

# Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

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Picture: RAIL LINK ENGINEERING



## So near, yet so far

A Eurostar train crosses the River Medway on Britain's first high-speed railway – the Channel Tunnel rail link.

The picture highlights the difference between the polluting, land-wasting motorway on the left and the fuel-efficient, safe railway. All the people in the road vehicles on view could probably fit into one railway carriage.

The high-speed line, which will take Eurostar trains into a new station at London St Pancras in three years time, should herald a bright new future for the rail network in Britain.

But in fact the £5.2 billion CTRL is the exception rather than the rule.

Hopes that the line from Ashford, Kent, along the south coast of England would be upgraded as a feeder route for Eurostar have been dashed time and again. And in the neighbouring county of Sussex the

Government Office for the South East is working actively to prevent the rail network expanding to meet current demand, let alone expand to cope with new passengers.

GOSE, which has a dubious record on transport, is trying to foil plans to reopen the line from Uckfield to Lewes.

It is calling for the eight-mile reopening to be dropped from the Regional Transport Strategy.

All the local councils, MPs and MEPs know that the reopening would enhance the business, cultural, health and safety aspects of life in the south-east.

The line could be reopened and associated lines electrified for around £100 million – less than a fiftieth of the cost of the CTRL.

The reopening would reduce road traffic in an area where there are many narrow, congested roads. It would provide access in an area that is currently poorly served by pub-

lic transport and it would open up access to Newhaven and ferries to France, as well as opening up a third main line from London to the South Coast.

Most of the councils in the area also question the Strategic Rail Authority's failure to recognise the value of the Uckfield route as a relief and alternative for the Brighton main line. Crowborough Town Council is just one of the organisations urging GOSE to re-think its strategy.

"We are very concerned at the idea that the route of the former railway would no longer be protected," said Councillor Julian Salmon, chairman of Crowborough town council's environment committee.

"It is quite clear to the majority that the rail closure over 30 years ago, to enable an inadequate road scheme to become practicable, was a huge mistake."