



ASSOCIATION EUROPEENNE DES
CHEMINOTS AEC

EUROPEAN RAILWAY WORKERS'
ASSOCIATION - SPANISH SECTION
(AEC-SE)



In the rain of the Sil: a day with the Ponfeblino that we will never forget

There are days that seem to be written by the territory itself. Days in which the rain does not get in the way, but accompanies; in which the grey of the sky mixes with the bright black of the coal that still seems to beat in the sleeping locomotives. Last Friday, March 13, 2026, Villablino was the scene of one of those days that remain etched in the collective memory: the visit of a delegation from the **European Association of Railway Workers, Spanish Section (AEC-SE)** to the **Ponfeblino Tourist Train project**.

In this way, under an intense rain that marked the entire day, a delegation from the European Association of Railway Workers, Spanish Section (AECSE), visited last Friday, **March 13**, the Ponfeblino Tourist Train project, an initiative that advances steadily towards the recovery of the historic mining railway that linked Ponferrada and Villablino for more than a century.

The visit, of an institutional nature, is part of the explicit support that the AEC has wanted to show to the project, as stated in the official note of the organization: *"The European Association of Railway Workers (AEC) will carry out an institutional visit to the Ponfeblino Tourist Train Project (...) with the aim of showing its explicit support for this initiative"*.

We arrived early, enveloped in a persistent downpour that soaked the streets and made the rails shine as if waking up from a long sleep. We were accompanied by two fundamental voices of the territory: the **Councilor for Culture, Tourism and Citizen Participation, Elena Fernández**, and the **Councilor for Finance and Heritage, María José Álvarez**, whose involvement and closeness brought warmth to a day marked by water and wind.



In the workshops, the reception was given by **Manuel Ramos**, director of **Ferrocarril del Valle del Sil S.L.**, the company that promotes the recovery of historical material. His enthusiasm was contagious. As we walked among steam locomotives, restored tourist cars and parts that seemed to speak in low voices, Ramos explained to us each advance, each difficulty overcome, each dream that comes a little closer.

Official documentation of the Ponfeblino Tourist Train Consortium, whose Statutes declare as their main purpose *"the commissioning and operation of the Ponfeblino Tourist Train, as an element of economic development of the Bierzo Region"*, came to life before our eyes. It was not an administrative text: it was a promise.

The delegation of the AEC-SE, soaked but excited, listened attentively. The press release announcing this visit spoke of *"showing the explicit support of the European Railway Association for a*



fully Spanish project, based on heritage recovery and tourism revitalization". And there, among the smell of grease, wet wood and old iron, that support became tangible.

The rain hit the roof like a constant applause as we watched the material from the historic



Limón Exprés, now reborn in the valleys of the Sil. The steam locomotives, sleeping giants, seemed to breathe under the humidity of the day. And the old mining route, visible in the fog, reminded us that this train is not just a project: it is a wound that wants to heal with dignity.



Institutional meetings and European support



The day included meetings with local authorities and with the director of Ferrocarril del Valle del Sil S.L., a company collaborating in the recovery of the rolling stock. It was also attended by Javier Fernández López, director of the Asturias Railway Museum in Gijón, the volunteer steam driver of the Asturian museum Beatriz Vilarnovo González, the presence of the European President General of the AEC, Carlos Abellán Ruiz, and the partners from: Asturias, Madrid, Zamora, Santander, Palma de Mallorca, Barcelona and Santiago de Compostela, reinforced the institutional nature of the support, and highlighted the interest that the project arouses beyond the regional scope.

The ACS recalled that part of the actions have European funding and that the Ponfeblino fits fully into the continental strategies of preservation of industrial heritage and sustainable territorial development.



A warm end at the rustic hotel restaurant La Bolera

After the technical visit, the rain continued to fall with the same determination as the first minute. We took refuge in **La Bolera**, in Robles de Laciana, where the smell of hot broth and firewood enveloped us like a hug. There, around the table, conversations flowed as naturally as water through the ditches of the valley.

There was talk of the future, of sustainable tourism, of European railway identity, of the importance of the Ponfeblino rolling again not only as a train, but as a symbol. The councillors shared their vision for Laciana; the representatives of the AEC-SE contributed



their international experience; and Manuel Ramos, with the serenity of someone who knows every screw of the project, drew a possible horizon.



El Ponfeblino: more than a train

When we left the restaurant, the rain had subsided. The valley was still grey, but a luminous grey, one of those that announce that something is changing. And perhaps that is the best summary of the day: the Ponfeblino is ceasing to be a dream to become a movement, a shared emotion, a project that unites generations.



The visit of the AEC-SE was not only an institutional gesture. It was a reminder that railway heritage is not preserved for nostalgia, but for identity. Because there are trains that not only transport people: they transport memory, dignity and future.

And that March 13, under the rain of the Sil, we all felt that way.



El Berrón: where the railway breathes history, future and memory

There are places where the railway is not only a means of transport, but a pulse. A heartbeat that crosses generations, that mixes with the identity of a territory and that is still alive in every workshop, in every building and at every crossroads. El Berrón, in the heart of Asturias, is one of those places.

Last Friday, March 13, after the visit to the Ponfeblino Tourist Train project and on the way to Gijón, a delegation from the **European Railway Association (AEC), Spanish Section**, made a stop in El Berrón to visit unique railway facilities, in a day that combined technique, emotion and a deep respect for the Asturian railway memory.



But before that tribute, it was time to immerse ourselves in the operational heart of the Asturian railway. **Hand in hand with its director, Roberto Campo**, we toured the workshops and the rest of the facilities listening to his prolix explanations and where we were also presented with a keychain... and in this way, El Berrón did not disappoint.



1. The metric gauge workshops: where the steam breathes again



impeccable, majestic, as if it were waiting for the signal to roll again, once it has been checked and in working order.

The members of the delegation walked among pits, tools, dismantled bogies and the metallic smell so characteristic of the workshops. Each explanation of the **technician Mr. Roberto Campo** was a window into decades of engineering, effort and dedication to the world of the railway.

The first stop was the metric gauge railway workshops, a space where time seems to fold in on itself. Modern trains and locomotives painted in the corporate colour of **El Transcantábrico** coexist with other historical pieces, and among them a jewel stands out: the **restored steam locomotive VA N°8**,

The steam locomotive, silent but imposing, seemed to observe everything with the patience of someone who has seen entire generations of railway workers pass by.



2. The Regulation and Control Center (CRC): technology inside a building that seems like a dream

The second stop was, without a doubt, one of the most surprising: the **Centre for Regulation and Control of Railway Traffic in Asturias**, located in a building that seems to be taken from a modernist tale.



A **Gaudí-style construction**, lovingly restored, which combines impossible curves, ornamental details and an almost magical presence next to the tracks.

Inside, the modernist aesthetic is transformed into pure technology: screens, panels, communications, real-time maps. From this strategic point, the railway heartbeat is coordinated in the circulation of trains

throughout Asturias, both those of metric gauge and those of Iberian gauge.

The delegation watched with admiration how, from a building that could be a work of art, the movement of trains that travel through mountains, tunnels, valleys and coasts is controlled.

A perfect contrast between past and future.



3. The railway singularity: two lines that cross as if time did not exist

The third point of the visit was one of those places that only railway lovers know how to appreciate in all its dimension: the **railway singularity** of El Berrón.

Here, two metric-gauge lines **intersect at the same level and perpendicularly**. They are Line 770 (from Oviedo to Santander), and Line 752 (from Gijón to Laviana); a phenomenon as unique as it is beautiful.

Unique for the **engineering solutions that have been applied both to the track part**, where it is the flange of the train wheel -instead of the rim-, which rests temporarily on a block filled and raised internally on the rail to prevent the wheel rim -in its usual rolling-, from detecting the groove it crosses; **and on the catenary side**, where the artisanal construction of a mesh made with copper contact wire and welded with silver, in the manner of a spider web (as in the upper mesh carried by the fairground amusement tracks in bumper cars), makes the pantographs of the trains rub against the perpendicular crossing of contact wires, having both catenary (the two perpendicular lines of the contact wire) at the same level. In this way, **the catenary also intersects**, forming an electrical framework that looks like an industrial sculpture suspended in the air.



It is a point where engineering becomes poetry. A crossing that has seen trains pass by for decades, that has resisted modernizations, that continues to operate as naturally as the first day. A place where the railway shows its purest essence: functional, resistant, humble and extraordinary at the same time.



A day that leaves its mark

The visit concluded with the shared feeling of having toured a space where the railway is not only infrastructure: it is culture, identity and memory. Asturias, as the official press release of the AEC-SE recalls, has maintained *"a deep relationship with the railway for more than a century and a half"*, and El Berrón is one of its temples.

The delegation left with the certainty that this heritage – both tangible and human – deserves to be known, protected and celebrated. And with the emotion of knowing that, the next day, the Railway Museum of Asturias would host a historic event: the distinction of **Víctor Manuel** as an Honorary Member, a gesture that unites music, memory and rails in the same tribute.



A Saturday between rails, memory and music: an intimate chronicle of a day at the Asturias Railway Museum

There are days that are not lived: they are crossed. Days that seem to be written by history before one steps on them. **Saturday, March 14, 2026**, in Gijón, was one of those days.

The Railway Museum of Asturias woke up with that soft light that only northern cities have when they are preparing for something important. The air smelled of old iron, of varnished wood, of stories that have not gone away. And there, among locomotives that seemed to watch everything from their solemn silence, the **European Association of Railway Workers, Spanish Section (AEC-SE)** held its **General Assembly**.



I. The Assembly: voices that build the future amid echoes of the past



The room chosen for the **Assembly** seemed purposely made: high ceilings, exposed brick, rails that crossed the floor like veins of a living organism. The members of the AEC-SE arrived little by little, greeting each other with that mixture of camaraderie and respect that only occurs between those who share the same passion.

During the meeting, they talked about projects, challenges, the responsibility of safeguarding a legacy that does not belong only to the railway workers, but to everyone. The railway, that old giant that never stops advancing, was the true invisible protagonist of each intervention.

And as words filled the room, the engines seemed to listen.



II. Víctor Manuel, Honorary Member: when music meets rails

After the Assembly, the museum was transformed. The atmosphere became more solemn, more intimate, more expectant.

In the centre of the main nave, under the imposing gaze of two steam locomotives, one of them the "Varela de los Montes", the AEC-SE held an event that will be engraved in its history: **the distinction of the Asturian singer-songwriter Víctor Manuel as an Honorary Member.**



The press release said it clearly: the association wanted to recognise *"his career and his close link with railway memory and cultural heritage"*. But there, live, the gesture took on another dimension.



Because Víctor Manuel is not just an artist. He is a voice that has narrated Asturias, that has sung its mines, its trains, its farewells, its returns. It is a bridge between generations.

The event was also attended by various authorities and institutional representatives, including **the Councillor for Culture, Museums and Creative Industries of the Gijón City Council, Ana Montserrat López Moro; the director of the Railway Museum, Javier Fernández López, and the European President General of the European Railway Association (AEC), Carlos Abellán Ruiz**, whose participation underlined the public, cultural and European nature of the tribute.



In that same solemn setting, the AEC-SE also wanted to recognize the work of those who, from the professional and heritage fields, keep the railway memory alive. **Diplomas of merit, official recognition and gratitude** for his dedication to the research and preservation of the **Railway Industrial Heritage** were presented to the director of the Museum himself, **Javier Fernández López**.

Likewise, Renfe train driver **Beatriz Vilarnovo González** was distinguished with **official recognition and gratitude**, for her work as a **historic train driver** at the Asturias Railway Museum, a job that allows the heritage not only to be preserved, but to continue breathing and moving on the rails.

And it was precisely in that climate of contained emotion that the **great surprise of the event came**: the fulfilment of a childhood wish that Víctor Manuel himself had written in his song *"The railway worker's son"* (*"El hijo del ferroviario"*). In that song he confessed: *«My father, by the way, was a railway worker / and as a child I would have liked / to put on my cap, grab the whistle / and, with the flag, start the Talgo»*.



That dream, kept for decades, came true right there, on the railway docks of the Museum of Asturias, in Gijón. The AEC-SE provided him with the **regulated equipment** so that he could **give the regulatory output to a steam locomotive hooked to passenger cars**.



What was born as a surprise for him, **became an endearing and deeply emotional act**. Many attendees felt that, at that moment, not only the singer-songwriter was being honored, but also all the railway workers - those of yesterday, those of today and those to come-, who have built the identity of this land.

When he received the distinction, the silence was almost reverential. The locomotives seemed to lean a little. And many felt that this tribute was not only for him, but for all the railway workers – those of yesterday, those of today, those to come – who have built the identity of this land.



The laudatio: Víctor Manuel, "the voice that never surrenders"

Narrative chronicle about the tribute to Víctor Manuel

There are speeches that not only present a person: they reveal him. The laudatio dedicated to **Víctor Manuel San José**, named *Honorary Member 2025 of the AEC-SE*, belongs to that category of words that do not describe, but illuminate.

At the Asturias Railway Museum, in Gijón, on 14 March 2026, the European Association of Railway Workers paid tribute to an artist whose career has transcended the stage to become an **act of citizenship**. As stated in the text itself:



"There are artists who fill stadiums, and there are artists who fill consciences."

That was the starting point of a laudatio that spoke not only of the musician, but of the man who has known how to turn his voice into an instrument of dignity. From his first songs, Víctor Manuel understood that music could be refuge, denunciation, memory and tenderness. His work has

accompanied miners, invisible women, peoples who fight for their dignity, people in need of intellectual support and entire generations who found in him an ethical compass.

The narration underlined his coherence, his serenity and that "quiet strength" that characterizes him. He did not need great gestures to demonstrate commitment: it was enough for him to be where he was needed, to sing when others were silent, to remember that culture can also be a public service.

The text expressed it clearly:

"We don't see just an exceptional singer. We see a committed citizen."

The laudatio culminated with a quote from Eduardo Galeano that resonated in the room as an ethical manifesto: the idea that small gestures, multiplied,



can change the world. And in that spirit, the AEC-SE recognized Víctor Manuel not only for his music, but for his example: for being a voice that never gives up, that never settles, that never forgets.

That day in Gijón not only an appointment was celebrated. A way of being in the world was celebrated. A way of singing that is also a way of living.



III. A gesture of memory and future: the vindication of the Vía de la Plata in the tribute to our Víctor Manuel.

In the midst of the solemnity of the honorary act dedicated to our beloved Víctor Manuel, there was a moment that transcended the personal tribute to become a collective declaration. In front of the museum's historic locomotives, a group of colleagues unfurled a large banner with a message as clear as it was necessary:

"1985–2026 = 41 years incommunicado. We want the Vía de la Plata train."

The image says it all: firm faces, joined hands and the symbolic layout of the old line called "Vía de la Plata"; a railway route of more than 900 kilometres that linked Gijón, Oviedo, León, Astorga, Benavente, Zamora, Salamanca, Plasencia, Cáceres, Mérida, Zafra and Seville, reminding us that this railway corridor is not only a lost infrastructure, but an open wound on the map of Spain.



The event, which was already full of emotion for the recognition of Víctor Manuel, became for a few moments a space of vindication. There, among locomotives that keep the memory of generations of railways, the demand to reopen the Vía de la Plata resonated with strength and dignity.

It was a simple gesture, but full of meaning: honoring those who have dedicated their lives to the railway also implies defending the future of the railway. And in that future, the Vía de la Plata cannot continue to be a memory; it must return to being a road.

An act of tribute, yes.



IV. The voice of cinema: Emilio Ruiz Barrachina and the memory that is filmed

Among the most special moments of the morning was the intervention of film director **Emilio Ruiz Barrachina**, whose presence added an unexpected layer of cultural depth.



His talk was not a typical conference: it was a journey. He spoke of the railway as a metaphor, as a stage, as a character. He recalled how trains have crossed the history of cinema since its origins, how they have symbolized farewells, encounters, escapes, returns, hopes.

But the most exciting thing was when he connected that cinematographic gaze with Asturias. With its stations. With its trains that have taken entire lives on its wheels.

His voice resounded among the locomotives as if he were narrating a film that we all knew, but that no one had told like that. And many felt that, for an instant, the entire museum became a set where memory was the protagonist.



V. Lunch at "El Otru Mallu": where the brotherhood sits at the table

After the emotion, came the heat. The human warmth, that of unhurried conversations, that of laughter that loosens the solemnity of official acts.

The group moved to the restaurant "El Otru Mallu", in Gijón, a place that seems made for people to meet. There, between dishes that smelled of tradition and tables that invited people to stay, the day changed pace.

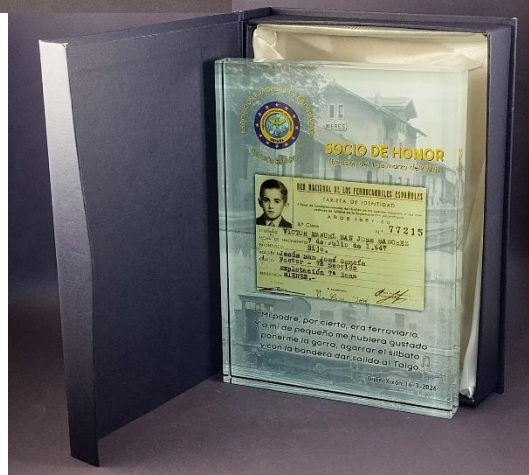
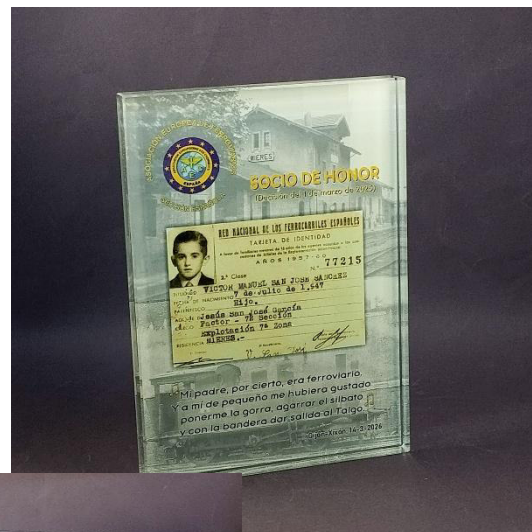
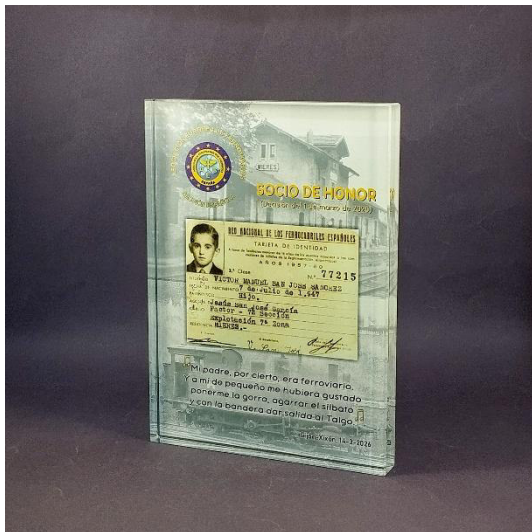
There was talk of trains, yes, but also of music, of memories, of anecdotes that are only told when one feels like family. The members of the AECSE shared impressions of the day, and more than one confessed that the ceremony had touched deep fibers.



Because it is not every day that an artist who has given voice to the collective memory is honoured. And it is not every day that the past, present and future of the railway is celebrated, in the same space.



Diplomas of Recognition and Commemorative Plaque:





DIPLOMA DE MÉRITO



La Sección Española de la Asociación Europea de Ferroviarios AEC-SE ha otorgado el reconocimiento oficial y gratitud, por su labor en la investigación, preservación del Patrimonio Industrial Ferroviario, al director del Museo del Ferrocarril de Asturias, dependiente del Ayuntamiento de Gijón, como:

**RECONOCIMIENTO ESPECIAL 2026 DE LA AEC-SE POR SU APORTACIÓN EXCEPCIONAL
EN FAVOR DE:**

D. Javier Fernández López

Y para que así conste en el Museo del Ferrocarril de Asturias, Gijón a 14 de marzo de 2026

Presidente Sección Española AEC-SE

Secretario Sección Española AEC-SE

Presidente General Europeo AEC

Jesús Aguilar Velamazán

Jose Manuel Rodriguez Vidal

Carlos Abellán Ruiz



DIPLOMA DE MÉRITO



La Sección Española de la Asociación Europea de Ferroviarios AEC-SE ha otorgado el reconocimiento oficial y gratitud, por su labor como maquinista de trenes históricos en el Museo del Ferrocarril de Asturias, dependiente del Ayuntamiento de Gijón, como:

**RECONOCIMIENTO ESPECIAL 2026 DE LA AEC-SE
EN FAVOR DE:**

Dña. Beatriz Vilarnovo González

Y para que así conste en el Museo del Ferrocarril de Asturias, Gijón a 14 de marzo de 2026

Presidente Sección Española AEC-SE

Secretario Sección Española AEC-SE

Presidente General Europeo AEC

Jesús Aguilar Velamazán

Jose Manuel Rodriguez Vidal

Carlos Abellán Ruiz



Epilogue: a day that stays in the soul

When the afternoon began to fall on Gijón, the museum was left behind, but it did not leave. It was still inside: in the conversations, in the looks, in the feeling of having experienced something that will not be repeated in the same way.



The Assembly had set the course. The distinction to Víctor Manuel had added emotion. And the lunch at "El Otru Mallu" had sealed the brotherhood. It was a complete, round day, one of those that do not need decorations because they are already full of meaning.

A day in which the railway, that old storyteller, reminded us again that it is still alive. And that, as long as there are people willing to listen to it, it will continue to advance.

Santiago de Compostela – Santander, 8 April 2026

Alberto José Sierra Daza
Deputy Secretary of the European Railway
Association, Spanish Section (AEC-SE)
& European Coordinating Delegate

Carlos Abellan Ruiz
European President General of the
European Railway Association (AEC)

✓ Firmado por SIERRA DAZA
ALBERTO JOSE - ***3718**
el día 08/04/2026 con un
certificado emitido por
AC FNMT Usuarios



✓ Firmado por Carlos
Abellan Ruiz
el día 08 / 04 / 2026 con un
certificado emitido
por IASE AC FNMT
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ASSOCIACION EUROPEENNE DES CHEMINOTS
EUROPEAN RAILWAY WORKERS' ASSOCIATION -
SPANISH SECTION



HONORARY MEMBER OF AEC-SE FOR 2025
VÍCTOR MANUEL SAN JOSÉ

LAUDATIO by Víctor Manuel: The Voice That Never Surrenders

There are artists who fill stadiums, and there are artists who fill consciences. Víctor Manuel belongs to that rare and necessary lineage that understands music not only as a profession, but as an act of responsibility. From his first steps, when he was still a young Asturian with more questions than certainties, he knew that singing could also be a way of accompanying, denouncing, embracing those who had no voice.

Throughout his life, Víctor Manuel has shown that commitment is not a pose, but a way of being in the world. He has sung to the miners when the darkness of the earth was confused with that of the times. He has sung to the women who sustain life in silence, to the peoples who fight for their dignity, to the unusual who professed their love more than social understanding, to the memory that is not resigned to oblivion. And he has always done so with an honesty that does not need loudspeakers, because it is born from the truth.

His work is a bridge between generations: those who lived through difficult times find refuge and testimony in his songs; those who come later discover in him an ethical compass, a reminder that culture can also be resistance, tenderness and justice.

Víctor Manuel has not stopped being where he was needed: in solidarity concerts, in social causes, in initiatives that seek a more egalitarian country and society. He has never needed great gestures to prove it; his coherence, his serene presence, that 'calm strength', and his way of saying things that penetrates deeper than any speech is enough for him.

Today, when we look at his career, we do not see only an exceptional singer. We see a committed citizen, a creator who has been able to turn his talent into a public service; a man who has put his voice next to those who needed it most. And that, in a world that sometimes seems to forget the essential, is an act of courage.

That is why we celebrate Víctor Manuel: for his music, yes, but also for his example. Because he reminds us that the art of music can be a beacon, and that there are voices that, when raised, illuminate much more than a stage.

Quote from the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano: *"Many small people, who live in small places, doing small things can change the world, because at the end of the day, we are what we do to change what we are."*

Laudatio read by Alberto José Sierra Daza at the Asturias Railway Museum in Gijón, March 14, 2026