

Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

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One mile to go

Picture: MAC HAWKINS



The tunnels being bored to take Eurostar trains to London St Pancras are now within one mile of their destination.

One of the 1,000 tonne boring machines, nicknamed Bertha, stopped at the ventilation shaft in Corsica Street, Highbury, pictured above, in November, for a maintenance check.

But sister machine Annie was continuing to drive the final mile towards St Pancras and the twin-bore tunnel is expected to be complete early next year – ahead of schedule.

It is nearly six months since the two Kawasaki machines arrived at Graham Road, Hackney, from Stratford.

Since then Bertha has laid nearly 40,000

concrete segments in a four-mile stretch of tunnel.

Nearly 700,000 tonnes of spoil has been removed during this tunnel drive and been taken back by conveyor belt to Stratford to raise the ground level by seven metres ready for commercial development.

The Channel Tunnel has not had the impact it should have had in bringing Britain's rail network closer to Europe. Eurostar is still largely operated as a rich businessmen's club and has not properly integrated its services into either the domestic rail network or the existing fares structure.

But when complete in 2007, the £5.2billion Channel Tunnel rail link will

halve journey times from central London to the Channel Tunnel and allow new high-speed domestic services from Kent to the three new international stations at St Pancras, Stratford and Ebbsfleet.

It could also provide the impetus to ensure that the vast amounts of public money invested bring proper transport and social inclusion benefits.

It's time for ordinary people to have some payback for their European and British taxes being spent on the project.

The 46-mile CTRL section one from the Channel Tunnel to Fawkham Junction in north Kent, opened in September.

More information at www.ctrl.co.uk