

High-speed link to Europe

Work began last year on the final section of the Channel Tunnel fast link from Ebbsfleet to St Pancras.

When the £1.7 billion project is finished in 2007, it will allow Eurostar trains to travel at high speed all the way from Europe into London.

The first stage of the link from Folkestone to Ebbsfleet is already nearing completion.

It is built to a generous gauge (UIC-C) so that double-deck commuter trains will also be able to run from Kent into St Pancras where the nineteenth century station is being transformed.

The impressive train shed which was built by William Barlow for the Midland Railway in 1868 will be used exclusively by Eurostars but there will also be an ultra-modern steel and glass extension to the north which will more than double its length to cope with the quarter-mile-long trains.

Midland Mainline trains will eventually terminate on four tracks in the west side of the new extension and will no longer penetrate the 19th century train shed. Before that, however, they will use a temporary terminus on the east side of the station.

The Midland main line is long overdue for electrification which would allow a proper high-speed service to be provided from London to Leicester, Sheffield and Nottingham but unless there is quick change of policy, Midland Mainline will still be operating diesel trains which currently pollute St Pancras when the Eurostars arrive there.

The Channel Tunnel rail link however will be a taste of the future for Britain, being electrified at 25kV and with automatic train protection. Railfuture is confident that high-speed trains from Germany and many other parts of Europe will be arriving at St Pancras, along with Eurostars, soon after the CTRL is completed.

Stage two of the link, being built by London & Continental Railways, is expensive at £134 million per mile (less than some new roads but much more useful) because much of it is in twin-bore tunnel. The 12-mile tunnel from near St Pancras to Ripple Lane, Dagenham, includes provision for an underground station at Stratford. For five miles to Purfleet, the CTRL runs above ground along the south side of

the existing rail line to Tilbury and then crosses the M25 on a viaduct before tunnelling under the River Thames.

Part of the two-mile tunnel under the river goes through water-bearing chalk which will need "de-watering".

A new station will be built at Ebbsfleet with a connection to the North Kent line to allow commuter trains from Margate and Chatham to run on the high speed line into London.

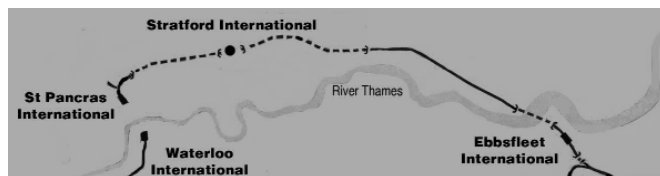
Back at St Pancras, Thameslink trains which currently dive underground just outside St Pancras will be diverted to a new Thameslink underground station on the west of St Pancras under the Midland Mainline station. There will also be a Thameslink 2000 underground connection to the King's Cross line.

In the summer of 2004, cross-London Thameslink services will be suspended for six months to enable the engineering work to be carried out.

Eurostar trains will also have links from St Pancras to the King's Cross line as well as to the North London Line, just north of St Pancras, for access to the West Coast main line and to the depot at North Pole.

UK services

Railfuture Kent has been told that the Strategic Rail Authority is confident that high-speed



Alex King

domestic services into St Pancras will commence soon after the link is completed.

The franchising process would be under way soon and there are reports that Connex South Eastern will have first refusal, although it is expected that other operators such as Great North Eastern and Virgin will be interested.

At present there are no trains able to combine the required acceleration and a running speed of 150mph, and an ability to run on third-rail electric lines.

The Department of Transport is believed to be working on a specification for high-speed rolling stock. Timetabling is also under consideration.

Work will be started next year on Strood tunnel to improve access to Ebbsfleet

Eurostar

It is reported that Waterloo to Avignon Eurostar services will be introduced on Saturdays this summer, from 20 July to 7 September. The southbound train will leave Waterloo

at 07.22, calling at Ashford at 08.27 and arriving at Avignon Centre at 14.37.

The northbound train will leave Avignon Centre at 17:05, calling at Ashford at 21.44 and arriving London Waterloo at 22.48.

Fares are "competitive" and bookings were due to start on 19 March.

Eurostar will be selling combination fares for customers who wish to return on a different day.

Please note however, that TGV reservations open 60 days before date of travel and therefore combination journeys cannot be booked until the end of May.

Onward connection tickets will be available separately.

This news was available on the Railfuture email newsgroup railfuture@yahoo.com. If you would like to join in, send a short email message including the page one headline from a recent edition of Railwatch magazine to railfuture-subscribe@yahoo.com

Passenger power in the USA

A two day Conference was held in Philadelphia in December, writes David Bertram. Some 50 people attended and represented a cross section of passenger interest groups, mainly from sponsored organisations such as the Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee (ACAC) and South Jersey Transit Advisory Committee. The organisers had sent out a thousand invitations across the USA and Canada and they knew they had only reached a small proportion of the many mainly local voluntary groups they believe exist. There were several better known groups missing, a reflection of the lack of common cause and some rivalry and personalities!

Such are the distances involved that it was not surprising given that each person was self funding that the majority attending were from within the north east corridor and while a high proportion of the trains run in this region it must not be forgotten that more and more conurbations are rapidly expanding their transit services with heavy rail commuter services, light rail and transit services, plus of course the national coverage by Amtrak.

The conference quickly recognised the need for better and more effective passenger representation, given on the one hand the 'third world status' of north American passenger services through low investment over many years (a familiar cry) and rising use on the other. New York, for example, has seen a 30% rise in train passengers in the last five years. There were statistics from several speakers to illustrate the need for urgent action and for example the NE Corridor Sub Group of ACAC had provided Amtrak with 66 pages of recommendations, though how many had been actioned was not stated! It was also said that the road lobby strength comprises some 15% of the US economy whilst Amtrak only carries 0.3% of inter city journeys.

The outcome of the two days was a unanimous decision to seek recognition from Congress and support, hopefully with funding, for the establishment of a national body to represent rail passengers' interests. A planning group has been set up to prepare detailed submissions quickly.

dandb@tickhilldonc.freeserve.co.uk