

Juliusz Engelhardt

Prof. dr hab.

Uniwersytet Szczeciński

Instytut Gospodarki Przestrzennej

i Geografii Społeczno-Ekonomicznej

juliusz.engelhardt@usz.edu.pl

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Railway Infrastructure of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship During the Socio-Economic Transformation Years

Abstract: The subject of the article is the development of the railway infrastructure of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship in the period of socio-economic transformation. After an introduction containing a short historical outline, a significant regression of the railway infrastructure in Western Pomerania in the first phase of the transformation period covering the years 1990 - 2004 was indicated. the EU budget perspective 2007-2013 and investments implemented in this period under the Regional Operational Programme. The basic documents concerning the transport policy of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship from 2002 and 2010, which defined the needs of the region in the development of railway infrastructure, were also indicated. In the summary of the article, the advantages and disadvantages of the existing railway network in Western Pomerania were pointed out, with the disadvantages clearly determining the directions of past investments in this area of transport infrastructure.

Keywords: Transport policy; Railway infrastructure; Line and station investments

Introduction - A Brief Historical Overview

The history of the development of railway infrastructure in Western Pomerania intertwines with the history of the Prussian railway network, which in the current area of Poland dates back to the opening of the Wrocław – Oława railway section in 1842. In 1843, the first railway line connecting Berlin with Szczecin was inaugurated in Western Pomerania. Subsequent development of the West Pomeranian railway network, still under Prussian control, included, among others: the construction of the Szczecin–Poznań connection (1846–1848) [dates provided from sources: 5, 18], Gdańsk (1859–1870), Wrocław (1869–1877), Kołobrzeg, Koszalin, and Świnoujście (1882–1901), as well as the construction of numerous supplementary connections, such as Ulikowo–Piła, Stargard–Siekierki, and Szczecinek–Kołobrzeg.

In the winter and spring of 1945, the railway network of Western Pomerania was severely damaged due to military actions in the fortified area of the Pomeranian Wall, including battles for Kołobrzeg and Szczecin, as well as the large concentration of troops and fighting in the southern part of the region caused by the forcing of the Oder River in Siekierki and Gozdowice. During World War II, Western Pomerania saw the destruction of, among others: over 1,300 kilometers of tracks, approximately 1,000 switches, over 140 bridges, and 90% of railway signaling equipment [2, p. 223]. The extent of wartime destruction was further exacerbated by the victorious Soviet troops' mass removal of all removable railway equipment and devices, which included not only rolling stock, station equipment, and telephone lines but also railway tracks.

The Polish administration took over the Western Pomeranian railway network in the second half of 1945, dedicating the initial years to its reconstruction, particularly of critical elements (bridge crossings), clearing railway access to Szczecin Główny station and depot from various directions (bridges over the Regalica, bridge over the Parnica Canal, double-

track link Szczecin Wstowo – Szczecin Główny), and also constructing, between 1947 and 1949, a second track on the "Poznań" section Szczecin – Krzyż [5, p. 6], which constituted and continues to constitute a key railway connection for Western Pomerania not only with Poznań but also with most of the remaining country.

In the Szczecin railway hub, the effects of wartime destruction were still felt in the 1960s because it was only in 1964 that the railway bridge over the Oder River directly adjacent to Szczecin Główny station was put into operation, and a direct southern connection Szczecin Główny – Gryfino, bypassing Szczecin Dąbie station, was inaugurated [5, p. 6]. The 1970s and 1980s marked a gradual improvement in the quality of the Western Pomeranian railway network, primarily as a result of the modernization of the line then known as the Nadodrzańska Coal Main Line (environmental name: "Nadodrżanka") between Szczecin and Kostrzyn on the Oder River, as well as the access line to the Świnoujście port Szczecin – Świnoujście, and the ongoing electrification of main railway lines. The first fully electrified line in Western Pomerania by the end of 1978 was the Poznań – Szczecin line, but the most intensive electrification of the railway network occurred in the 1980s. By 1983, all lines and sections within the Szczecin hub were electrified, followed by, among others, the lines: Szczecin – Świnoujście (1984), Szczecin – Kostrzyn on the Oder (1985), Stargard – Gdańsk (1989), Piła – Białogard (1989) – totaling 915 kilometers of Western Pomeranian railway lines electrified by the end of that decade [2, p. 229].

First Phase of the Transformation Period 1990 - 2004

The initial phase of the systemic transformation period, conventionally set between 1990 and 2004, up to the full accession of Poland to the European Union, did not leave a positive mark on the history of the development of the Western Pomeranian railway network. It was characterized - today one might even say symbolically - by a significant regression in railway infrastructure due to the suspension of services and, in some cases, their physical dismantling. Passenger rail services were suspended during this period on lines or sections such as Szczecin Główny – Trzebież Szczeciński, Worowo – Wysoka Kamieńska, Pyrzyce – Siekierki, Pyrzyce – Gryfino, Barlinek – Wierzchowo Pomorskie, and Świdwin – Grzmiąca due to a sharp decline in demand. Some lines or sections with suspended services, especially those where freight services were also halted, were subject to physical dismantling. Examples include sections like Chwarstnica – Swobnica, Złocieniec – Połczyn Zdrój, and Barlinek – Głazów.

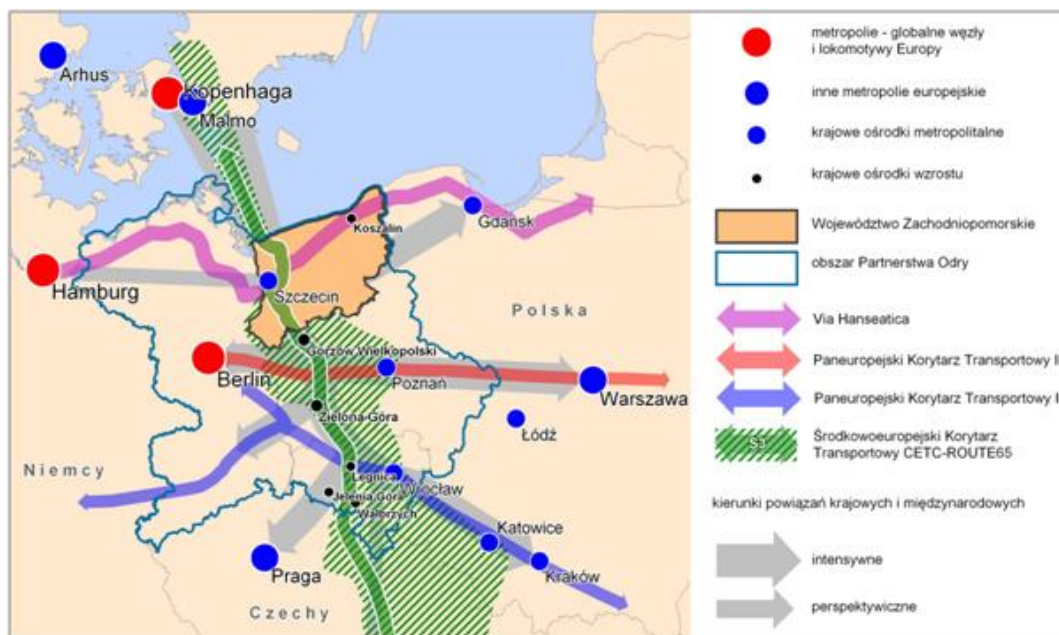
However, it should be noted that in the 1980s, Poland joined the European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC) [15] and subsequently the European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Facilities (AGTC) [16]. Based on these agreements, the most important Western Pomeranian railway line designated as E-59, running Świnoujście – Szczecin – Poznań – Wrocław – Opole and further to the Polish-Czech border crossing Chałupki – Bohumin, was incorporated into the AGC network. Additionally, the Nadodrzańska Main Line, designated as CE-59, running Świnoujście – Szczecin (shared with E-59) – Kostrzyn – Zielona Góra – Wrocław – Opole – Chałupki – Bohumin, was included in the AGTC network, with the section from Wrocław to the Czech border sharing the route with E-59. Furthermore, two branches were established for CE-59: C-59/1 Nowa Sól – Węglińiec – Zgorzelec – Zawidów and C-59/2 Wrocław – Międzylesie, extending to the Polish-Czech border in Frydländ and Lichkov, respectively. Both lines were and continue to be of fundamental importance for the Szczecin – Świnoujście port complex. These lines connect Poznań and central Poland, as well as Lower and Upper Silesia, with the West Pomeranian ports, leading southwest and south to Wrocław and further to the border with the Czech Republic, and through Opole, Katowice, Kraków, and Rzeszów to the Ukrainian border at the Medyka – Mościska railway crossing.

In the 1990s, Poland's key transport policy documents identified lines included in the AGC and AGTC agreements as the most predisposed and prioritized for future modernization, undoubtedly signaling the fundamental importance of the aforementioned Western Pomeranian lines for the country's transport system [8, p. 48]. However, during the initial phase of the socio-economic transformation, Polish transport policy, while declaratively recognizing the importance of lines E-59 and CE-59, effectively neglected their significance in terms of the urgent need for comprehensive modernization to improve access to the West Pomeranian ports from the mainland and enhance the quality of railway connectivity for the population with the rest of the country.

During this period, up to May 1, 2004, Poland was an associated member of the European Union under the so-called European Agreement [14]. It was also a time when, within the Community itself, along with the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which established the European Union, the issues of Trans-European Networks (TEN-T) first emerged. In terms of railway infrastructure, the TEN-T networks have included the most important railway lines in the "old" European Union countries since their inception, while associated and aspiring EU member states, including Poland, participated in three Pan-European Transport Conferences (1991 – Prague, 1994 – Crete, 1997 – Helsinki) between 1991 and 1997. These conferences resulted in the adoption—subject to European Union approval - of a list of priority transport corridors for Central and Eastern Europe, consistent with the EU's TEN-T network. The priority transport infrastructure corridors established at that time, including railway corridors known as the Crete Corridors, of which four passed through Polish territory and could be financially supported by various pre-accession funds, encompassed the main railway lines in Poland identified in the AGC agreement, namely lines E-20, E-30, E-65, and CE-65 from the AGTC agreement, but did not include the most important Western Pomeranian railway lines, E-59 and CE-59.

Second Phase of the Transformation Period from 2005 Onwards

The aforementioned shortcomings in Polish transport policy concerning the transport network of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship could not be rectified within the framework of the accession treaty [13], under which the Polish transport infrastructure network was incorporated into the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) along with all railway lines previously covered by the AGC and AGTC agreements, totaling 5.3 thousand kilometers, including the Western Pomeranian lines E-59 and CE-59. This was because, regardless of this inclusion, the earlier corridor priorities remained in effect. The situation of the transport system of Western Pomerania being effectively excluded from the investment priorities of Polish transport policy is well illustrated – apparently - by the map presented in Figure 1. The map intentionally highlights the international connections of the West Pomeranian region in the east–west and north–south axes. In the former, there is a clear indication of the corridor omission for the West Pomeranian Voivodeship concerning the modernization priorities of transport infrastructure connecting Western Pomerania with the rest of the country (Corridors II and III bypass the region from the south). Instead, aside from official transport policy, historically shaped transport connections of the Baltic regions - Hamburg, Front Pomerania, and West Pomerania with Gdańsk Pomerania and Königsberg - are emphasized, bearing the name *Via Hanseatica*.



1. External communication connections of Western Pomerania [4]

In the north–south axis on the map, the Central European Transport Corridor CETC-ROUTE 65, running from the Swedish region of Skåne (Malmö) to Świnoujście and then through Szczecin – Zielona Góra and Wrocław to the Czech Republic and further to Southern Europe, is marked as being disregarded by the then official transport policy. The idea to create this transport corridor originated several years after Poland's accession to the European Union in 2009 within local government circles, when fourteen regions from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, and Italy signed an agreement to promptly implement the north–south railway corridor [19]. In 2010, an agreement was signed by the marshals of seven Polish regions associated with the Baltic-Adriatic Corridor, which in 2012 was transformed into the Association of Polish Regions of the Baltic-Adriatic Transport Corridor based in Gdańsk [19]. It can thus be stated that the idea of subsequently creating the Baltic-Adriatic TEN-T core network corridor originated from grassroots actions of Polish local authorities. Poland's full accession to the European Union in May 2004 undoubtedly marked an important temporal turning point in many aspects of the country's socio-economic functioning, initiating a second distinct period of transformation that continues to the present day. It is also unquestionable that with accession, especially from 2005 onwards, new development impulses emerged in the entire Polish transport system, including railways, thanks to EU funds. The first major investment projects in the railway infrastructure of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship appeared within the framework of the first full EU budget perspective with the implementation of the sectoral Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment (POIiŚ) for 2007–2013. This programme envisaged significant EU funding for railway investments and included dozens of projects, including the modernization of the E-59 railway line sections Poznań – Krzyż and Krzyż – Szczecin. The local government authorities of the West Pomeranian region fully supported this initiative and also advocated for a series of other investment projects in railway infrastructure, as indicated by a document adopted by the West Pomeranian Voivodeship Sejmik in 2002 [11]. According to this document, the priority investment projects in railway infrastructure at that time far exceeded the modernization project of the West Pomeranian sections of the E-59 line and should include the following [11, pp. 57–58]:

1. Completion of Stage I of the modernization of the main line 351 Poznań – Szczecin (103.8 km within the voivodeship) – included in the AGC agreement as line E-59.

2. Implementation of Stage II of the modernization of the Poznań – Szczecin line, included in the AGC agreement as E-59 and the CE-59 line included in the AGTC agreement, section Szczecin Dąbie – Świnoujście (100.7 km within the voivodeship) – to eliminate existing speed restrictions and ensure a target speed of 120 km/h for passenger trains.
3. Modernization of the Szczecin – Wrocław railway line (93.7 km within the voivodeship) – the so-called "Nadodrzańska Main Line" – included in the AGTC agreement as CE-59 – to eliminate existing speed restrictions and ensure a target speed of 120 km/h for passenger trains.
4. Modernization of railway line 202 Gdynia – Stargard Szczeciński (188.4 km within the voivodeship) – to eliminate existing speed restrictions and ensure a target speed of 120 km/h for passenger trains.
5. Completion of the modernization of the Szczecin Gumieńce – Grambow/Tantow railway border crossing, along with the construction of the Szczecin Zaleskie Łęgi halt station.
6. Modernization of certain railway lines of defensive importance to meet the parameters required by military authorities.
7. Modernization of line 210 Chojnice – Runowo Pomorskie (100.7 km within the voivodeship).
8. Modernization of line 402 Koszalin – Goleniów (142.9 km), including the electrification of the Goleniów – Kołobrzeg section (99.7 km) and the modernization of Kołobrzeg station.
9. Modernization of line 404 Szczecinek – Kołobrzeg (99.8 km) – to improve the transport accessibility of Kołobrzeg and its surroundings.
10. Construction of a western railway bypass of Szczecin, which should be connected to the Police Chemia railway station, running Szczecin Gumieńce – Dobra Szczecińska – Police Chemia, thereby eliminating the transportation of hazardous materials through the city of Szczecin.

In practice, in the subsequent years of implementing POIiŚ 2007–2013, it turned out that some significant projects planned during the programme's creation phase were significantly delayed, and others could not be implemented for various reasons. This included, for example, the planned modernization of the E-59 line section in West Pomerania. Projects that were canceled from the main list during later stages of the programme moved to later years and were replaced by projects from the reserve list or entirely new projects. In this way, the modernization project of the "Szczecin" section of the E-59 line was postponed to the next budget perspective, making it difficult to pinpoint a single direct cause for this postponement. On the one hand, delays in the programme arose from the government's failure to provide the so-called own contribution for financing EU projects. On the other hand, there were significant delays in the environmental approvals for the planned modernization, and finally, there was the factor of the so-called "over-sizing" of the entire project. The latter involved adopting the assumption that the entire E-59 section from Poznań to Szczecin would achieve a maximum speed parameter of 200 km/h after modernization, meaning that after modernization it would be a high-speed railway line rather than a conventional line with a maximum speed of 160 km/h. From a technical standpoint, a railway line with a maximum speed of 200 km/h, compared to a conventional line with a maximum speed of 160 km/h, fundamentally changes the scope of the investment, thereby significantly increasing the value of modernization. This affects not only the tracks themselves (requiring larger curve radii and greater distances between track axes on double-track lines) but also the scope of level crossings with roads, which must be two-level, as well as automation and traffic control devices, crossings and passages for various types of animals, line fencing, and soundproof

screens. An important impetus that led the then Polish transport authorities to abandon the modernization of the E-59 line sections in West Pomerania was the withdrawal in 2011 from the project of constructing and launching the high-speed railway line Warsaw – Łódź – Poznań/Wrocław (Project Y). This was because the E-59 section from Poznań to Szczecin at a maximum speed of 200 km/h was an integral part of the entire Project Y for building and launching high-speed rail services from 2008 onwards [3, pp. 76–80].

The First Regional Operational Programme (RPO) for 2007–2013

The West Pomeranian Voivodeship included two projects in the first Regional Operational Programme (RPO) for 2007–2013, namely:

- Modernization of the regional railway line 403 Wałcz – Ulikowo, to ensure efficient connections on the Wałcz – Kalisz Pomorski section and to increase the maximum speed to 100 km/h.
- Modernization of the regional railway line 402 Goleniów – Kołobrzeg, to increase the maximum speed to 120 km/h, along with the construction of a connection to the Szczecin-Goleniów Airport Port (approx. 4 km) and the construction of a passing loop between Mścice and Ustronie Morskie stations.

Both RPO projects were 100% completed as originally intended in the years 2012–2013.

Another transport policy document for the West Pomeranian region adopted in 2010 proposed further expansion of the necessary investment projects in railway infrastructure [12]. According to this document, in addition to the previously indicated priority railway infrastructure projects of the voivodeship that had not yet been undertaken or implemented, additional necessary investments should be included, such as, among others [12, pp. 77–82]:

1. Reconstruction and modernization of railway infrastructure in the ports of Szczecin and Świnoujście, along with the modernization of station infrastructure in the Szczecin – Świnoujście port complex (modernization of shunting station tracks, siding tracks, connections, and sidings in relation to engineering structures, automation devices, communication systems, and other equipment ensuring smooth railway operations in the ports).
2. Improvement of access to the port of Kołobrzeg from the land side (roads and railways).
3. Modernization of railway line 406 Szczecin Główny – Trzebież Szczeciński, particularly to improve the operational parameters on the Szczecin Turzyn – Police section.
4. Modernization of line 402 on the Koszalin – Kołobrzeg section.
5. Modernization of line 405 on the Szczecinek – Słupsk section.
6. Construction of the northern railway bypass of Szczecin.
7. Modernization of passenger stations, along with the modernization or construction of new stations in Szczecin, Świnoujście, Goleniów, Koszalin, Kołobrzeg, Białogard, Szczecinek, Złocieniec, Runowo Pomorskie, and Choszczno.

Regarding Szczecin, the cited document indicated the need to build a new Szczecin Główny railway station, intended to function in the future as an "Integrated Transport Center" in the capital of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. Additionally, it was proposed to include the railway line 202 Gdynia – Stargard in the then-priority transport corridor no. I Rail Baltica [12, pp. 77–82].

Between 2008 and 2013, new guidelines defining the target structure of the TEN-T network were being prepared within the European Union. Actively participating in the European Commission's work on revising this network, Poland proposed the inclusion of, among others, line 202, which was subsequently incorporated into later legal acts [6]. In December 2013, the European Parliament adopted Regulations 1315/2013 [9] and 1316/2013

[10], concerning the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), which divide the entire transport network of the European Union into a comprehensive network and a core network. The comprehensive network is intended to be a pan-European transport network, ensuring accessibility and connectivity for all regions within the Union, including remote, insular, and the most distant regions, thereby strengthening social and economic cohesion among them. The core network is to be identified, and appropriate actions for its development undertaken by 2030 as a priority within the comprehensive network. Thus, the core network should form the foundation for the development of a sustainable multimodal transport network, stimulate the development of the entire comprehensive network, and enable the concentration of EU efforts on those elements of the Trans-European Transport Network that have the highest European added value. "European added value" refers to the value of a project that - in addition to its potential value for a given Member State - leads to a significant improvement in transport connections or flows between Member States, which can be demonstrated through enhanced efficiency, sustainability, competitiveness, or cohesion [9]. Consequently, the core network constitutes a subset imposed on the comprehensive network, representing a network of priority projects. Regulation (EU) 1316/2013 includes a list of nine TEN-T transport corridors, two of which - namely the North Sea – Baltic Sea Corridor and the Baltic Sea – Adriatic Sea Corridor - pass through Poland. The former combines the previous "old" corridors running through Poland in the west–east axis with a branch to the northeast towards the Baltic States (Rail Baltica and Via Baltica). The Baltic Sea – Adriatic Sea Corridor encompasses the previous Trans-European network corridor for Central and Eastern European countries, running through Poland in the north–south axis from the Tricity area – Warsaw/Łódź – Katowice/Kraków – the state borders with the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and additionally includes the route: Świnoujście/Szczecin – Poznań – Wrocław – Ostrava. Thus, this priority corridor, along with the A6 highway border section and the entire S3 expressway, includes the entire E-59 line incorporated into the freight core network on the Świnoujście – Szczecin section and into the passenger core TEN-T network from Szczecin onward. Meanwhile, the CE-59 (Nadodrzanka) and 202 Stargard – Koszalin – Gdynia railway lines were included in the comprehensive network.

With the realization of the idea to create the Baltic-Adriatic TEN-T transport corridor, Polish regions established in December 2013 a European grouped territorial cooperation (EUWT) entity named Central European Transport Corridor Europe Grouped Territorial Cooperation Ltd. (ŚKT-CETC Sp. z o.o.) based in Szczecin [21]. Its original inception was the concept of creating the aforementioned CETC-ROUTE 65 transport corridor. Since then, the declared goal of the group has been to work towards the development of the Baltic-Adriatic transport corridor network, integrate this network with the Mediterranean Corridor network, undertake initiatives aimed at supplementing the existing corridor network with additional transport infrastructure sections that constitute elements of the TEN-T core network, and monitor investment projects implemented as part of the corridor's development [21].



2. Railway lines of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship [7, s. 12].

Summary

Between 2015 and 2020, considering previous line liquidation processes, the railway network in Western Pomerania developed into the system shown in Figure 2. In 2020, the total length of standard-gauge lines operated in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship was 1,176 km, of which 737 km (62.7%) were electrified and 424 km (36.1%) were double-tracked. This amounted to 5.3 km of lines per 100 km² of the voivodeship, which is below the national average of 6.2 km per 100 km². Additionally, there were 6.9 km of lines per 10,000 inhabitants. Besides the previously mentioned lines E-59 (no. 351) and CE-59 (no. 273), which provide rail access to the ports in Szczecin and Świnoujście, the most important railway lines in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship include:

- Line no. 202: Gdynia – Stargard,
- Line no. 402: Koszalin – Goleniów,
- Line no. 210: Runowo Pomorskie – Chojnice,
- Line no. 404: Szczecinek – Kołobrzeg,
- Line no. 403: Ulikowo – Piła.

The combined route of lines E-59 and CE-59 between Szczecin Dąbie and Świnoujście is designated as line no. 401. Notably, in Świnoujście, at the terminus of line no. 401, there is Poland’s only ferry terminal handling rail freight traffic to and from Sweden, adapted for intermodal transport. Due to Szczecin’s strategic location, two short lines, no. 408 (13 km) and no. 409 (10 km), connect Szczecin Main Station through Szczecin Gumieńce to the railway border crossings Tantow (no. 409) and further towards Angermünde to Berlin and Grambow (no. 408) in the direction of Pasewalk and Hamburg, playing a significant role in transportation.

While the developed railway network in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship has its strengths, it also has shortcomings. Notably, the interregional network lacks a direct railway connection between Szczecin and Gorzów [7, p. 9]. In the regional network, the suspension of passenger services and the physical closure of certain line sections have excluded cities in the Myślibórz Lakeland, such as Pyrzyce, Lipiany, Myślibórz, and Dębno, from railway communication. Similarly, in the Drawsko Lakeland, the same exclusions affect Drawno, Mirosławiec, and the spa town Połczyn Zdrój. A glance at the map (Figure 1) shows that the coastal resorts of Szczecin, Świnoujście, and Kołobrzeg, along with Międzyzdroje between them, have direct connections to the national railway network. However, on the Baltic coast between Kamień Pomorski and Trzebiatów, a parallel railway connection is missing, which is another significant drawback.

Another unresolved issue in the historically developed railway network of the Szczecin hub is the provision of rail transport for residents and industrial plants in Police. Passenger services have not operated on the existing line no. 406 since 2002. This line, passing through the center of Szczecin, serves the chemical plants Azoty Police with various types of hazardous cargo. Consequently, there has long been a demand to build a western railway bypass of Szczecin, essential for serving both the chemical plants and the full-sea port in Police [7, p. 9]. However, this project was not realized and was superseded by the currently implemented project to construct the western road bypass of Police along with the Police – Świąta tunnel over the Oder River.

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