The same train, five times the price:
what buying a European train ticket *actually* looks like

The EU wants rail to be the credible alternative to flying and driving. But it can only be that if consumers can find, compare and buy the journeys they want.

To see what a European traveller really faces today, we **ran a hands-on test on 11 train journeys** and **accross 7 trains websites**:

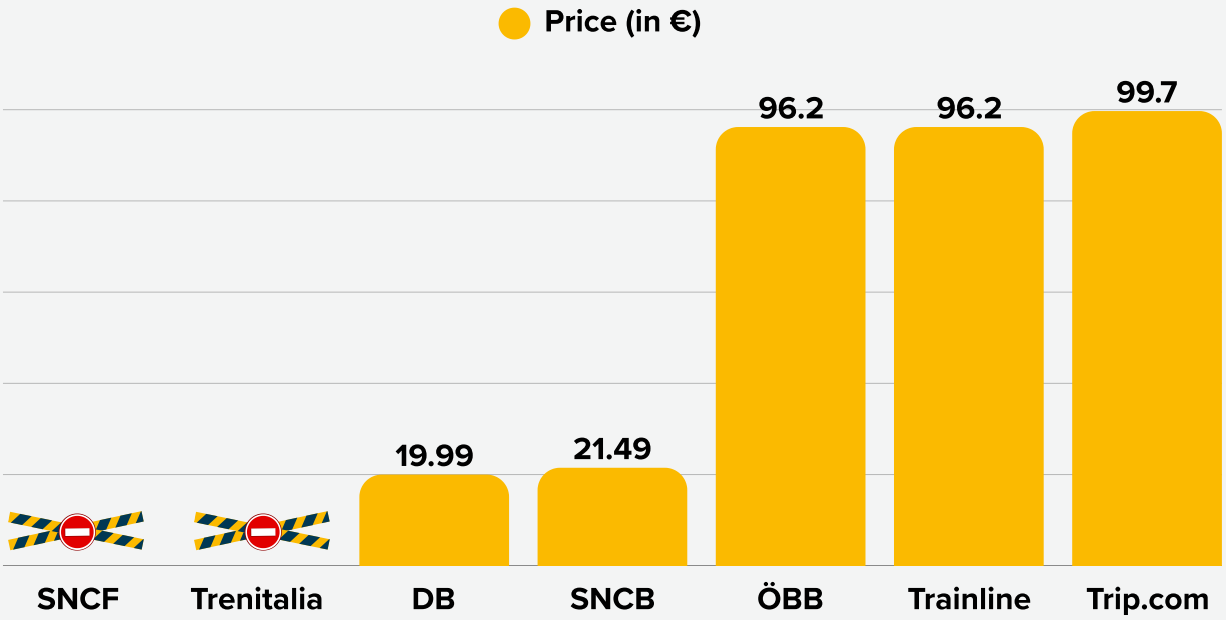
SNCF	**SNCB**	**DB**	**ÖBB**	**Trenitalia**	**Trip.com**	**Trainline**
French National Operator	*Belgium National Operator*	*German National Operator*	*Austrian National Operator*	*Italian National Operator*	*Independent Retailer*	*Independent Retailer*

We checked what was on offer, at what price, and under what conditions to change or cancel. These are illustrative cases, not a statistical market audit. Nonetheless it provides an interesting window into the consumer booking experience when it comes to rail.



The same train, at nearly five times the price

Travelling from Munich to Vienna seems like straight forward trip. But the price of the ticket can take various directions. Those are the prices we observed on July 14th, for the train Eurocity 1218 circulating on September 11.



Despite having the exact **same cancellation policy for this Eurocity service**, all sellers offer different prices. The highest-priced ticket (from Trip.com) was five times more expensive that the cheapest (from DB). **The same train at a 400% premium.**



It is particularly concerning as consumers likely **wouldn't have known that a cheaper version of the same ticket exist** elsewhere.

Retailers are of course free to price how they choose. Reductions, service fees and mark-ups are part of a working market. But **when the same product costs five times more in one place than another, and the consumer can't see why, that's not a market working**.



A well-functioning market gives consumers visibility into the choices they make. Here, that transparency is missing, and it is ultimately the consumer who bears the cost.

Competitors compete, but not on each other's websites

Two operators run the Milan–Paris route: Trenitalia's Frecciarossa, and SNCF's TGV INOUI. On the day we tested, SNCF Connect didn't list the Frecciarossa service. Conversely, Trenitalia's website didn't list the TGV INOUI service either.



But on Deutsch Bahn, SNCB, Trainline and Trip.com, both trains appeared normally. **In other words, both operators are sharing their data through the wider ticketing system, but they do not display the other's service**.

As a result, consumers going to the country's national rail operator's website only saw half themarket.

Different sales channels provide different views of the Milan–Paris market:

Websites	Frecciarossa FR9296	TGV INOUI 9250	Market visibility
SNCF Connect	× Not displayed	✓ Displayed	50%
Trenitalia	✓ Displayed	× Not displayed	50%
Deutsche Bahn	✓ Displayed	✓ Displayed	100%
SNCB	✓ Displayed	✓ Displayed	100%
Trainline	✓ Displayed	✓ Displayed	100%
Trip.com	✓ Displayed	✓ Displayed	100%
ÖBB	× Not displayed	× Not displayed	0%

What you're agreeing to isn't always clearly visible

Buying a ticket means agreeing to the terms attached to it. Cross-border rail doesn't always make those terms easy to find.

On the Vienna–Munich and Munich–Vienna Railjet Express services, Trenitalia sold the most expensive ticket of any channel, at €138.60, **while applying cancellation penalties that its own website didn't specify**.

On the Munich–Bologna Nightjet service, **Trenitalia's cancellation policy wasn't shown alongside the fare at all**. Instead, it sat on a separately linked page, disconnected from the ticket the consumer was actually about to buy.

On the TGV 9561 from Paris to Frankfurt, Deutsche Bahn charged around €10 more than SNCF for the same journey, while offering no option to cancel or exchange the ticket. By contrast, SNCF's fare allows passengers to exchange their ticket and obtain a refund up to 7 days before departure.

Three different services, three different retailers, one shared problem: consumers being asked to commit to terms they can't easily see, or paying more for less because.

It doesn't have to work like this

On Paris–Brussels, we found something different. Every one of the five channels that sold the Eurostar service offered it at exactly €109.00, with exactly the same conditions for changing or cancelling.

Same price, same terms, wherever a consumer clicked.

That's what cross-border rail ticketing looks like when operators and their retailers align. It isn't a technical achievement. **It's a commercial choice, made once, on one route.** That it doesn't hold elsewhere is a decision, not a limitation.

What the EU's rail reforms need to deliver



The European Commission's Rail Passenger Package rightly aims to fix much of what we found. Operators will be required to share their products with retailers. Dominant platforms will have to display competitors' services. Commercial agreements will have to be fair and non-discriminatory.

Euroconsumers supports all of this.

But our test shows the reforms need to reach further to actually work for consumers:

- **Cover the whole journey a consumer is trying to make**, not just individual services in a single national market. A traveller looking at Milan–Paris should be able to see, on any reasonable channel, the operators actually running the route.

- **Make fare conditions travel with the fare.** Consumers should see what a ticket lets them do before they buy — not after they've clicked through to a linked page, and not with penalties that only become clear when they try to cancel.

- **Show what a retailer has added on.** Any fee, mark-up or reduction should appear as its own line at the point of sale, so a €19.99 ticket that sells elsewhere for €99.70 doesn't do so invisibly.

Rail can be the backbone of European travel.
But not while consumers are the ones doing the work.

Methodology

In July 2026, Euroconsumers checked eleven international rail services connecting Milan, Paris, Frankfurt, Brussels, Vienna, Munich and Bologna, across seven retailers: SNCF Connect, B-Europe, DB, ÖBB, Trenitalia, Trip.com and Trainline. This is an illustrative exercise, not a statistical audit.

Full case detail available on request.

About Euroconsumers

Gathering six national consumer organisations and giving voice to a total of more than 7 million people in Italy, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Poland and Brazil, Euroconsumers is the world's leading consumer group in innovative information, personalised services and the defence of consumer rights.

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