



Received: 30.06.2020

Received in revised form: 04.09.2020

Accepted: 05.09.2020

Published: 30.09.2020

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## TOURIST ASSETS OF THE CROSS-BORDER RAILWAY LINE BREST–WŁODAWA–CHEŁM

### *Walory turystyczne przygranicznej linii kolejowej Brześć–Włodawa–Chełm*

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**Citation:**

Anisiewicz R., 2020, Tourist assets of the cross-border railway line Brest–Włodawa–Chełm, *Prace Komisji Geografii Komunikacji PTG*, 23(4), 19–31.

**Abstract:** The article is to show tourist assets of the cross-border railway line Brest–Chełm, which is disrupted by a state border and the lack of a bridge on the Bug River barring access to Brest–Włodawa line section on the Belarus side and to Włodawa–Chełm section on the Polish side. The locally operating sections, built in the eighties of the twentieth century, of the strategic railway linking the Warsaw–Terespol line with the Vistula River Railroad (Nadwiślańska) have a great potential for the development of railway tourism. The line runs along prized nature areas of the macro-regions West Polesie and Wołyńskie Polesie. Sundry landscapes of the border countryside and their biological diversity are decisive in enjoying the highly valued scenery along the line on the Polish side. The attractiveness of the Belarus side – in practice accessible to foreigners following the introduction of the tourist and recreation zone 'Brest' in 2018 – is usually associated with the uncommon rules of travelling by train in the Belarus cross-border region. Both fragments of the line Brest–Chełm lead to and run through interesting tourist localities and cross-border culture sites. The article also touches on the present restrictions for railway tourism along this route, and the chances of reviving regular traffic in the Polish section in view of the governmental programme *Kolej+*.

**Keywords:** railway line Brest–Włodawa, railwayline Chełm–Włodawa, cross-border railway line, railway tourism, tourist assets

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is among those terms, which are defined by many authors (compare A. Kowalczyk, 2000; W.W. Gaworecki, 2007; W. Kurek, M. Mika, 2008). The key element linking all aspects, and the core feature of tourism, is translocation. A trip may be the way of reaching a tourist destination or be the tourist objective (J. Górny, 2014).

Rail transport is popular among tourists. Taking into account the purpose of railway tourism excursions, we can identify travelling to reach a destination, or railway focused tourism, when the voyage itself is an objective and the reaching of sites connected with railways, for example historical rolling stock parks (J. Górny, 2014). The objective of railway tourism defined above does not eliminate other travelling motives such as sightseeing or travelling for leisure. Railway fans enjoy in particular peripheral lines, which run in the midst of outstanding landscapes and where railway tracks are often non-electrified. Cross-border railways belong to the more interesting in terms of railway tourism. Experiencing a train journey, apart from the railway related aspects, is linked with travelling abroad, which may be an additional tourist attraction.

Seventy-eight railway lines cut across the Polish borders established after World War Two, including 72 standard gauge tracks and six narrow gauged tracks (T. Lijewski, 1996). Regions, where such lines were not disconnected following the changes to Poland's borders are in a better position. Less lucky were the locations where the infrastructure was destroyed during the war, and where the rail tracks were split by a border, which functioned as a barrier unfavourable for rebuilding rail connections.

An example of the above is the nearly 115-kilometre long Brest–Chełm line presently partly in Poland and partly in Belarus. The continuity of the line, built in the eighties of the nineteenth century on the territories annexed by Russia, suffered with the destruction of the bridge on the Bug River near Włodawa at the end of World War Two. Its latitudinal route in the new geopolitical situation (Polish USSR border on the Bug River) failed to favour the reconstruction of this railway infrastructure. In effect, the split fragments of the route Brest–Chełm operated locally, providing transport to the meagrely developed Polish and USSR border area – later the Belarus border.

Attempts made since the nineties of the twentieth century by self-governmental bodies of both countries to restore the railway passage and open a border crossing in Włodawa have failed as of today. The construction of the bridge on the Bug River and the *circa* 4 km long railway tracks are part of

strategic<sup>1</sup> and planning<sup>2</sup> documents. Nonetheless, nothing indicates that the situation will change in the next few years. These investments are projected for the next EU financial perspective by the self government of Lubelskie Voievodship, which submitted a revitalization project of the said route – including the construction of a bridge near Włodawa and the laying of 1520 mm tracks from Włodawa to Zawada – as a backup project to the regional operational programme (*Lubelskie: Linia...*, 2020). The separately operating segments of the Brest–Chełm railway line demonstrate assets of a potential tourist attraction even if lacking a direct railway link.

The Polish section of the line is open to passengers in the summer season. The introduction of the 'Brest' zone, with visa-free tourist and recreational traffic, on January 1, 2018, and the merging with the earlier established zone 'Grodno' on 10 November 2019 to create a joint zone, provided access to the Belarus section of the Brest–Chełm line for Polish and foreign tourists. This step facilitated the stay of foreigners in border areas of this country, which neighbours Poland. In Belarus, however, access to these territories is limited for both foreigners and Belarus non-inhabitants of the area. The establishment of a tourist-recreation zone resulted in opening, for citizens of other countries, the option of travelling by local railway lines, like the line Brest–Włodawa (station in Tomaszówka), in the border area of the country which was basically impossible in the past.

The aim of the article is to demonstrate the tourist assets of the railway line Brest–Chełm, which is split by the border and the missing bridge on the Bug River. Taking advantage of the railway tourist opportunity may supplement the cross-border region's tourist offer and stimulate the development drive on both sides of the border. Tourist assets mean here specific features and elements of the natural environment as well as humankind activity, which are of interest for tourists (T. Lijewski i in., 2008). The line's missing section, which would ensure its cross-border nature, indicates the tentative use of the term 'border railway line' today.

The spatial scope of the study covers the length of the line on the Belarus side from Brest to the station Włodawa, and on the Polish side from Chełm to Włodawa. The study takes into account places and objects by the railroad, as defined by rail tourism, and those accessible by a train journey distanced up to several kilometres of the line itself, as of 2020.

<sup>1</sup> The 'Cross-border Cooperation Strategy of the Lubelskie Voievodship, the Volyn Oblast, the Lviv Oblast, and the Brest Oblast for 2014-2020.

<sup>2</sup> Spatial development plan of the Lubelskie Voievodship.

## 2. Genesis of the railway line Brest–Chełm

To find the origin of the Brest–Chełm railway line we must look back to the sixties of the nineteenth century. Following the suppression of the January Uprising on the former territory of the Republic of Poland, Russian tsar authorities instigated a program of developing strongholds and connecting railway lines (W. Wojasiewicz, 2009).

The key role fell to Brest stronghold located on the borderline of the Kingdom of Poland. In 1870, a private railroad Warsaw–Terespol reached Brest, following the State funded prolongation of the line from Terespol. In 1871, a railway line with Moscow and Smoleńsk, later called the Moscow–Brest line, became operable. Railway lines Brest–Grajewo and Brest–Kiev started operating two years later. Each railway line had a separate station, with the stations, after some time, marked by numbers. In order to avoid difficulties in using several stations in the node, Moscow–Brest line built a single station, opened in Brest to all the lines in 1886. Today, this station is called Central Brest.

Under the railway development programme, Vistula River Railroad (*Nadwiślańska*) was built in the seventies of the nineteenth century. In 1877, it linked Mława, a border town at the time, with Kovel though Nowogeorgijewsk (Modlin), Warsaw, Iwangorod (Dęblin), Lublin, Chełm. A branch line from Iwangorod to Łuków along the Warsaw–Terespol line, which let the Iwangorod and Brest strongholds be connected (Z. Taylor, 2007).

Railway investments slowed down in the second half of the seventies of the nineteenth century due to perturbations of the Russian banking system. Further activity was resumed at the beginning of the next decade. Plans were made for a 1500 km long railway network called Poleskie railway, though not all sections lay in the Poleskie region (e.g. the line Siedlce–Małkinia). Their construction took place in the years 1882–1887. The line Brest–Chełm, approved by tsar Alexander on March 29, 1884, was a section of the Poleskie lines (W. Wojasiewicz, 2009).

The preparatory work (land acquisition and expropriation) in course of constructing the line Brest–Chełm, which was financed by the state budget, started in December 1885. Ground works started in April 1886 and were generally completed by the end of the year. By 1887, the construction of hydro-technical infrastructure was in progress. The line, which cost 3 166 thousand roubles, was launched on June 21, 1887 (W. Wojasiewicz, 2009).

The military designation of the line (strategic line joining Warsaw–Terespol rail and Vistula River Railroad) meant that in designing this route along the

river Bug, no attention was given to joining locations nearby (Sz. Komusiński, 2010). Only major obstructions were taken into account. In effect, it featured only five built stations and five stops<sup>3</sup>. Looking from the Brest side these were – on the right bank of the Bug River: Bernady (stop), Stradecz (station), Dubitsa (stop), Domachevo (station), Przyborowo (stop), Włodawa (station) and on the left bank: Sobibór (stop), Uhrusk (station), Ruda (stop), Chełm (station). The stations (with the exception of Stradecz) featured several wooden housing structures, and in Włodawa and Chełm warehouses were built, additionally Chełm boasted a two-stand locomotive shed and two turntables. Water reached the stations from the Bug River (in Chełm from Uherka River) and water towers were built to supply the steam engines. The line had one set of rail tracks and foundations for a second set. The initially Russian gauged tracks (1520 mm) were adapted to relevant gauging depending on the changing borderline. The engineering facilities included: 11 steel bridges, three wooden bridges and 30 wooden bridges with concrete abutments, substituting culverts. The tracks could be crossed at levelled ground in 80 locations. Telegraph and military wires stretched along the tracks (W. Wojasiewicz, 2009).

It is worth noting that Włodawa featured the biggest steel bridge on the Bug River. The bridge was a three span frame trestle, 225 m long supported on two abutments and two pillars. The bridge was constructed by the company *Towarzystwo Zakładów Mechanicznych Lilpop, Rau i Lowenstein S.A.* The bridge was destroyed during World War One (1915) and rebuilt. Unfortunately, it was again destroyed during the next war in 1944<sup>4</sup> and with the state border set on the Bug River, no reconstruction was undertaken splitting the continuity of the entire Brest–Chełm line.

Important historical facts include its takeover, in November 1918, by the Polish Management Board of State Railways in Vilnius and the use of this route during World War Two (1942–43) by Nazi Germans to transport Jews to the extermination camp in Sobibor. Access to the railway line running across the vast secluded wooded area was one of the reasons for choosing the location for this camp (M. Bem, 2011).

In reviewing the history of the Brest–Chełm line, it is worthwhile to devote some time to the station built for Włodawa – a town lying by the rail crossing of the Bug River. The station was built on the right bank of the river, in the nearest possible place around

<sup>3</sup> The number of stops increased with time.

<sup>4</sup> In 1939 the railway bridge over the Bug River was only damaged. After some repairs, Germans used the bridge during the war.





Fig. 1. Station Włodawa in Belarus in 2019.

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3 km from Włodawa, which lies on the right bank. The railway station was linked with the town by a road and wooden road bridge (R. Anisiewicz, 2018). The station was constructed on the land remaining the property of Count Tomasz Zamoyski. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, a settlement developed called in his honour Tomaszówka. The neighbouring location of a wood treating plant for sleepers of the Vilnius DOKP, and the development of three timber mills benefitting from the surrounding timber resources contributed to the settlement's development (S. Michalski, 1939). The emerging of the settlement in the twentieth century and its later development is a classic example of the city-genic function of railways. It is interesting that though the station Włodawa is in the town Tomaszówka, following the setting of the state border along the Bug River and after becoming part of the USSR, it was not renamed (Fig. 1). On the Polish side, the station Bug Włodawski set up in Orchówek in 1919, in the turnout on the left bank, was renamed Włodawa in 1951. From the introduction of the state border, it served as the railway station for Włodawa (M. Stiasny, R. Stankiewicz, 2014). The situation is a curiosity, perhaps the only such case on the railway maps worldwide, where two different railway stations have the same name in two countries and neither is located on the territory of the town whose name it carries.

### 3. Brest–Włodawa railway line parameters

This single track, non-electrified railway line Brest–Włodawa lies in the Brest Voblast and Raion in Belarus. Passengers can commute from the station

Central Brest. The length of the line to the station Włodawa stretches for 69.36 km. In Brest, trains towards Włodawa also call at Poleski Brest and South Brest and the stop at South West, which lies between them. The station South Brest is the node with lines to Włodawa and Kovel through Malaryta. The line South Brest–Włodawa stretches for over 67.76 km. There are at present two railway stations along this section of the line: Dubitsa and Włodawa in the town Tomaszówka and 16 passenger stops (Fig. 2).

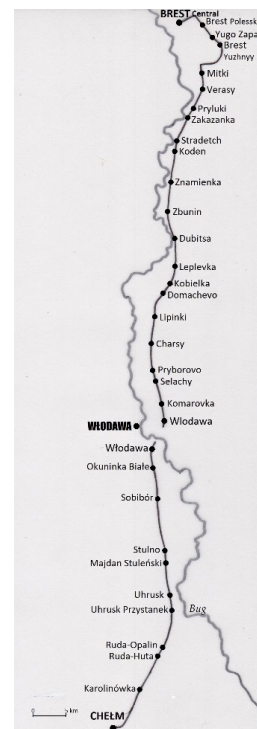


Fig. 2. Railway line Brest–Włodawa–Chełm.

Source: own study.

Belarus Railways operate the Brest–Włodawa line in cargo traffic (carriage of timber, grain, fertilisers, fodder) and passenger traffic (Ю. Федоренко, 2016). Two pairs of passenger trains run regularly. The technical condition of the line is not satisfactory as evidenced by the travel time of *circa* 120 minutes, including 17 minutes in the area of Brest (Belarus Railways). Passenger traffic relies on DR1A diesel train sets manufactured in USSR. It takes on board bicycles. The cost of the passage from Brest to Włodawa in 2020 was 1.53 BYN, which in Polish currency is equivalent to about PLN 3. The price is lower in particular sections with discounts for entitled groups.

#### 4. Tourist assets of the Brest–Włodawa railway line

For individuals interested in railway tourism, travelling by train is an interesting experience. The specifics of travelling in the visited country, the distinctiveness of the rules governing train journeys and other services, the lower price of tickets, all increase its attractiveness to foreigners (M. Więckowski, 2010).

Those interested in learning more about the Brest–Włodawa line can cross the border at the border crossing Terespol–Brest, or Sławatycze–Damachava, where they can go to the nearest railway station (in Brest, Damachava, Leplevka). The Polish tourist may be surprised by the necessity to show an ID on buying a ticket to stations in the cross-border region, where the line runs, not only by foreigners

ing the purchase of two tourist services<sup>5</sup> with the name of locations to be visited. The border regime on trains means the presence of border guards in train sets to Włodawa, controlling at random ID cards or the entitlement to be on this territory among travelling passengers. Such controls can take place at railway stations and stops, continually observed by borderers. Travelling by train, we can see (e.g. Dubitsa) elements of border infrastructure separating the border zone from the rest of the region.

Railway tourists may find interest in Belarus railways infrastructure; e.g. rolling stock, stations or railway stops. In these terms, the journey by a six unit, wide gauged DR1A diesel train set produced by Soviet Russia, with 628 seats operating on the line Brest–Włodawa can be an attraction (Fig. 3).

The train station Central Brest, the starting point to Włodawa is very interesting (Fig. 4). The presently operating facility was built in the interwar period in place of the station demolished in 1915. Following the devastation during World War Two, the station was converted in the fifties to the Stalin classicism style. The general renovation at the beginning of the twenty first century is responsible for the station's present appearance. The station comprises several buildings, including the main and suburban station with departures to Włodawa.

The Włodawa station is also interesting with its historical brick station building dating back to 1897. Destroyed during World War Two, the facility was reconstructed as late as in the sixties of the twentieth



Fig. 3. A Włodawa–Brest train at the station Włodawa in 2019.

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but also by Belarus citizens. Foreigners travelling to the border region should have a voucher document-

<sup>5</sup> Such a voucher is treated as the document, which entitles foreigners to enter the visa-free tourist and recreation zone Brest–Grodno, including border regions in the zone.





Fig. 4. Railway station Central Brest in 2019.

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Fig. 5. The interior of Włodawa station in Belarus in 2019.

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century (Ю. Федоренко, 2016). The interior decorating and the building surroundings today attract attention (Fig. 5). The existence of the station Włodawa

in Belarus, besides Włodawa station in Poland is perhaps another exceptional phenomenon world-wide.



Another curiosity is the stop Kodeń, which is named after a well-known pilgrimage site in Poland. Before World War Two, pilgrims journeying to the St. Mary's sanctuary on the other side of the Bug River bank got off the train at this station. Another interesting site is Dubitsa with its station building, dating 1897, which is entered in the register of historical buildings (Fig. 6). Belarus filmmakers, who choose the location for their war films (*Szlak rowerowy...*, 2014), appreciate its historical assets.

a raion city with a population of *circa* 315 thousand, which is located by the Polish border. Tourists are attracted mainly by the stronghold built in the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century, which contributed, in later years, to the appearance of the railway line Brest–Chełm. For railway fans, the Railway Museum near the stronghold may be very interesting. The city offers other attractions including museums, architectural and cultural sites as well as cruises on



Fig. 6. Dubitsa station in 2019.

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The train journey from Brest to Włodawa gives an opportunity to enjoy the natural environment of the most southeast part of Belarus. A physical and geographical line cuts across the mesoregion Polesie Brest, which is part of the macro-region West Polesie (J. Kondracki, 2013). The wide plains disclose, on travelling by train, inland dune belts, which form small elevations covered by pine forests. The railway line runs through forested areas, which in the southern part of the region are nature reserves of national rank Pribuzhskoye Polesie, part to the international UNESCO biosphere West Polesie Transboundary Biosphere Reserve. The landscape features scattered agricultural areas and small settlements, often-wooden architecture.

The anthropogenic tourist assets of the region, accessible during train journeys, centre generally in bigger towns. The biggest role is assigned to Brest –

board small passenger vessels along the Mukhavets.

Another tourist attraction may be the stay in the *circa* thousand strong Tomaszówka, which hosts the railway station Włodawa. Railway fascinated tourists will enjoy the station, its environment and the spot where the tracks of the Brest–Chełm line suddenly end (Fig. 7) The location offers a unique attraction in Belarus – the Museum of Astronautics connected with Pyotr Klimuk – an astronaut born and brought up in the nearby Kamarovka who flew into space with Mirosław Hermaszewski in 1978. Near the railway station, we can also see the cemetery of *circa* 1300 German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian soldiers who lost their lives during World War One. The development of tourism in the most southwest part of Belarus is supported by the tourist infrastructure for longer stays developed at the beginning of the twenty first century, which includes a hotel, restau-



Fig. 7. The end of the Brest–Włodawa tracks in Tomaszówka in 2019.

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rant and recreation and sport facility 'Zwiedznyj' (R. Anisiewicz, 2019).

Another location, lying along the railway line Brest–Włodawa, worth noting is Damachava with a population of 1.1 thousand, which is the local services centre featuring historical sacral buildings (Roman Catholic Church, and an Orthodox Church), a protestant cemetery as well as remains of a Dutch settlements by the Bug River (A. Abramczuk, 2010), and Leplevka, which hosts the Ecological Centre of the Nature Reserve Pribuzhskoye Polesie. It provides tourist information, a tourist equipment renting facility (e.g. bicycles) and 15 boarding beds (R. Anisiewicz, 2019).

## 5. Brest–Włodawa railway line parameters

The railway line 81 Chełm–Włodawa is a 45.47 km long non-electrified one-track line. It runs through the gminas Chełm and Ruda-Huta in the Chełmski Powiat and gminas Wola Uhruska and Włodawa (rural) in Włodawski Powiat. The line has ten stops (Fig. 2). The station Włodawa is located in Orchówek, about 4 km from the town centre. The stops Ruda-Huta, Majdan Stuleński and Okuninka Białe were opened in 2015.

Following World War Two, the line Chełm–Włodawa provided passenger services up to April

3, 2000. Six train sets, including one on a shortened route Chełm–Uhrusk, operated along the route in the eighties of the twentieth century. Starting the nineties, the number of courses was reduced to three train pairs (*Sieczowe Rozkłady Jazdy Pociągów* – train timetable). After suspension of the connection in April 2000, regular traffic was revived on June 1, 2000 at the motion of self-governments, which declared co-financing of the line. The timetables showed five train pairs including two travelling along the entire route and three Chełm–Uhrusk connections (M. Moczulski, 2000). Later their number was reduced to two train pairs. The trains operated to November 12, 2002 when regular traffic was wound up (M. Stiasny, R. Stankiewicz, 2014). Passenger traffic was activated on weekends and seasonally starting August 11, 2012 (R. Jasiński, 2013).

The line Chełm–Włodawa presently (2020) serves cargo traffic and seasonally (June–September) passenger traffic. Cargo shipments embrace mainly timber from Sobibor forests loaded in Włodawa, Sobibor and Ruda-Opalin. Seasonal carriage of passengers takes place by Polregio SA 103 railbuses, fit to carry bicycles (Fig. 8). The technical conditions of the tracks forced the reduction of travelling speed from 60 to 40 km/h (*Regulamin przydzielania...*) Thus, the entire journey for passengers lasted about 80 minutes.





Fig. 8. Włodawa–Chełm line railbus at the station Włodawa in 2020.

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Though the traffic is low, several overhauls of the line Chełm–Włodawa were carried out in the last few years. Two bridges were reconstructed, including the biggest one over the Uherka River in Ruda-Opalin. The track was upgraded to the speed of 120 km/h and the mandatory axles load of 221 kN. Upgrading works also included the construction of new platforms at three new stops and the Chełm station departure infrastructure. In 2020, a road flyover was constructed over the tracks in the municipal section of the national road 12, taking into account a possible second railway track line (R. Jasiński, 2020).

## 6. Tourist assets of the railway line Chełm–Włodawa

The railway line Chełm–Włodawa runs across valuable nature areas characterised by diversified landscape on the borderline of the macro-regions Wołyńskie Polesie in the south and West Polesie in the north (J. Kondracki, 2013). Leaving Chełm towards Włodawa, we can note the sundry configuration of the landscape Chełmskie Hills, with protruding chalk rocks. The elevated chalk protrusions gradually descend eastwards to the plain called Obniżenie Dubieńskie, which in the west meets with the Uhruski Arch of the Chełmskie Hills macro-region, which can be seen from the train windows in the area of

Wola Uhruska (station Uhrusk). Chełmskie Hills and Obniżenie Dubieńskie constitute Polesie Wołyńskie mesoregions dominated by agricultural land. Moving on from the village Wola Uhruska, the train enters generally forested areas, local marshlands of the Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Plain – a mesoregion of West Polesie. This part of the journey discloses the Sobibor forests – another valuable nature complex.

The richness of the region's natural environment along the Chełm–Włodawa line is further highlighted by its course through two landscape parks established in 1983. In the section between Chełm and Karolinówka, the tracks go across the Chełmski Landscape Park, including its most valuable fragment Chełmskie Marsh, which is a unique peatland area, which provides a habitat for many bird species and plants (*Centralny Rejestr Form ...*). The northern part of the route (between Majdan Stuleński and Okuninka Białe) weaves through the forests of the Sobibor Landscape Park featuring diversified ecosystems ranging from dry to very wet. The pine stand dominates the area with irregular patches of birch. Alder swamps stretch along the railway tracks (K. Izdebski, T. Grądział, 1981). You can often see various fauna species (e.g. roe deer, elk).

The Sobibor Landscape Park embraces six nature reserves. The western border of the fauna reserve Małoziemce, protecting the refuge for grey herons,

is adjacent to the railway tracks between the stops Majdan Stuleński and Stulno. Other sites are nearby, distanced up to several kilometres from the line. The wetland and marshes reserves lay east of the railway tracks: Three Lakes, Brudzieniec Lake and Magazyn. The reserve Jezioro Orchowe (lake), which is of a similar character, lies eastward of the railway stop Okuninka Białe. Żółwiowe Błota (turtle marches) provide a protected habitat for the biggest known population of European pond turtles in Europe and lie *circa* 3 km west of the stop Sobibor (*Centralny Rejestr Form...*).

Sobibor forests boast a wealth of groundcover, which were for years the objective of those interested in picking its wealth. They usually got off at the stops Sobibor and Stulno. The train schedule, trimmed to summer and autumn weekends, limited this form of access to the forests, though some continue to enjoy the ride today.

The railway infrastructure aspect is crucial for train tourism. The line Chełm–Włodawa features historical, often falling to ruin, unexploited wooden stations in Ruda Opalin, Sobibor, Wola Uhruska (station). The railway station in Ruda Opalin resembles, in architectural terms, facilities built in Siberia and is the sole example of such a building in Poland. Other interesting sites, remembering the tsar epoch, are the wooden water tower at the Uhrusk station, the lodgings for railway workers and the gateman's lodges along the route (R. Jasiński, 2010). A twenty-century brick station building keeps standing at the station Włodawa

in Orchówek. Approximately 2 km away from the station, we can see at the end of the railway embankment the remains of the stone abutment of the old bridge over the Bug River.

The station Sobibor was more fortunate as an overhaul of the station started in 2020, at the initiative of Starostwo Powiatowe in Włodawa under an investment project to convert the station into a Historical Education Centre 'Sobibor Station' (Fig. 9). The station building witnessed in silence the operation of the German death camp in Sobibor as one of its few silent witnesses. Under the project, co-funded by the EU, the building will undergo renovation and fitting for its function. The station will house an exhibition hall, a reading room and the Sobibor archives. The stations building will host a new railway platform, a parking lot for cars and bicycles as well as an exhibition walkway. The Centre plans to hold sessions for youth, exhibitions, talks, conferences, art *en plein air*, etc. (W. Zakrzewski, 2020). A nearby building will host a pre-war post office. Its basement will be turned into a lamp room with historical railway equipment (R. Jasiński, 2020). The entire facility is to take on the rustic style of the twenties in the twentieth century.

The Sobibor station lies nearby the premises of the death camp, where Germans murdered *circa* 180 thousand Jews from Poland, Austria, the Netherlands, USSR and other countries. In recent years, following archaeological and historical studies, the area was developed anew and a museum building was erected



Fig. 9. Renovation works at the Sobibor railway station in 2020.

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to be opened to the public in 2020 (R. Anisiewicz, 2019).

Other anthropogenic assets of the regions, which are accessible thanks to railway connections, can be found in the town of Chełm and Włodawa. These centres shaped by the multicultural past feature valuable architectural historic sites. Both towns feature Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish temples. The unique Synagogue Complex in Włodawa is a museum today. Old stalls, stands and shambles forming a tetragon are characteristic for this town of 13 thousand inhabitants as is the water line measuring point on the Bug River. Chełm, with a population of 62 thousand, features outstanding sacral historical sites and additionally exceptional chalk tunnels under the town. In terms of railway tourism, the modernist urban design of the 'Dyrekcja' estate is an interesting site, which was built in 1928-39 with the intension of moving the East Regional Directorate of State Railways from Radom to Chełm, which never took place. It was designed to lie south of the station Chełm, according to the concept of a garden town. Apart from Gdynia, this is the only example in Poland of such comprehensive urban planning in the period of the Second Republic.

Less popular, though worthy of attention sites along the railway line Chełm–Włodawa are the seventeenth century Catholic church and nineteenth century Orthodox Church in Uhrusk (Uhrusk Stop), the eighteenth century church in Orchówek and the remains of

the palace complex in Majdan Stuleński (R. Jasiński, 2010).

An exclusive tourist attraction lying nearly 3 km from the Włodawa railway station is the tri-border point of Poland, Ukraine and Belarus. It is the only river border linking Poland with two non EU states among six tri-border points along the Polish border.

Apart from the cognizant assets of the railway line, Chełm–Włodawa provides passenger transport to recreational and leisure locations in the region. Tourist accommodation facilities near the railway cluster in Wola Uhruska (Uhrusk station) by the Bug River, and provide agro tourism services developing since the nineties of the twentieth century. This locality and its neighbourhood are also popular with anglers fishing in the Bug River. Easier access to this popular, among Lubelszczyzna inhabitants, leisure areas was provided by establishing a railway stop near Jezioro Białe (lake) in Okuninka Białe, distanced several kilometres from the locality. For bicycle riders the distance is not a problem but for pedestrians the distance may be a barrier in reaching the destination. In Okuninka, railway fans will find an original Pdn post carriage – probably an unexpected site at this location. The carriage was adapted to a post office – 'Post Station' on the sidetracks in the middle of the locality with a specially constructed mini platform (Fig. 10). This is the only example of adapting a travelling post office withdrawn from operation (K. Lewandowski, 2008).



Fig. 10. Travelling Post Office coach converted to a post Office in Okuninka in 2020.

Author: Renata Anisiewicz.

## 7. The Chełm–Włodawa line in the Programme Kolej+

The article depicts tourist options provided by the Chełm–Włodawa line in the year 2020. Its attractiveness could grow with the renovation and management of railway facilities. Students of the Faculty of Architecture at the Lublin University of Technology, in cooperation with Włodawa authorities and Poviats authorities, prepared in 2018 their suggestions on revitalization of railway Line 81 in a functional and spatial study (Lubelskie: Linia..., 2018). As of today, only the revitalisation works on the Sobibor station are progressing.

The State Programme for Closing Gaps in the Local and Regional Railway Infrastructure called *Kolej+*, signed December 3, 2019, gives hope of reviving a regular connection along the route and further actions contributing to economic revival of the region. The programme is to reduce transport related exclusion by reviving local railway links and ensuring access to inter-voievodship passenger transport. Under the programme, 21 sections are to be revived linking towns with a population count of over 10 thousand inhabitants. The completion of the entire project, up to 85% of which is to be financed by the State, is planned for 2028.

Upgrading of the Chełm–Włodawa line involves the technical infrastructure and *circa* 7.5 kilometres of new rail tracks leading to the town of Włodawa. The project would link the town directly to the rail network and revive passenger traffic along the entire 81 line and thanks to the Dorohusk–Lublin trunk line 7 link it to the Chełm–Włodawa line, consequently providing convenient railway transport to Lublin for gminas lying along the border. The entire project was initially anticipated by PKP Polish Railway Lines to cost PLN 230 million and would entail the share of self-governments to the minimum sum of PLN 34.5 million.

The first step was the signing of a letter of intent, in Włodawa on July 9, 2020, regarding plans of reviving the connection Chełm–Włodawa and improving access to rail transport in the town of Włodawa by self-governments of respective poviats and gminas across which the line passes (J. Madrjas, 2020). The respective self-governments passed resolutions to participate in the *Kolej+* programme by August 26, 2020. The first preparatory phase of assessing the applications is to be completed by November 27, 2020. The second phase (by November 28 2021 at the latest) projects the development of the initial planning and prognostic study by the territorial self-governmental units. Once the projects are found eligible and are accepted by the Ministry of Infrastructure in

April 2022, contracts for project implementation are to be signed and works initiated.

## 8. Summary

The railway line Brest–Chełm, operating locally in the cross-border region of Poland and Belarus may supplement the tourist offer of the region. The line's assets favour the development of railway tourism associated with travel by train and discovering railway related facilities, as well as the option to reach other interesting sites lying along the route.

The opening of cross-border regions in Belarus for foreign tourists in 2018 stimulated the activation of the entire Brest–Chełm line. The activation is beneficial not only for this country. It also enriches the range of tourist attractions for persons in border regions of eastern Lubelszczyzna (including foreigners), who may enjoy a short trip abroad. For Powiat Włodawski, which is facing social and economic problems (depopulation, unemployment), and which lies on route of the railway line, this issue is important as the region counts on tourist development. It is worth adding that the Lubelskie Voievodship region demonstrates one the most meagre railway networks in Poland. Railway lines, particularly those attractive for tourists, are not an obvious component of the cultural heritage. Thus, they require more care and gearing up of their undisclosed potential.

The Polish side of the Brest–Chełm line offers landscape related attractions because it runs across valuable nature areas of sundry topographic profile. The attractiveness of the Belarus part for Polish tourists may originate, to a significant degree, in the different rules governing railway travelling in the country, particularly in the cross-border region which the line Brest–Włodawa crosses. Both sections of the line lead to interesting tourists sites lying in its vicinity.

The present restrictions to the development of railway tourism on the Polish side of the border result from its seasonal weekend timetable. The deteriorating railway infrastructure may fail to impress (a positive exception to the situation can be seen at the station Sobibor, where revitalisation steps were undertaken in 2020). An obstacle, which bars access to the Belarus section of the Brest–Chełm line is the missing road, or at least a pedestrian or bicycle border crossing in Włodawski Powiat close to the railway. It forces tourists to travel to distanced border crossings in Sławatycze or Terespol. Train tourists without bicycles may find it difficult to reach attractions distanced from the railway stops. This situation refers particularly to the holiday locality Okuninka and Włodawa, though here Powiat authorities coordinated, for the first time in 2020, the timetables of trains and bus-



es commuting between station Włodawa and the town.

The unstable political situation in Belarus is a threat to train tourism in the Belarus section of the Brest–Chełm line generating obstacles for foreigners in crossing the border and staying in the country, especially in the border zone. Persons who fail to respect the rules of behaviour in the border zone (e.g. entering forested areas close to the border is banned) may meet with restrictions.

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