

A high speed route to European cities

Britain takes a major step forward this year in joining the European high-speed rail club. St Pancras International is expected to open on 14 November along with Ebbsfleet and the second stage of the Channel Tunnel rail link.

That means there will be a truly high-speed railway all the way from London to both Paris and Brussels and we will also be able to link into other high-speed rail routes to other parts of Europe.

The 20-minute reduction in journey times from London to Paris and Brussels will attract airline users.

"This move will be the most significant event in Eurostar's history since we started running passenger services 12 years ago today," said chief executive Richard Brown.

"It will mark the start of a new era in travel between the UK and mainland Europe, making high-speed rail an even faster, more reliable and less environmentally damaging alternative to flying."

But the change will also bring problems. Waterloo International will close and Ashford in Kent will lose most of its current Eurostar service of "10 out and 12 back" a day.

From November only four Eurostar trains each way will call at Ashford International. There will be no trains calling there for most of the day, and none to Brussels at all.

Ashford station cost £100million to rebuild for Eurostar services just a few years ago which seems like a waste of money now, if only four trains each way stop there.

Railfuture believes the fullest use should be made of this asset.

Eurostar has not properly marketed Ashford, and Railfuture is worried many people from Kent, Sussex, Surrey and South London will choose not to board Eurostar at Ebbsfleet but to travel by air.

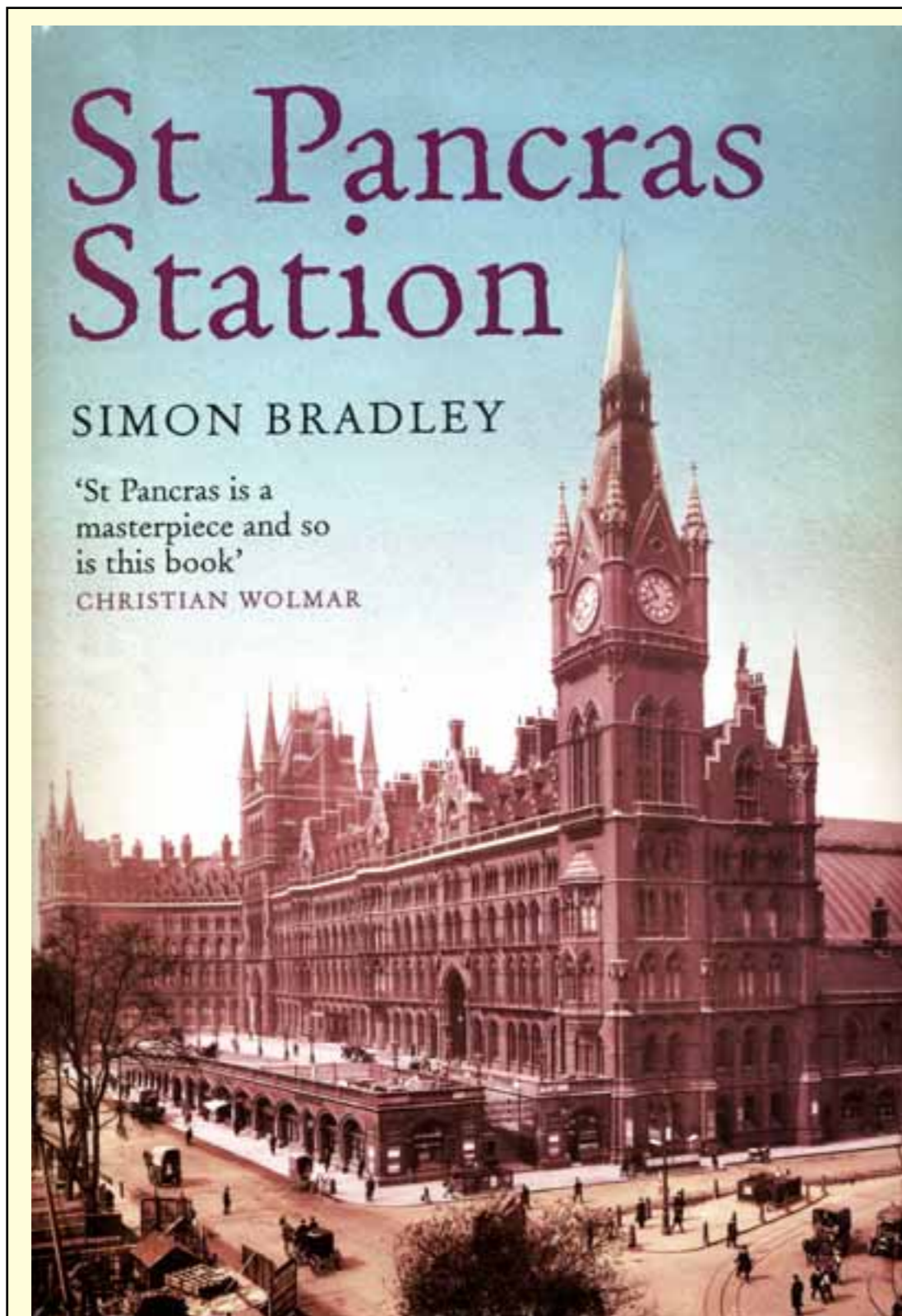
Ebbsfleet International station is near both Gravesend and the M25 and has parking for 9,000 cars, but it is in one of the most congested locations on the motorway network.

Worse still, Ebbsfleet International station has no direct access from other train services, and the nearest station is Northfleet, a mile away.

Ebbsfleet domestic station will open in December 2009, and will be served by trains between London and Medway towns, but not from other parts of Kent.

Most Kent rail passengers who do not or cannot travel by car will be able to gain access to Eurostar services only via the four daily trains calling at Ashford.

Railfuture is calling on Eurostar to provide a better service, with trains calling at least every two hours alternately at Ebbsfleet or Ashford. Paris, Lille and Brussels must be



served by these trains. Railfuture, in conjunction with European rail passenger organisations, has been campaigning within the European Union for improved cross-border rail services throughout Europe, in line with EU policy.

The Ashford-Calais rail service is an example of worst practice, with only three outward and two inward trains daily, at absurdly high fares,

while motorists have both frequent Eurotunnel and ferry services.

Dover-Folkestone and Calais should enjoy Eurostar services from Ashford every two hours. Railfuture urges both Eurostar and the Government to reconsider their attitudes, have more concern for the environment of the south-east, and ensure that Ashford retains at least its present service levels. The

MEP for South East England Sharon Bowles is also campaigning against the reduction in Eurostar services from Ashford.

She says the cuts will cause great inconvenience to passengers throughout the area who rely on the service, and who will now need to travel to Ebbsfleet station for the Eurostar connection (mostly travelling there by car with the associ-

A grand way forward

The Midland Railways 1850-built terminus at St Pancras opens for Eurostars in November, and Railfuture campaigners will be looking forward to the day when French and German high-speed trains can also arrive there.

Eurostar will be keen to remain a monopoly operator but passengers will look forward to being able to board a direct train to Amsterdam, Marseilles, Berlin, Madrid and Rome.

There seems to be no reason why European operators should not run services to St Pancras.

However in practice any TGV, ICE and AVE trains will have to gain approval from health and safety experts for running through the Channel Tunnel.

Trains going through the long Swiss Alpine tunnels are currently not required to meet the same strict fire regulations as Channel Tunnel trains.

European railways may have to build new trains to serve London while Eurostars would have to be modified to allow them to run in Germany and Holland but at least the European Parliament is keen to open up cross-border rail.

Illustrated left is a new book by Simon Bradley tracing the station's history. For years its trainshed was the widest single span structure in the world and George Gilbert Scott's Midland Grand Hotel was one of the world's most impressive buildings. The book costs £14.99 but the publisher is offering it to Railfuture members for £10 each, plus £2 postage and packing. To order, please ring Jodyanne Fletcher with your credit card details on 020 7841 6302 or email specialoffers@profilebooks.com, or send a cheque for £12 to Profile Books, 3A Exmouth House, Exmouth Market, London EC1R 0JH



NEW ELECTRIC TRAINS: SNCF has ordered £300million worth of electric trains for French regional services. The 112 high-capacity trains (top) will be built in France by Bombardier and can run as electrics (at 15kV or 25kV) or diesels.

In Germany Bombardier is set to clinch a £600million deal to supply Talent electric trains for German regional services, right. They will run as two-car or six-car units and can be adjusted to operate on different voltage systems prevalent in the European rail network (15kV AC, 25kV AC or 3kV DC).

Pictures: Bombardier



Out and about in Paris and London

By Trevor Garrod

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I represented Railfuture and the European Passengers' Federation at meetings in London and Paris in December.

The London meeting was with the Association of European Rail Agents, who were very interested in our work lobbying for rail passengers at national and international level.

AERA consists of independent travel agents who sell rail tickets, and like us, they have to deal with operators. I explained our efforts to get train operating companies

community. The campaign has the support of several local MPs, and all of the MEPs for the area, who are working together in Brussels in a cross-party alliance. They are considering a postcard campaign.

For more details of the Railfuture campaign, contact Ian McDonald, 10 Douglas Road, Maidstone, Kent ME16 8ES. Email: ianfsmcdonald@blueyonder.co.uk



to advertise to their potential customers and where it was possible to obtain information about Eurostar, rail-sea-rail and Continental facilities, something even more important now that these have been dropped from the Great Britain Rail Timetable.

At the very least, the companies should mention in their own publicity how to find out about times and book tickets.

We also had considerable discussion about Eurostar services after 14 November 2007, as some AERA members shared our concerns about the proposals to reduce services at Ashford International.

On 16 December I made a day trip by train from Lowestoft to Paris and spent almost all my time in the French capital at a meeting of the National Council of our French sister organisation, FNAUT (Federation Nationale des Associa-

tions d'Usagers des Transports). I explained to them the reasons for rail privatisation in our country, the advantages and disadvantages and the lessons to be learnt.

Our French colleagues were very interested in fare and ticketing issues and the role of Railfuture, local users' associations and statutory bodies like Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch.

They also wanted to know about the influence of the environmental lobby in Great Britain, road pricing and the collapse of Railtrack.

I have had further e-mail correspondence with their chairman to clarify points and as a result a detailed article is to appear in their journal FNAUT Infos.

I have also prepared a short paper for them on how lobbying can be conducted when the rail services are privatised. The paper is in French, but I can send a copy to any member.

Please send an SAE to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road South, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 1RQ.