

Innovations and Reforms to Be Introduced for the Modernization of the Conventional Railway Line of Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia

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How to cite this paper: Garcia, J. A. B. (2022). Innovations and Reforms to Be Introduced for the Modernization of the Conventional Railway Line of Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 12, 299-320.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2022.122018>

Received: March 14, 2022

Accepted: April 26, 2022

Published: April 29, 2022

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Abstract

This political study unravels the results and derivations of the potential official interest in closing the conventional train line between Madrid and Valencia, showing in all sections that it is urgent to ensure that a mistake is not made with wide consequences. This requires completely discarding the so-called “XCuenca Plan”, since it would generate a problem that has been dragging on for many years and that has only been getting worse over time. The general objective is focused on claiming support for the train and the maintenance of the line, as the backbone and dynamizer of the province of Cuenca. This opinion has been achieved through the most common methods of information extraction in Sociology in the field of local management, focusing on those areas in which it is necessary to have a diagnostic knowledge of the reality on which it is intended to act. With concrete data it is shown that there is a better alternative to this plan to structure the localities of the provinces of Cuenca, Toledo, Madrid and Valencia, in terms of travel time and price. And a new strategy, elaborated by Pablo Salvador Zuriaga, a PhD professor at the Polytechnic University of Valencia, reveals that the solution to this problem must be based on rail-road intermodality and its application to the localities of the Serranía Baja de Cuenca. The strategy is based on improving the benefits that the improved line would introduce and its operation with updated rolling stock, but it goes further. Once the line is renewed, the objective is to carry out a public consultation with the municipalities under the area of influence of the line to agree on the service schedules. From there, solutions must be articulated to move travelers from the population centers to the nearest stations. We will see that this solution, even considering the transfer times, is more efficient than assigning a bus that passes through the successive population centers.

Keywords

Conventional Train, Railway Modernization, Plan XCuenca, Mobility Strategy, Sustainable Development Goals, Public Investment, Speculation, Depopulation

1. Introduction

On November 30, 2021, a meeting was held in Cuenca in which the closure of the conventional railway line that runs between Aranjuez (Madrid) and Valencia was announced. The aim was to completely shut down the rail service and replace it with buses. But this is nothing new, as Adrián García clarified. For decades, the service has been decreasing, being worse every day for the citizen, reaching the point of being a complete odyssey to travel on that train. It makes, given this, a tour of all the factors that have predisposed to closure, see if there are some alternatives for the train to continue and, above all, if the closure is justified (García, 2021).

The Law and the Regulation of the Spanish Railway Sector define the concepts of railway infrastructure and railway line, specifying in great detail their constituent elements. They also establish a classification of lines on high-speed lines and conventional lines, with the following definitions:

- The following are considered high-speed railway lines:
 - Lines specially built for high speed, equipped for speeds, usually equal to or greater than 250 kilometers per hour.
 - Specially equipped lines for high speed equipped for speeds of the order of 200 kilometers per hour.
 - Lines specially equipped for high speed, of a specific nature, due to topographical, relief or urban environment difficulties whose speed must be adjusted on a case-by-case basis.
- Conventional railway lines are those that, being integrated into the Railway Network of General Interest, do not meet the characteristics of high-speed railway lines.

The train, as Luis Garrido has warned, will not be the backbone of the Empty Spain and the public service obligations will go through a review procedure that, predictably, will end with the closure of lines such as the Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia. This is dictated, that is, the (Garrido, 2022) Safe, Sustainable and Connected Mobility Strategy 2030 (Ministerio de Transportes, 2022) approved by the Council of Ministers on December 10, 2021. The approval of this document is one of the milestones agreed with the European Commission to receive EU funds for recovery. That is, it will be mandatory.

This strategy is the roadmap that will guide the actions of the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda (MITMA) in the field of transport and mobility in the next ten years. It is developed through 9 strategic axes, which are composed of more than 40 lines of action with more than 150 concrete meas-

ures.

The measure proposed by the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda on the railway future loads with a stroke the declaration of intentions including the National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge presented with great fanfare at the beginning of 2021. That star document of the portfolio of Teresa Ribera, the minister, spoke in her introduction of “equal rights and opportunities throughout the territory”, but did not refer, apparently, to the passenger train.

This Mobility Strategy is based on a difficult premise to understand for the fight against population bleeding. Literally, the Ministry of Mobility points out that “the development of transport infrastructures does not guarantee that rural areas will stop losing population”. And above this, the document points out that “connectivity should not be identified with specific modes of transport, even less when it is, such as rail, ways that to be efficient require high demands and high concentrations of population that do not occur in rural areas.”

The language of government, therefore, is that of efficiency. An efficiency that, however, is purely economical. In fact, the document puts black on white that the cost of maintaining railway infrastructure in rural areas is “high and disproportionate”, something that unifies the “lack of operators that accept to provide commercial services on these lines” and a “lack of justification in terms of sustainability”. Words that pave the way for the final decision: “All this makes the railway solution unfeasible to solve mobility in certain territories.” And, in case there were doubts, the Government of Spain clarifies that “it is essential to focus the objective on providing mobility solutions adjusted to demands and not increase public spending on services that may have a more limited use”.

It is, therefore, a series of justifications that put in the foreground the obligations of public service and the premise of providing equal services to citizens regardless of whether or not they are economically deficient.

2. Objectives and Methodology

2.1. Specific Objectives

The following specific objectives have been proposed:

- Analyze the strategic importance, the future and the development for the entire territory of Cuenca, the conventional railway line Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia.
- Detect the priority actions for the modernization of this line.
- Know the assessment of the level of satisfaction of users due to the decrease in services provided online.
- Determine the rejection of the Mobility Plan proposed by CEOE-Cepyme Cuenca, judged as “lacking in rigor” and containing “technical inaccuracies and evaluation of opportunities”.

To this end, specific purposes were established when deploying the fieldwork:

- 1) To know the impact that the requests included in the Manifesto of the Group “Peoples with the Train”, of the organizations and platforms that inte-

grate it and its signatories, will have on the development of the territory that is within the perimeter covered by this railway line;

2) Know the frequency of use of this railway infrastructure, its respective services and the spaces of territorial structuring of the location of stations and stops;

3) Know the level of participation and information on measures aimed at improving the local, provincial and regional environment;

4) Identify the main problems perceived by people, as well as priorities for collective improvement;

5) Recognize possible socio-political and economic variables of the “start-up” in order to analyze their behavior according to the topics considered in the survey;

6) Obtain reliable information on various issues of public opinion regarding contingent variables to the quality of life of the habitat crossed by the conventional train and the social relations in the towns, villages and cities it crosses.

2.2. Methodology

Methodologically, various specialized studies of the University of Valencia have been of great help, as well as the opinion articles and political-administrative initiatives of Professor Fernando Casas, as well as the various statements made to the media by Professor Francisco de los Cobos, along with other issues raised by people linked to RENFE. All of them good connoisseurs of the highlights of this process, developed from a *comprehensive perspective*.

Sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld found that researchers should act as chroniclers of the facts, and that the method of achieving this was that of the survey. And his words, experiences and demonstrations have been used.

It should be noted that there are many sociological studies that are carried out at the request of different administrations, including local ones, to improve the knowledge of social reality in order to make the best decisions, in the sense of those most adjusted to that reality. Among them, we must highlight the copious bibliography that derives from the analysis of citizens' perceptions on various aspects (a good example would be the series of publications of the Center for Sociological Research, specifically the Monographs Collection), the studies of valuation of services, opinion surveys for the evaluation of public management, the survey applied to strategic planning and control of public management, etc.

Studies and instruments have been incorporated not only to obtain knowledge of social reality, but also as a device for evaluating public policies.

3. Notable Aspects of Institutional Management

In the “Junta de Cuenca” indicated above, whose purpose was to decide the future of the line, the Ministry of Transport, the Junta de Castilla-La Mancha, the Provincial Council and the City Council of Cuenca agree to definitively close the line between Utiel and Aranjuez, under the premise of a better service to the lo-

calities with bus, and more services with AVE and Avant between Cuenca and other cities. The old railway line would become a greenway, and in the cities all the railway land would be freed up to carry out urban planning. The excuses used are the zero profitability of the line (something that does not make sense in a public service, which has to serve the citizen, not generate money), in addition to its clear lack of investment (caused by the lack of maintenance for years). All this argumentation, on which the general lines of this investigation are inscribed, we will dismantle it with data, clarifications and testimonies that certify the falsehoods and irrationalities of an indefensible and so incongruous measure.

This is how the professor of Political Science Fernando Casas places it. He accuses the aforementioned institutions for the will of all of them to dismantle the railway line by applying in Cuenca the so-called (Casas, 2022a) “*shock doctrine*”, which is a theory proposed by Naomi Klein, published in 2007 in her homonymous work. The main thesis defended by the author is that free market systems have been imposed by social psychology techniques. This impact has been achieved through disasters and contingencies that have made it possible to carry out unpopular reforms (Klein, 2007).

Dr. Casas explains that this dogma is embedded in the economic policies proposed by Nobel laureate and University of Chicago economics professor Milton Friedman. This prestigious professor, a bitter enemy of the Welfare State, considered that tragic moments (coups d'état, floods, earthquakes) had to be perceived as market opportunities that should be profitable. In this way, the Chicago professor argued that catastrophes (such as storm Filomena and Covid-19) must be used to liquidate the public services of the Welfare States. Therefore, when a crisis is declared, it is advisable to act quickly, to ensure that changes are irreversibly imposed, before the affected society feels nostalgic for the loss of its rights. And as the irony of history turns everything upside down, the “*shock doctrine*” aims to be executed in Cuenca by the government of Castilla-La Mancha.

Without further contemplation, the government of the regional president, García-Page, seems willing to put into practice, without contemplation, the recipes recommended by Friedman. In the first place, cuts in public investment, that is, as required by the CEOE-CEPYME of Cuenca, that the Ministry of Transport, Mobilization and Urban Agenda (MITMA) not invest in the railway line. Secondly, the privatization of transport and the liquidation of public lands, so that some privileged people get rich, giving them a chance. And, finally, the deregulation, which will be carried out with the exclusion, of the Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia line from the public service obligation. With this, Fernando Casas literally affirms, that taking advantage of “the COVID-19 pandemic and the Filomena storm, the Government of Castilla-La Mancha applies the ‘*shock doctrine*’, to dismantle the railway public transport service, in the most depopulated and backward province of the region, constitutes an infamy, which citizens will never forget, even if they flood their mailboxes with incredible propaganda,

on mobility in the twenty-first century”.

It is intended to remove the train after having degraded it for more than thirty years. The result of the closure is shameful: the loss of the structuring of the territory, the aggravation of the demographic problem, the squandering of an opportunity to reduce the carbon footprint and the loss of services in villages already in critical situation. And, of course, this closure is sponsored by the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Year of Rail.

The political turmoil caused by the intention described, will register a very dangerous precedent, which adds to the widened “*adverse government of García-Pagé*” (Buedo García, 2022a) and its meandering management, after having affirmed in its government program that the railway is an “essential infrastructure” and that it was going to “demand the electrification of all lines”. On the contrary, it is now promoting the destruction of the Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia railway line.

This task, between ridiculous and imposter, is accompanied by the measures of destruction of the railway that, being so unpopular among the citizens, are bathed by the regional government with rhetoric and ridiculous plans; the main one is framed in the plan to put an equis or a cross, in front of Cuenca, which is a falsehood, undemocratic and without a future. It is unheard of for the regional government to cook an improvised plan, with its back to the citizens, so that Cuenca does not advance. A spawn that lacks technical, financial and administrative viability and goes against the wishes of a large part of the population, as the CITCO_MCV Survey has shown. But the PSOE intends to make their mejunje acceptable, trying to change the mentality of society (Buedo García, 2022b).

To this end, it has launched, “in the spirit of crusade, a demagogic campaign of intoxication on the mobility of the XXI century, using all its competences (state, regional, provincial and local), to convince the population that the suppression of public goods and services of the Welfare State in Cuenca, is a good idea”. To dismantle this attack on citizens and democratic procedure, our analysis has been carried out, starting methodologically also from (Casas, 2022b) *Brandolini’s Law*, also known as the principle of asymmetry of stupidity, which is an Internet adage that emphasizes the difficulty of discrediting false, comical or misleading information: “The amount of energy needed to refute the ‘shit’ (falsehoods, stupidity) is an order of magnitude greater than that needed to produce it.” This is the main objective that will be presented in the successive sections, aimed at eradicating the nonsense contained in that plan.

The voice of the citizenry does not stop denouncing a government without political sensitivity, which takes advantage of catastrophes to apply indecent policies. Citizens and associations (such as Pueblos con el tren), do not tire of providing data, which show that the regional government is acting against its program and that what the slogan against the definitive closure of the Aranjuez-Cuenca-Utiel railway line—“*Defend your train—Defend the future of our land*”—is what should reasonably be done, because he trusts that the ability to

argue and persuade democratically can end up decanting decisions and reconsidering policies. An emblem from which the manifesto in defense of the conventional train starts: “If the line is closed, it will never recover. It will lose a service forever and an infrastructure that must be allied for the development of the municipalities of its route”. Based on this slogan, numerous platforms, associations, unions or political parties join the protest and, at the same time, citizens are invited to support it, “in the face of the outrage of taking away something very ours, which is part of our heritage. We must bet on it in this European Year of The Railway in which the European Union contributes funds for its commitment to the future,” said the organizers of the event held on Sunday, December 19, a concentration in the Plaza de España in Cuenca demonstrating the wide social and political rejection that the XCuenca Project has awakened.

3.1. Execution by the Government of the “XCuenca Mobility Plan” Proposed by CEOE-Cepyme Cuenca

The CTCO_MCV Survey recalls that the territory affected by the potential closure of the conventional train of the Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia artery has the obligation to make use of European *cohesion policy*, providing a privileged framework to face all challenges simultaneously and respond better to the needs of its citizens, as Europeans.

Hence, the interviews carried out for this purpose constitute in themselves the representative profile of the general population, saddened and distressed, since they come from all areas of this railway line. In addition, it introduces multiple questions to assess the degree of public satisfaction with respect to, for example, the level of utilization; the culpability of its closure; and even the particular estimation of those who have responded on whether in the last two decades sufficient resources have been dedicated to the maintenance and modernization of the line. It also fits a new set of questions about what is the main reason why the line should continue to operate, once the service and all its infrastructure have been improved. And, in general, on the transcendental aspects of the rejection of the “XCuenca Mobility Plan” proposed by CEOE-Cepyme Cuenca, because they consider that “it lacks rigor” and contains “technical inaccuracies and evaluation of opportunities”. To this indication is added that of the withdrawal of said Plan for contravening the objectives contained in *the Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union, of December 23, 2020*, by which the year 2021 was declared European Year of Rail.

On March 3, 2022, with the only votes of the PSOE in the City of Cuenca, the labeling as *The General Protocol of Action of the XCuenca Plan* is approved, which generates a wide controversy and is carried out thanks to the abstention of the electoral group ‘Cuenca unites us’ and against the rest of the political groups with representation in the consistory of the capital of Cuenca. The refusal of the latter is justified because they consider that this approval is to give “moral free rein” to the suppression of the conventional train between Madrid, Cuenca and

Valencia.

At that juncture the social networks rescue that same day a video of the PSOE of Castilla-La Mancha dated in 2013 in which the president of Castilla-La Mancha, Emiliano García-Page, makes a fiery defense of the maintenance of the conventional train in a trip that makes in the train between Sigüenza and Guadalajara pointing out that “if we do not defend this, no one is going to defend him.” (*Liberal de Castilla, 2013*)

In the video, Emiliano García-Page wonders if anyone knows which line is profitable in Spain and answers that “not one”, and then affirms that “we are guilty of everything... Of the roads, of the hospitals, of the schools, of the institutes, that the same lines that are deficient now as fifteen years ago have not been suppressed...”

Faced with this lack of immunity and its obvious contradictions, Professor Casas Mínguez, in his categorical crusade against the attack of the closure, pulls the demonstrative rope of the dishonest action of the three institutions responsible for the altercation (*Casas, 2022b*):

The representatives of the PSOE that govern the Board, the Diputación de Cuenca and the City Council, maintain that “they voted for them so that there was no partisan interference in the decisions taken by the three institutions, in favor of the province and the capital.”

This statement by Martínez Guijarro, speaking of the railway, assumes that they voted to destroy the line. And that the three institutions have unchecked power to do whatever they want.

All of which is false: they did not vote for them to destroy the line, nor do they have unlimited power. Parties in democracy are subject to the Constitution and are accountable to citizens for their electoral program.

The electoral program of the PSOE, which is a contract with the citizens (according to García Page) demanded the modernization of all the railway lines of the region, rejecting the destruction of only one, so as not to provoke grievances or conflicts.

In view of the programme, the commitment of the three institutions to the destruction of the railway is a dishonest action, contrary to the programme voted for by the citizens and which the party leaders promised to fulfil in the regional courts.

If they wanted the destruction of the train, they should have had the courage to include the proposal in their program and explain it to the sovereign people during the election campaign. Therefore, the claim of the three institutions to dismantle the line by removing it from the Catalogue of the Railway Network of General Interest violates democracy.

Having won regional, provincial and local elections does not entitle a party to act with deception or abuse of power. They deceive when they exclusively endorse the Ministry of Transport the destruction of the Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia line, hiding the obligation established by law to hear

the Autonomous Communities, through whose territory the line runs when it is intended to modify.

To this falsehood about exclusive competence, we must add another about the future of the railway. The PSOE's government program called for the recovery of the railway as an "essential infrastructure." For this reason, Martínez Guijarro supported the Chinchilla-Cartagena line, arguing that the railway was vital for the structuring and fixation of the territory's population. And he alluded to the fact that the railway is fundamental to keep alive the hope of growth with the train.

But the vice president has no problem proposing the destruction of the Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia line, inciting the city council and the deputation of Cuenca to follow him. It is amazing to see to what extent on behalf of the Government, Martínez-Guijarro is willing to do in Cuenca the opposite of what he defends in Albacete or Toledo.

3.1.1. Criticism of Some Governmental Inconsistencies

Dr. Casas is especially the regional vice president, highlighting what he calls discursive, transmuted, and paradoxical inconsistencies. In Toledo he speaks of the railway as safe and sustainable transport, but arrives in Cuenca and declares that "the train pollutes more than the highway". The vice president also does not believe that the recommendations of the European Union to transform the economy through the modernization of the railway are valid for Cuenca. And, without mercy, he accuses this politician of an oblique position: "Perhaps he would defend with more interest the Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia railway line if asked by the businessmen. Because the vice president of Castilla-La Mancha is very obsequious with them. In Valencia he even said that he wanted to 'attend to all those companies that want to come to the Autonomous Community by putting a red carpet on them' and encourages them to invest in the region because we have an amount of European funds, exceeding 8830 million euros."

However, "the performance of the vice president with the citizens of the province of Cuenca is denigrating," confesses the competent professor: "He despises their votes, promoting the destruction of the railway. He deceives unscrupulously, declaring that the train has no future and refuses to invest in Cuenca to modernize the railway with European funds." He believes for all this that it is "very serious that the leaders of the PSOE try to make us believe that they are democratically legitimized to impose, without adequate deliberation, a vital decision for the future of the province." And, as a good jurist, he pronounces sentence: "It is an abuse of power that they promote the destruction of the railroad, violating the rules of the democratic game and using falsehoods, AVE bonds, privatizations of public lands, sports subsidies and blackmail, as if they did not have to be held accountable for their actions."

3.1.2. Scrapping of the Position of the Business Fabric of Cuenca

Within this trajectory of the official dismantling Pablo Salvador Zuriaga, assis-

tant professor doctor of the Universitat Politècnica de València, accuses the CEOE of Conquense of having marked with this matter a “lost to the river” and opened a melon to which no one to date had dared: the possibility of closing and dismantling the railway line between Tarancón and Utiel. The “all-inclusive” Mobility Plan also contemplates, as has already been said, the replacement of the rail service from Aranjuez by buses and transport on demand, the conversion of the line into a greenway and the urban use of the railway land as the different populations pass (Tarancón, Huete, Cuenca and Carboneras, fundamentally). Although it was a mobility plan, of the 44 slides in which it consisted, 22 were dedicated to infographics on what the railway land would look like after its urbanization (Salvador Zuriaga, 2022a).

Thus, taking advantage of the slipstream of the CEOE, the different administrations involved, all of them governed by the same political party, in perfect planetary alignment have applauded this “Plan”, which the Ministry renamed “XCuenca”. Although all this nebula will be analyzed in the following section, it must be recorded here that the group of Civil Engineers, Channels and Ports, competent in matters of infrastructures and transport services, have expressed the incongruity involved in making decisions of strategic relevance for a country, such as the dismantling of an infrastructure of the Railway Network of General Interest, based on a “mobility plan” that is nothing more than a mere “idea” or “strategy” largely urbanistic, which does not guarantee an interprovincial connection that improves the existing one today and that can compromise future logistical developments in the area. Good proof of this is that it does not go into details, does not propose scenarios with the improved line and does not contemplate uses compatible with passenger traffic, such as tourist or freight trains. In this way, it is intended to close an infrastructure without consensus with those affected (municipalities and neighboring provinces) or consult the competent technicians, who could provide data and ideas that improve the use of the railway line.

4. Occultism, Misunderstandings and Withdrawal from the “XCuenca Mobility Plan”

The report of results of the survey CITCO_MCV warns that the veracity of the data obtained is essential to assess the depth of its own message and, together, a large number of them can help the development of strategies for future action. Which makes its own content of great importance, as well as its dissemination, since we are facing the danger of the union that the responsible administrations have taken in favor of the “XCuenca” plan. Mainly because “our closest politicians must take full note of the demands of the citizens, in order to decide the different priorities to solve the serious problem that this entails,” he says.

That Maccabean plan, as always presented by a project assumed by the Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha its current vice president, José Luis Martínez Guijarro, is a balloon launched into the air, little hunched over and

flimsy projective. But, very typical of this political writer, adorned and communicated to public opinion with varnishes of exclusive grandiosity. Thus, on January 24, 2022, this man announced during the course of an *informative breakfast*, in which he was accompanied by the mayor of Cuenca, Darío Dolz, and by the president of the Diputación, Álvaro Martínez Chana, that the XCuenca Plan is going to change the two daily conventional train services for five bus services in each of the directions. In addition, these buses with which the conventional train service will be replaced will have three stops within the capital: in the center, at the Virgen de la Luz Hospital and at the Fernando Zóbel AVE station.

“In the province, for example in the Huete-Cuenca section, there are two services that stop in the center of the city. The approach we make is five buses a day per direction that will leave them where they traditionally come to Cuenca,” said the regional vice president as an example. In the documentation delivered to the media during breakfast, there was an infographic with the schedules of stops planned in the municipalities of Huete and Carboneras de Guadazaón, although Martínez Guijarro clarified that the buses will travel the entire line and that the schedules could undergo modifications.

The data and technical findings refute the inconsistent opinion of the weak politician. In the visit that María José Rallo, Secretary General of Transport of the Ministry of Development, made on January 26, 2022 to the Social Council of the City of Cuenca to defend the XCuenca Plan, she affirmed that the railway line is obsolete and that it would continue to be so regardless of the investment made. Strange argument considering that, today, the journey between Madrid and Valencia through Cuenca takes about 7 hours and 30 minutes, but in the 80 s, with the infrastructure in better condition, it took about 4 hours and 50 minutes to make the same route, with worse rolling stock.

As an alternative, they propose to replace the train between Tarancon and Utiel with buses, increasing, for example, by more than half an hour the travel times of Huete and Carboneras of Guadazaón with Cuenca with respect to the times that the train could offer. 4 hours 50 minutes may seem an excessive time to join Madrid and Valencia, but if we take into account the number of towns that are structured along the provinces of Madrid, Toledo, Cuenca and Valencia, the railway is the best alternative. As for the price, the complete route costs about 20 euros, being the cheapest option, since the € 7 of the Avlo are an ephemeral that rarely happens. All this without the need to look for rates or valley offers several weeks in advance.

Regarding the use of this line for freight traffic, the fundamental thing is that, if this railway line is abolished, any possibility of logistical development for the entire province of Cuenca that may arise in the medium or long term, based on the intermodality of the railway, is eliminated. In this way, proposals such as the creation of multimodal logistics platforms that connect the province of Cuenca with the Port of Valencia or the Mediterranean Corridor could not even be proposed.

Of course, as Pablo Salvador Zuriaga denounces, the Administration, in the short term, has the accounts with the “Plan” XCuenca, since it supposes an investment of 30 million, compared to the 200 million euros that the complete renovation of the line would entail. 200 million may seem like a lot of money, but it is less than 1% of the 24,000 million euros that, On November 30, 2021, the Minister of Transport announced that she should invest in the Railway Network of General Interest of which, even today, the Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia line is part.

The rattled politician Martínez Guijarro, has been accused of “lack of railway culture”, both of him and of those who follow him. “It’s a brazenness, an insult. They have sold us a bus to end up using the AVE,” lamented the spokesman of the Platform Peoples with the Train and mayor of Arguisuelas (Cuenca), Dani García. “It is incomprehensible that to go to Valencia from my town I have to go back 50 kilometers by bus to Cuenca to take an AVE there,” he criticized.

Visibly angry, García did not like the “occultism” with which this project has been carried out since “they have been telling us for a year that the line would be repaired.” “We will continue to oppose this project,” he said, and the mayor of Camporrobles has advanced that various demonstrations will be called to ask for the reopening of the route that now wants to be dismantled, such as the one held in Madrid in October attended by more than 1000 people from all Valencian, La Mancha and Madrid towns.

4.1. Claim of the Regional Train

The people, the municipalities, have to claim the regional train because if they don’t load it. They already did it with the one from Toledo to Aranjuez, which passed through Castillejo. High speed kills the regional, several respondents have commented. “During the bubble, everyone came from Ocaña (Toledo) to Audi. Then the skinny cows arrived and began to complain that they did not have Cercanías.”

“This is normal in empty Spain,” said Francisco de los Cobos, spokesman for the platform in defense of the Cuenca railway, upon learning of the situation via WhatsApp. “Renfe, outside the AVE, is third world.”

The association Pueblos con el Tren and the Platform in Defense of the Public and Social Railway of Cuenca demanded the resignation of the president of Renfe, through a statement issued by both groups (*Redacción Voces de Cuenca, 2022*). These same sources add that “today, without starting the train, with its creative accounting Renfe imputes thousands of euros of losses to the people of Cuenca and, at the same time, prevents them from traveling. You, directors of Renfe and the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda who fail to comply with the Public Service Obligations, but approach Cuenca, in an inquisitorial attitude, to call us subsidized, deficit, inefficient... while from their chairs they decide our future.”

In short, they want to close the section of line between Tarancón and Utiel

and leave the one from Aranjuez to Tarancón only open for goods. The piece that is kept is that of Utiel to Valencia, integrated into the Valencian Cercanías.

The argument is that it is inefficient and very expensive to maintain for the few people who take it. And that there is an alternative, the AVE, faster and more used. In return, they will put buses (some of them, on demand) and open a Greenway for cycling. And the grounds of the Cuenca station, 22 juicy hectares in the center of the city, will be free. It is a premeditated closure. This is the story of how the mismanagement of a railway line ends with its dismantling. “It’s not oversight or budget crisis,” says Adrián Fernández, Head of Mobility at Greenpeace and a mobility specialist. “It’s premeditated. It seeks to reach a critical situation in which everyone understands the reason for the closure.”

4.2. Rebuttal of the XCuenca Plan

The latter is demonstrated by replicating the XCuenca Plan. The challenge and subsequent withdrawal is included in the document prepared by the professor and sociologist of the UCLM Francisco de los Cobos, entitled *Sustainable Future for Tod@s in the Province of Cuenca +*. Presented at the “Conference for Sustainable Mobility. A Cuenca en Tren”, dismantles one by one the falsehoods, supercherries and intentions of this disjointed project. Its extension here prevents a thorough examination of it, so that only the most prominent points will be recorded, that is, those that interrupt the acceptance of the burlesque plan. See.

- Data is false, manipulated or limited
 - Part of the premises defeated in Europe. Traffic between large cities in competition to the plane.
 - It lacks interprovincial mobility studies.
 - Its promoters reject a technical debate in public.
 - They propose blackmail to divest from Cuenca.
- Use the means, servers and public resources of the Plan.
- “As a general criterion, urban integration actions are actions of an essentially urban nature, which must be assumed directly by the Local or Autonomous Administrations competent in matters of urban planning, limiting the State Administration to carry out the functional improvement of the railway network that is necessary” (MITMA, 2021).
 - **Figure 1**, debunking XCuenca, reveals where it starts and where it wants to go.
- It contradicts the Special Plan for Internal Reform, approved by Order of the Ministry of Public Works of 20 December 1995. Therefore, it exposes three lies (**Figure 2**).
- 1st Evaluation of the equisCuenca project:
 - ⇒ Citizens will see their travel opportunities reduced (increases in time and unbearable costs).
 - ⇒ Interprovincial mobility is not guaranteed, neither with neighboring communities nor within Castilla-La Mancha.



Source: Sustainable Future Communication for Tod@s in the Province of Cuenca+.

Figure 1. Disqualification Plan XCuenca.



Source: Sustainable Future Communication for Tod@s in the Province of Cuenca+.

Figure 2. Lies of the XCuenca Plan.

-
- ⇒ Demonstrated incompetence of the City Council of Cuenca (11 years) to have an effective public transport to the Fernando Zóbel station.
 - ⇒ On-demand transportation is a copy-paste of an outdated and failed project of 2018.
 - 2nd Evaluation of the equisCuenca project:
 - ⇒ Job losses.
 - ⇒ Deliberate divestment in the Aranjuez-Cuenca-Utiel section.
 - ⇒ Loss of opportunity cost with respect to other territories.
 - ⇒ Non-recognition of the historical debt with Cuenca and affected provinces.
 - Forecast of a mixed use Travelers-Goods. Evolution and future:
 - Travel times to Madrid
 - 2:16 (1978). Atocha.
 - 3:21 (2022) Transfer Aranjuez.
 - 2 hours (2030). Travel times and prices VERY COMPETITIVE.
 - Advantages of maintenance of the conventional train M-C-V: Evolution and future:
 - It links the territory offering links with other destinations in Castilla-La Mancha (Aranjuez) and the metropolitan areas of Valencia and Madrid.
 - Wares. Online logistics platforms (like other communities) and Valencia-Madrid cargoes.
 - Its stations are accessible in urban centers.
 - Additional benefits to that maintenance:
 - Great potential for goods.
 - Departure to the main port of Spain (Valencia).
 - Exit to the main market of Spain (Madrid).
 - Intermediate industries in the provinces of Cuenca, Toledo, Valencia and Madrid.
 - Tourism potential:
 - Train + Bicycle.
 - Tourist trains.
 - Declaration of Asset of Cultural Interest.
 - Penalty of travel times and unaffordable prices leaving only from the AVE.
 - The proposal of the integral project of mobility, territorial development and urban transformation is more expensive and even slower.
 - The proposal is unassumable, since it carries with it:
 - A single passenger station for THE ENTIRE PROVINCE OF CUENCA.
 - Only province in Spain without goods terminals.
 - There is no regional passenger service at 17,141 km².
 - 266 kms. (206 emptied in the province of Cuenca).
 - The withdrawal of the line entails a “deliberate divestment” in Cuenca.
 - Main conclusions of the *document Sustainable Future for Tod@s in the Province of Cuenca+*:

- ⇒ The Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia railway line is the best alternative for the future for the mobility of people and goods in the province of Cuenca.
- ⇒ Europe values rail as the optimal solution for integrated mobility in the twenty-first century: walking-pedaling-travelling by train.
- ⇒ The best option in times and prices of door-to-door travel is the railway.
- ⇒ Intermodal passenger service to the head of the train stations.

The platforms of Futuro Ciudadanos, represented by the group Pueblos con el Tren and a multitude of municipalities, collectives, associations, political parties, unions and individuals, defend the improvement of the conventional train. The citizens' position is linked to the European Union's proposal to transform the Union's economy by improving conventional rail, in order to achieve sustainable development in the Union.

- ⇒ logistics in 266 kilometers between the first port of Spain and the first city in population.

5. Proposals to Improve the Management and Modernisation of the M-C-V Regional Train

In reviewing many of the political and administrative decisions taken in the province of Cuenca, especially in terms of population and economic activity, many observe the discriminatory content of these acts. This has been expressed by Jesús Neira, former independent councilor of the PSOE in the City of Cuenca and currently spokesman for "Candidacy of Cuenca", who has described what he calls (Neira, 2022) *a rosary* of disagreements caused by different organs of the State Administration and the Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha. Among these insolences is that of the AVE, the high-speed train, regarding which he affirms: "It was necessary a titanic effort of the society of Cuenca to change the drawing of the initial maps that in no way proposed, in the offices of Madrid and Toledo, their stop in the city of Cuenca. Not heroic enough to put the station in the center. This decision, of a station in the suburbs, which has meant a serious impairment of the functionality and usefulness of this infrastructure". Without forgetting the conventional train, by which it hits consciences pressuring the committed organizations that there are now 24,000 million for this means of transport, structuring and economic development of the XXI century, "less for Cuenca, which receives a new trophy, the only province in Spain without conventional railway stations".

And this must be avoided with citizen firmness and political intelligence, not demonstrated, as we have seen in the previous section. It links this to the final two sections of the *revised Sustainable Future communication for Tod@s in the Province of Cuenca+*. The first of these is that of the latter's proposals to optimize the whole of its activity (Figure 3).

5.1. Strategy for the Integral Improvement of the Line

The next formulas for the integral improvement of the line must be distributed

Propuestas para mejorar la gestión	
Gestión actual	Mejorar gestión
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Reducir la oferta de trenes, con el argumento que esta servida la capital. 2) Aumentar artificialmente los tiempos de viaje para que los trenes que cohesionan el territorio no compitan con el ave. 3) Obligar a los pasajeros a efectuar transbordos injustificados. 4) Impedir el acceso al centro de las ciudades. 5) Ofertar los trenes en sentido contrario al flujo natural de los tráfico 6) Cerrar líneas “competidoras”. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recuperar servicios 2013. 2. Recuperar tiempos de viaje: objetivo dos horas. 3. Viajes sin transbordos. 4. Origen-fin Valencia-Nord y Madrid-Atocha-cercanfas. 5. Trenes con acceso a primera hora a Valencia-Madrid y Cuenca. 6. Mejora integral linea.

Source: Sustainable Future Communication for Tod@s in the Province of Cuenca+.

Figure 3. Proposals to improve management.

in multi-year investments, with a repayment term of 50 years, as a repair of the historical debt contracted by the central government with the province of Cuenca. This refers us to the work done by Professor Pablo Salvador Zuriaga, who in his facebook account announces the gradual publication of the project drafted in February 2022. In the first place, it is intended to demonstrate, with concrete data, that there is a better alternative to the XCuenca Plan to structure the localities of the provinces of Cuenca, Toledo, Madrid and Valencia, in terms of travel time and price. And he anticipates that, in the coming days, “we will be revealing the details of a strategy based on rail-road intermodality and its application to the localities of the Serranía Baja de Cuenca”. He will present it little by little to give the opportunity for people to comment on each point and explain it step by step.

The strategy is based on the improvement of the performance that the improved line would introduce and its exploitation with updated rolling stock, but it goes further. Once the line has been improved, it is a matter of carrying out a public consultation with the municipalities under the area of influence of the line to agree on the service schedules. From there, solutions must be articulated to move travelers from the population centers to the nearest stations. We will see that this solution, even considering the transfer times, is more efficient than assigning a bus that passes through the successive population centers (Salvador Zuriaga, 2022b) (Figure 4).

The approach is broken down into the points included in the points grouped in Figure 5.

5.2. Proposition No of Law (PNL) in Defense of the Conventional Train

The course of the modernization of the railway that has been explained, we will



Source: Pablo Salvador Zuriaga, Mobility Strategy based on Intermodality FFCC + Road, pg. 3.

Figure 4. Description of the mobility strategy.

- Emplear la línea ferroviaria como eje vertebrador de la provincia en sentido noroeste-sureste
- Creación de áreas de influencia que agiopen a los municipios más cercanos a cada una de las estaciones de la línea ferroviaria
- Conexión de los municipios de cada área de influencia con su estación de referencia mediante transporte por carretera a demanda. Diferentes modelos de explotación.
- Eliminación de trayectos por carretera redundantes con el servicio ferroviario, siempre que no supongan una merma respecto al servicio actual (tiempos de viaje, horarios de paso, precio, etc.). Empleo de los autobuses liberados en mejorar la comunicación de las áreas que no cubre el servicio ferroviario.
- Posibilidad de integración tarifaria. Unico billete para el servicio tren + carretera
- Y todo ello compatible con:
 - El aumento de servicios AVANT a/desde Cuenca
 - La mejora de la conexión por bus desde el centro de la capital hasta la estación de Cuenca Fernando Zobel
 - La implantación de la red ASTRA a los municipios del rea metropolitana de Cuenca
 - La integración de la traza ferroviaria en la ciudad
 - La urbanización de los terrenos ferroviarios en desuso

Source: Pablo Salvador Zuriaga, Mobility Strategy based on Intermodality FFCC + Road, pgs. 4 and 5.

Figure 5. Strategic mobility proposals.

close it with a step forward taken by the political formation Podemos, which on March 11, 2022 presents together with the Platform in Defense of the Public and Social Railway a Proposal No of Law (PNL) to the executive of García-Page to protect the conventional train, “discarding” the XCuenca Plan, which contemplates the elimination of this important conventional train line as it passes through the autonomous community (Podemos Castilla-La Mancha, 2022).

The regional coordinator of Podemos in Castilla-La Mancha, José Luis García Gascón, has defended the role of the conventional railway as “a public service to unite Castilla-La Mancha, make effective the right to transport for all, face the climate crisis and fight against depopulation”. García Gascón has continued to develop the position of his party regarding this situation: “a sincere and serious commitment to the environment, public services in towns and cities and the ar-

tication of our region has to protect and expand, not destroy resources such as this train line and the rest of those that pass through our Community”. “Castilla-La Mancha deserves, at least, the same rights as the rest of Spain, especially when we talk about the rural environment,” he said. and, therefore, considers that “eliminating the conventional train line between the first and third cities of the country to leave the Toledo region of the Mesa de Ocaña and the entire province of Cuenca without conventional rail is the opposite of what the state and European mobility programs establish”.

In addition to the members of Podemos at the regional and municipal level, Francisco de los Cobos has also attended the presentation of this parliamentary initiative, as spokesman for the Platform in Defense of the Public and Social Railway in Cuenca, one of the organizations that has participated in this NLP together with the main unions, the Platform in Defense of the Public Railway, Social and Sustainable of Castilla-La Mancha, neighborhood associations and the Chamber of Commerce of Cuenca. De Los Cobos has highlighted the usefulness of conventional rail “to guarantee public, sustainable and quality transport in the region”. “We are not only talking about Madrid, Ocaña, Cuenca or Valencia; we are talking about dozens of villages with direct access to this service and hundreds of villages that depend on the train to maintain their population and their capacity for progress in the future,” he concluded.

The document presented in the Castilian-Manchego Courts contains a total of 5 measures: the maintenance of the roads through the withdrawal of the aforementioned project; increased investments to adapt the infrastructure by reducing travel times and adapting the line for freight transport; maintaining public service obligations, increasing frequency and adapting schedules; the establishment of intermodal stations; and the expansion and increase of the connecting rail service between the 5 provinces and the 5 county capitals, including a reference to the urgent improvement of the lines and the Illescas-Torrijos-Talavera and Chinchilla-Hellín service.

6. Conclusion

Unraveling the results and the derivations of the potential official interest in closing the conventional train line between Madrid and Valencia, as has been demonstrated in all sections, it is necessary to ensure that a mistake of that magnitude is not made, avoiding an unacceptable and shameful arrangement. This requires the complete dismissal of the insulting “Plan XCuenca”.

Ecologists in Action, member of the Platform in Defense of the Public and Social Railway of Cuenca, at the end of January 2022 during his speech at the meeting of the Social Council of the city on the XCuenca Plan alluded to “the need to open a deep, social, technical and urban debate, beyond the elementary infographics offered by the Ministry of Transport, the Board and the City Council”. In his opinion, it is necessary to offer alternatives with their respective analyses of social, economic and environmental effects, a point of view that has pe-

netrated deeply, as has been glossed throughout this study. In his opinion, as they point out in a statement, “the Secretary General of Transport once again presented the xCuenca Plan, with which the Ministry intends to leave the city and the province without conventional rail, the backbone of the territory. Two months after his presentation before the municipal plenary, he has tried to respond to the opposition he has aroused in the city and the province. However, their explanations have been plagued by data the AVE for the transport of parcel goods”.

In a turn to the wheel and the relevant reverse is the exit. Therefore, if the province of Cuenca wants the structuring and fixation of the population and wants to keep alive the hope of growth with the train, citizens have to “conquer their dignity, their rights and demand justice; we must mobilize for the sustainable development of the peoples with the train, demanding that state and European funds be invested in the renovation of the Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia railway line”, as Fernando Casas invokes.

It is very important, in fact, that the people of Cuenca are clear that, if they left the province without the conventional railway line, it would be because the Cortes and the Government of Castilla-La Mancha have decided not to lift a finger. If the Junta de Comunidades had any interest and carried out the appropriate actions, the Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia railway line would not be dismantled. It is irrefutable that, if the García-Page government wanted to, it could invest the necessary state and European funds mentioned above, taking away arguments from *savers*, who see a political opportunity in depopulation. The investment in Cuenca would be key because railway communications are vital for the structuring and fixation of the population of the territory. There is no doubt, in short, as CITCO_MCV has shown, that the Madrid-Cuenca-Valencia railway could be maintained, with as much justification as that of the Hellín-Cartagena line. A line that is still there, because the Board got the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda not to dismantle it, harming the Region of Hellín and Murcia.

At the level of active policy, it should be noted, first of all, the Emergency Resolution of the Railway Sector approved, unanimously, by the Regional Commission of the FeSMC-UGT of Castilla la Mancha held on March 10, 2022 in Guadalajara, a measure that highlights the unequivocal position of the regional leaders in relation to the dismantling of the conventional railway line in the Madrid-Cuenca-Levante corridor. Committed to maintenance and investment in a railway line that, without a doubt, can be an important channel for the transport of goods to or from eastern Spain (*Redacción de Liberal de Castilla, 2022*).

We must not forget that, if the line is dismantled, the province of Cuenca is isolated from traffic with Europe, we would not have a direct connection with the Mediterranean Axis, which is the channeler of goods from Europe, and from the ports of the Mediterranean. The province of Cuenca would be isolated from two of the main cities of Spain, both the capital Madrid and Valencia; which would generate an island *at the territory level*. Another mistake, since we would not be competitive with green energies based on biomass such as pellets for

which the province of Cuenca has great resources. Not in vain is the European province with the largest area of forest mass, very necessary for the not too distant future, as we can see with the prices of fossil fuels and electricity today. Nor would we have freight transport for oilseeds or cereals, for which efficient and cheap transport provided by rail is essential.

As if this were not enough, the closure action goes against everything that the European Union recommends to us, which is nothing other than the increase in rail freight transport and the revitalisation of railway lines. In doing so, it would turn its back on the great potential of operating this railway infrastructure.

In addition, there is an incessant interest of individuals in the speculation of the urban lands of the capital of Cuenca, agreed in which the political party that governs the city has placed special emphasis and reiteration. This perspective, added to that of sharing in all the intervening institutions such as city council, provincial council, autonomous community and central government makes them believe that they can reimpose their decision to all citizens without having previously agreed with the rest of the political parties and social agents involved, and to which a large part of the population of Cuenca is opposed, as the CITCO_MCV Survey has shown.

To these terms we must gather the set of arguments presented in the Proposal of Law presented by Podemos to the Presidency of the Commission of Petitions and Citizen Participation of the Cortes of Castilla-La Mancha. A point of the NLP also resorts to the contravention that supposes the closure of the service and dismantling of the tracks, since it infringes the European guidelines on the Sustainable Development Goals, while discarding the future transport model for the region, that of bringing citizens and goods by rail. This is imperative in terms of the regional fight against the climate crisis and boosting a future economy in all of this.

In short, the NLP proclaims that in the face of the counter historic idea of destroying this essential sustainable public service, we are committed to greater investment in the line with the aim of adapting it to the future, reducing times, improving benefits and, ultimately, being more attractive to users.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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