

Page One picture

Work continues apace on the East London Line and next year, it will give London an Overground cross-city rail link helping to match the Paris network of RER lines.

The £1billion project is expected to stimulate £10billion worth of associated regeneration.

Work is also currently under way to upgrade the north-south cross-London Thameslink rail service.

When the £5.5billion Thameslink project is finished in six years time, there will be air-conditioned Electrostar trains through central London every two to three minutes to destinations like Bedford, Brighton, Gatwick and Luton.

Work has also begun on the biggest rail project of all, Crossrail.

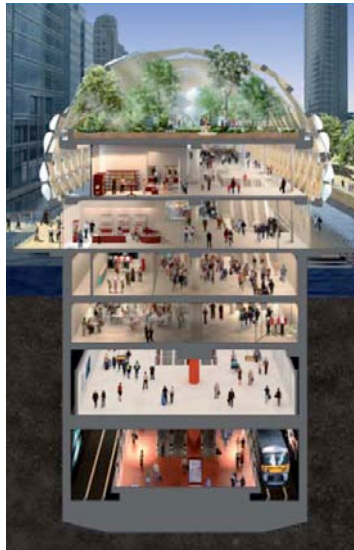
Crossrail, costing £16billion, is expected to deliver £36billion worth of benefit to the UK economy when the east-west line opens in eight years time. It will link Kent (including possibly Ebbsfleet) and Essex to Heathrow airport.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Mayor of London Boris Johnson marked the start of Crossrail construction in June when the first steel piles were driven for the new Crossrail Canary Wharf station.

It is being built below the water of North Dock with several floors

of retail space and a park on top. There is however a cloud on the horizon. The Tories have refused to rule out cancelling Crossrail if they win the next election.

It should also be remembered that Network Rail's predecessor Rail-track failed to deliver on Thameslink and refused even to consider building Crossrail.



Crossrail's 'below water level' station at Canary Wharf is now under construction

Railwatch

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Who's Who: Many other useful contact details can be found on the Railfuture website

Wales

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Loop forward

The half-hourly passenger service to Merthyr and associated dynamic passing loop at Merthyr Vale was inaugurated on 18 May. This was achieved by the extension of a service which formerly terminated at Pontypridd. Also from 18 May, a later evening train was provided on the Coryton branch at 22.21 from Cardiff Central. The previous last departure was at 20.51.

Now Huw Lewis, Labour Assembly Member for Merthyr and Rhymney, says similar improvements, to provide a half-hourly frequency, are needed for the Rhymney Valley. Welcoming the new service following a long-standing campaign which led to £23million of investment, Mr Lewis said the new service would make a huge difference for local people.

He added: "It will allow better access for people to contribute to the local economy, but it will also help families access better leisure services and bring people closer together."

Merthyr Vale station was opened by the Taff Vale Railway in 1883 and featured briefly in the 1971 film *10 Rillington Place*.

Chester benefit

Virgin West Coast has improved its service from North Wales to London Euston following the introduction of its full West Coast timetable. It now offers an hourly service from Chester.

Steel to Europe

New freight services conveying steel from Margam to Wembley and Dollands Moor for Mauberge, near Lille, were introduced in March and up to four weekly services have been provided.

Ferry bad news

Irish Sea ferry services for foot passengers have further deteriorated. The traditional "arrive by train and walk on to the ferry" at port of departure and "walk off ferry and depart by train" at port of arrival procedure has been reduced to one service a day. The remaining service, operated by Stena HSS, departs Holyhead at 10.25 for Dun Laoghaire and returns at 13.30 from Dun Laoghaire. Stena's other services from Holyhead now arrive at Dublin City port which is at the eastern end of North Wall, a 15-minute bus ride to the city centre. The berth used has no walk on/off facility. Stena will however convey foot passengers on its Superferry services at 08.20 from Dublin and 13.50 from Holyhead and passengers are transferred by bus between the terminals and on to the boat. Stena has ceased conveying foot passengers on its night crossings.

Irish Ferries however continue to provide day and night crossings for foot passengers between Holyhead and Dublin. Foot passengers are conveyed on to and off the ferries by bus at Holyhead but walk on/off facilities are available at Dublin City port which is linked to Dublin city centre by a dedicated bus link.

Rail developments in Wales

Passenger Focus held its 13 May meeting in the Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay. The morning session, attended by members of Railfuture, included presentations from Welsh Assembly Government, Arriva Trains Wales, First Great Western and Network Rail. The presentations provided a summary of present and future rail developments in Wales. The improved performances of ATW and FGW were noted but those present stated that performances could be further enhanced by track improvements. Questions were asked about future electrification, the coordination of services (ATW and FGW services from Newport to Swansea depart within five minutes of each other) and new rolling stock.

