the old bridge, while almost two thirds support the construction of a new bridge.

At the end of last year, Správa železnic presented the winner of the architectural competition for the design of a new railway bridge at Prague's Výtoň. In response to this, a petition was initiated, whose signatories protest against the replacement of the outdated bridge and advocated that the railway bridge should be preserved regardless of the cost, technical complexity of the renovation or its short lifetime. Since then, debates for or against one or the other solution variant have been taking place in the public space. *"The often passionate controversy about the future of this railway bridge is dominated by social media. We were therefore interested in the representative opinion of the public not only on this particular bridge, but also on the dilemma between monument protection and railway modernisation in general,"* said Pavel Paidar, Director of Construction Planning Department of Správa železnic.

### **Railway bridges cannot be compared with other monuments**

According to the survey, a slight majority of the public (51.4 %) would generally favour monument protection. However, people have a different opinion in the case of historic railway bridges, where 66.1 % of respondents believe that functionality and safety should always be the priority, regardless of historical value. *"Other types of railway bridges can usually be repaired to cope with higher traffic capacity at the same time. The Negrelli Viaduct in Prague is a good example. But steel bridges are a big problem. The structure is weakened by corrosion even in places that cannot be reached during repair, and a disproportionately expensive reconstruction will only extend the service life by a few decades. Therefore, we have been pointing out for a long time that their monument protection is questionable and complicates the modernisation of railways, not only in the case of the railway bridge at Výtoň,"* explains Pavel Paidar.

### **Two-thirds support a new bridge, nearly 40 percent would have the old structure relocated elsewhere**

In the specific case of the Vytoň railway bridge, 65.7 % of respondents were in favour of a new bridge. Some of them (38.6 %) chose the option of a new bridge with relocation of the old steel structure to another place and 27.1 % are only in favour of building a new bridge.

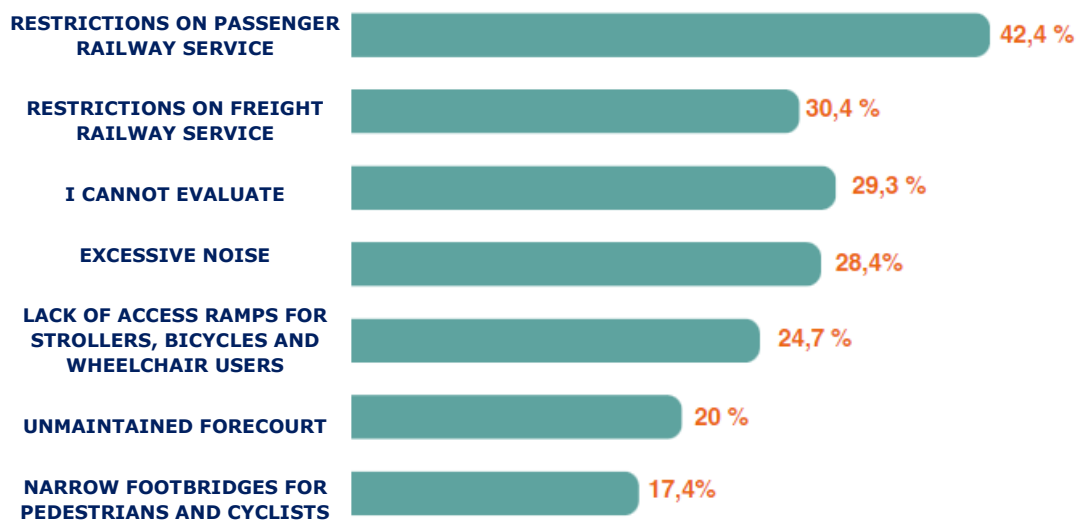
Only 20.1 % were in favour of renovating the original bridge with the addition of a third track. The rest (14.2 %) had no opinion on this question. When asked who should decide on the future of the railway bridge at Výtoň, 67.9 % of respondents answered that experts should decide taking into account the opinion of the public.

### The main issue with the current situation is the traffic restriction

The current technical condition of the bridge brings with it a number of disadvantages. Respondents consider the restrictions on passenger railway service to be the most serious – 42.4 % of respondents are bothered by this, while for people who travel by train frequently this is even 52 % of respondents. In second place, there are complete closures or diversionary routes for freight trains (30.4 %). In third place, it is excessive noise from old construction.

For the residents of the districts Prague 2 and Prague 5, the top four disadvantages are excessive noise, which they perceive as intensely as the restrictions of passenger railway service (both 38 %), followed by the lack of approach ramps (36 %). The unmaintained forecourt was ranked as a disadvantage by 31 % of respondents from these districts. The lack of access ramps for bicycles, strollers and wheelchair users was then more likely – in second place with 34 % – to be addressed by respondents aged 27 to 35.

### The current technical condition of the bridge brings with it a number of disadvantages. Which of them do you consider the most serious?



Note: It was possible to select up to three disadvantages.

### Summary of current situation

The double-track railway bridge on Prague's Výtoň was put into operation in 1901 and initially it was used by dozens of trains a day. Today there are almost 300 trains and the number will continue to grow in the future. The bridge is already in a very poor condition and there has been a debate for many years about whether to replace it with a new one or just renovate it. Experts in the field of bridge engineering, who have assessed the solution options in the past, have come to the unambiguous conclusion that the best solution is to build a new three-track bridge. As a result, the design emerged from an international architectural competition that meets the contemporary requirements for safety and capacity of railway traffic, solves the connection to public transport, offers comfort for pedestrians and cyclists and fits into the panorama with its appearance.

After Správa železnic presented a design for a new bridge at Výtoň at the end of last year, a petition was initiated whose signatories protested against the replacement of the bridge and advocated that the monument should be preserved regardless of the cost or technical complexity of the solution.

A study by the international expert organisation Jaspers, published at the end of October, showed that compared to the renovation of the old bridge (with a side extension of the third track to achieve the necessary traffic capacity), the construction of the new three-track bridge will be at least 40 % cheaper (the difference amounts to CZK 1.1 billion), it will be completed up to 1.5 years faster and the new bridge will have a service life of at least 100 years compared to 30 years of the renovated bridge.

#### **About the opinion poll**

The data collection took place from 6 to 10 November and was carried out via the agency Ipsos' Instant Research application on a sample of 1,544 respondents from Prague (52.7 %) and Central Bohemia (47.3 %). The sample of respondents was representative in terms of gender, age and education.