

Greeks Hope to Ride Abandoned Scenic Railway Once Again

Eleni Stamatoukou | Athens | BIRN | November 6, 2025 08:10

A Greek-Swiss initiative seeks to reopen the historic Peloponnese Railway to boost tourism and generate income for locals – but is the project really practical?

“**T**he train passed through my village. I remember travelling on it myself,” says Konstantinos Mprousalis, a 70-year-old retired teacher from Partheni, a small village outside the city of Tripoli in Greece’s mountainous Peloponnese region. “I’ve had a love for the railway since I was a child.”

Mprousalis is a spokesman for the Citizens’ Movement for the Salvation and Reopening of the Peloponnese Railway, a narrow-gauge network built back in 1882 that gradually ceased to operate in 2011, as the Greek financial crisis worsened.

Since then, ordinary citizens like Mprousalis and civil society organisations have been highlighting the railway’s value – and trying to get it up and running once more.

They argue that the railway route passes various historic locations and viticulture hotspots, links two UNESCO World Heritage sites and boasts several train stations of architectural interest. They believe the project could boost tourism, help to revitalise the area and reverse the depopulation trend in villages around the line.

In 2022, they thought they had made significant progress. The Greek Society for Environment and Culture, ELLET, and the Swiss embassy in Athens decided to collaborate to reactivate the railway.

“It is a monument of architectural and industrial heritage, it crosses wonderful landscapes and is a national infrastructure of great importance, which has been inactive for 15 years. Its activation will offer a lot to the local community and beyond,” said Irini Frezadou, an architect and member of the board of ELLET and the scientific coordinator of the Greek-Swiss initiative.

The Swiss connection



A stretch of track on the Peloponnese Railway, April 4. Photo: Citizens' Movement for the Salvation and Reopening of the Peloponnese Railway/Facebook

The Peloponnese railway line originally had around 160 stations, of which 79 have been designated by the Greek Ministry of Culture as modern monuments, alongside the Diakofto Kalavrita rack railway and the Manari railway bridge in Arcadia.

The line ran for about 750 kilometres and connected the archaeological UNESCO World Heritage sites of Mycenae and Olympia, while passing through various historic towns and villages that played an important role in the Greek revolution against the Ottomans in 1821.

Today, only three parts of the network still operate: the Patras Suburban Railway, which connects Kato Achaia with Patras and Rio with Agios Vassilios; Odontotos, the historic rack railway, which connects Diakopto and Kalavryta; and the Katakolo-Olympia route.

The Greek government invested 80 million euros in the renovation of the Corinth-Kalamata line between 2004 and 2009, with the intention to reopen it. The upgrade and reopening of the Corinth-Argos-Nafplio section is also [included](#) in the National Transport Plan. The Ministry of Transport's 20-year plan for 2024-2044 also provides for further upgrading of the Corinth-Tripoli-Kalamata axis.

The Swiss connection to the railway started with Frezadou, a graduate of ETH Zurich University. Since 2012, she has collaborated with the university on research projects on Greek railways, including looking at the reopening of the Peloponnese railway.

This led to a Greek-Swiss scientific initiative in which ELLET, the Swiss embassy, experts from the National Technical University of Zurich and the National Technical University of Athens all participated.

“Switzerland is a railway nation, so we care for the railway,” Stefan Estermann, the Swiss ambassador to Athens, told BIRN.

Estermann said an existing rail link allows access to the old narrow-gauge railway. “There already is a modern railway station in Korinthos that allows passengers to change from the normal to the narrow-gauge trains, being the perfect point of departure,” he said.

The Greek-Swiss initiative proposes reopening the railway along with the creation of bicycle paths, where the landscape allows. Swiss experts say the feasibility study and a business plan for the revival of the Corinth-Nafplio section of the railway, would cost about 280,000 euros.

“Our idea is to include bicycle tourism in our feasibility study for reactivating the railway in the Peloponnese, promoting both forms of sustainable tourism,” Estermann said.

Battle over bike routes

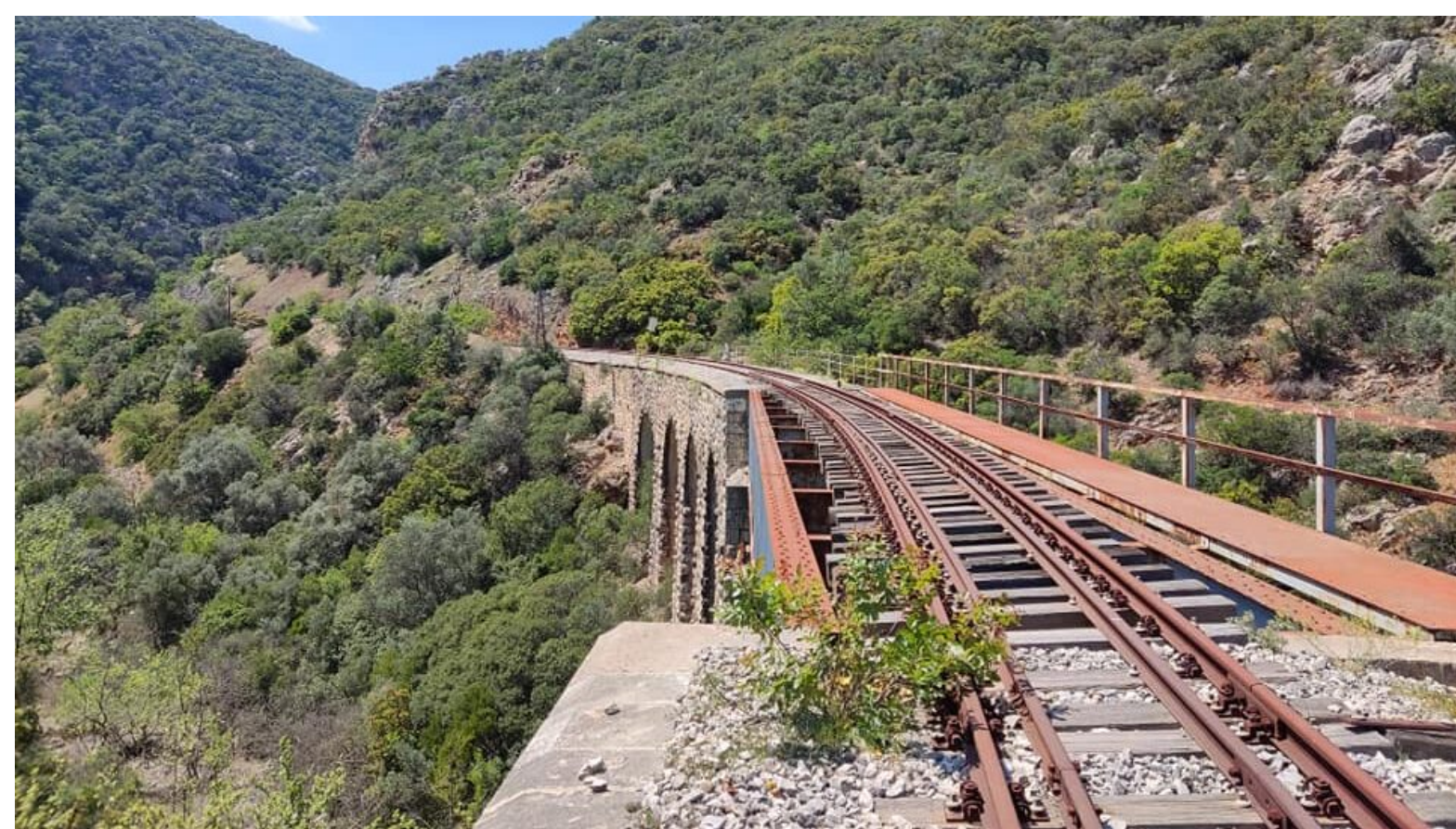


Photo: Citizens' Movement for the Salvation and Reopening of the Peloponnese Railway/Facebook

Plans for bicycle routes along the railway have triggered a row in parliament.

In September, the Technical Chamber of Greece, TEE, the official technical adviser to the state, announced a tender on behalf of the Environment and Energy Ministry for contractors to prepare two preliminary studies to convert a 244-kilometre section of the railway line from Megara to Corinth and Kalamata, around a third of the entire line, into a cycle path.

The cost of the preliminary studies totals over 3.5 million euros, which is to be covered by the Green Fund, a body supervised by the Ministry of Environment, which aims to strengthen development through environmental protection.

But the announcement alarmed civic groups, local authorities and opposition parties who voiced fears that the railway might be abandoned as a result.

“The conversion of the railway line into a cycle path will not only cancel the investments and studies that have already been carried out, but will cancel the reopening of a historic railway network,” nine MPs from the centre-left PASOK party [declared](#) on October 9, “which could offer significant benefits to the local development of the region, sustainable mobility and tourism.”

The uproar had an impact. On October 19, the TEE Assembly, the chamber’s governing body, called on the Environment Ministry to clarify that the preliminary studies are not about converting the railway line to other uses, but will focus only on adding bicycle paths where the terrain allows.

“If this clarification is not made, the TEE Assembly asks for the tender to be cancelled,” its president, Nikos Milis, told BIRN.

The TEE Assembly urged the TEE’s president and the Ministry to revise the tender, to explicitly include the railway line renovation in the project as well as the cycling path.

Estermann also argued against repurposing the railway as a bike trail. “Railway and bicycle tourism are complementary. One should not be promoted at the expense of the other. Cyclists love railways as a backup on their journeys, so permanently destroying the rail tracks to make way for a cycle path is not a good idea,” he said.

The arguments seemed to work. A few days after the controversy erupted, the TEE and the ministry issued the relevant clarification. “Under no circumstances should the preliminary study propose interventions that would alter the railway infrastructure so that it can no longer be used for its intended purpose, which is operation by the railway,” it said.

Frezadou, the architect from ELLET, described this as a “first” victory – ahead of a hoped-for decision to revitalise the railway itself. “All parties – both the Technical Chamber of Greece and the ministry – have recognised that they cannot destroy the historic railway network of the Peloponnese,” Frezadou said.

However, she argued the bike trail tender should have been cancelled altogether “because it is something that is not needed”, and because no feasibility study has been done to establish whether or not it would be practical and viable.

‘All in good time’



Andritsa station. Photo: Citizens' Movement for the Salvation and Reopening of the Peloponnese Railway/Facebook

While government politicians declare verbal support for the revitalisation of the railway, they do not promise immediate action.

Replying to a question in parliament last month from Alexis Charitsis, leader of the New Left party, Konstantinos Kyranakis, the Alternate Minister of Infrastructure and Transport, said that “our absolute priority is to make the active [part of the] railway as safe as possible again ... everything else is a luxury.”

Charitsis called for the cancellation of the bike route tender and the re-opening of the railway with EU funding.

According to ELLET, in 2024, Greece [declared](#) that the narrow-gauge lines in the Peloponnese could be part of the Trans-European Transport Network, an EU project that selects important transport routes across Europe for improvement and integration into a continent-wide high-speed rail system.

However, Kyranakis warned parliament that the Peloponnese line cannot be part of a European-wide rail network because it cannot accommodate high-speed trains – “its speeds are too low”. Instead, he acknowledged that it “looks like a work of art” because of its unique station buildings and the landscape that surrounds it.

He promised further consultation with local stakeholders and the opposition on the next steps towards reopening – “but all in good time”.

Estermann, however, remains positive. “I am fully convinced that the existing narrow-gauge railway system in the Peloponnese can be reactivated and modernised. This is exactly the charm of mountain railways in Switzerland,” he said.

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