

## Call for papers Conference

*The material artefacts of railway systems: looking back at two centuries of environmental issues*

### Scientific background

Rails & histoire has included in its 2018-2023 scientific programme a line of research on the ecological challenges of the train. This axis has three main themes:

1. The environmental issues of the train as a large-scale network,
2. Environmental issues related to the material artefacts of railway systems,
3. The growth of environmental issues within the SNCF since the 1970s.

The conference concerned by this call aims to address the second theme of this axis.

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### Main stakes

Railways are a large technical system which has given rise to many approaches, as much on its economic and territorial effects as on the social configuration of this specific world or on the representations of space and time carried by trains in the industrial societies. While the elements that make up the railway are also well known, from locomotives to various infrastructures, they are more rarely questioned from the point of view of their links with the environment in which they are established and operated, in the ecological sense of the term. Before being a network, a political object or even a means of transport, railways are a material system, which requires the use of various resources, which finds its place in a rural or urban environment and whose operation produces various effects (emanations, noise, etc.).

The aim of the conference is to review the constituent elements of this world of railways in the light of ecological issues, by placing them in the times and contexts concerned by their production and use. This includes both the artefacts used by the infrastructure (sleepers, ballast, etc.) or by mobile elements (coal, exotic wood, etc.) and the direct material effects of their use on the environment, both

near and far (smoke, vegetation around them, etc.). By following the elements of the railway, the aim is thus to question what it means to insert this industrial system into an established environmental framework, the perception of which has also evolved over the period under consideration since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By thus crossing the history of the environment with that of transport and mobility, the aim is also to dig a path of research at the margins of established fields.

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## Paper proposals

The expected proposals for papers are expected to address these issues from different points of view. First of all, we are thinking of the overlapping identities of the artefacts. The natural environment or the railway system do not lead to the same consideration of the same element. These tensions may give rise to controversy or, on the contrary, the absence of tension would only be revealed by *a posteriori* debates generated by a view of the environment that would become increasingly protective.

The proposals may also focus on the dynamics of pooling, recycling or extending the lifespan of artefacts in the railway systems. They could also question the environmental scales, from the immediate proximity of the track to the origin of its components, some of which come, for example, from the colonial world.

Far from seeking to incriminate railways, the conference aims to gain a better understanding of these issues in order to clarify these relationships as clearly as possible, without forgetting the positive aspects that railway systems may have generated, for example by perhaps offering niches of biodiversity in areas marked by the expansion of intensive agriculture. By noting that human beings are only transforming their environment, particularly since industrialisation, the conference also aims to provide a point of comparison between the railways and other mobility systems. One can think here of the automobile system and its intensive use of mineral materials, which also has a significant environmental and landscape impact. For example, the use of concrete is common to the railway world, especially for sleepers, and the motorway world, which can thus prove to be a sector for recycling railway waste, in the context of what could be a symbiotic economy.

The contributions of young scholars will be looked at with particular attention in order to open up perspectives as much as possible.

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## Details

**Dates:** mid-December 2021 – 1 day

**Location:** Paris

**Proposals:** 1/2 page + bibliography + CV 1/2 page

**Deadline for submission of proposals:** 15 March 2021

Proposals should be sent to [arnaud.passalacqua@m4x.org](mailto:arnaud.passalacqua@m4x.org) and [cecile.hochard@ahicf.com](mailto:cecile.hochard@ahicf.com).

**Selection of proposals:** during April 2021

**Deadline for sending first draft papers:** November 2021

**Expected size:** 30,000 signs

**Publication:** The conference will result in a publication of an issue of the *Revue d'histoire des chemins de fer*. The authors of the papers presented at the event will therefore be asked to submit a final version of their text following the conference (1 February 2022) for submission to the journal.

**Organising Committee:**

- Sébastien Barbe
- Cécile Hochard
- Arnaud Passalacqua
- Romain Sanchez

**Scientific Committee:**

- Christophe Bouneau
- Michèle Merger
- Arnaud Passalacqua
- Émile Quinet
- Georges Ribeill

**Languages:** French and English