

A new era for high-speed trains

TGV speed record

French Railways emphasised their superiority in April when a TGV set a new world speed record of 372mph.

President Jacques Chirac said: "It is a magnificent demonstration of France's great abilities in research and development and is further proof of the excellence of the French rail industry."

French TGV trains normally run at speeds of up to 200mph but will be increased to 224mph in the next five years.

The previous speed record was 320mph set in France in 1990.

The new record was set on the latest French high-speed track from Paris to Strasbourg which opens this month. The new line is another piece of the European high-speed network.

Euro network

The line from Brussels to Amsterdam should be finished this summer and several projects are under way in Spain. Other projects are in advanced planning stages all across Europe.

German Railways has introduced new services and fares to Paris from Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Mannheim, Kaiserslautern and Saarbrücken.

The eventual aim is to create a high-speed railway from Paris to Bratislava via Strasbourg, Stuttgart, Munich and Vienna. Perhaps in response, Russia is already talking about extending its broad gauge network to Bratislava.

Ashford protest

Even Britain has something to celebrate this year with the completion of the Channel Tunnel high-speed link and the opening of London St Pancras International and Ebbsfleet stations in November this year.

But the good news has been overshadowed by protests in Kent over big reductions in the Eurostar service at Ashford.

Eurostar managers distinguished themselves in April by refusing to meet a delegation of four MPs, four councillors and Railfuture's Ian McDonald, who wanted to present an 8,000-signature petition calling for a change of policy on Ashford.

They also refused to allow TV news teams to film on Waterloo station.

The Ashford campaign is spiritedly led by Ashford resident Edith Robson who has managed to get four political parties on board – the Tories, Lib Dem, Labour and Green.

Lib Dem Member of the European Parliament for the South East, Sharon Bowles said "It is deeply disappointing that Eurostar have chosen to make these cuts to the service. Now we must work to ensure they understand the importance of Ashford's international connec-



Tony Juniper of Friends of the Earth and Mr Brown at St Pancras

tions." She has launched a website to fight for Eurostar services at Ashford.

See: <http://saveashfordinternational.org.uk/>

In a new leaflet submitted to both Eurostar and the Government, Railfuture is advocating the following pattern of service:

Every two hours:

London, Ashford, Calais, Paris
London, Ebbsfleet, Paris
London, Ashford, Lille, Brussels
London, Ebbsfleet, Lille, Brussels

Every hour (at peak times):

London, Paris non-stop.

Railfuture's international committee believes this would make good use of the existing Eurostar fleet.

The Ashford campaigners were boosted by reports in May that Air France-KLM was considering running a Channel Tunnel rail service to rival Eurostar.

GET with it

Eurotunnel, the private company which owns the Channel Tunnel, restructured itself in May to

become Groupe Eurotunnel SA, GET SA for short.

Again Eurotunnel has made a name for itself by transporting large numbers of lorries and cars between Britain and France, although there has been talk of it running its own freight trains to destinations throughout Europe.

The future

In many ways the Channel Tunnel has not lived up to Railfuture aspirations. It could provide a great deal more to both transport and the environment.

It was always promised that it would relieve traffic problems in Kent. But the way it has been operated has contributed virtually nothing on that front.

There is a need for more destinations in Britain and Europe for Eurostar and other inter-city services. There should also be local trains between Kent and Nord Pas de Calais and various patterns of service have been talked about. It would be good to see talk turn to

Green flag

A journey by Eurostar or TGV is already 10 times greener than flying. But Eurostar is planning to become even more environment friendly and to be "carbon neutral" by November when St Pancras International opens.

It also aims to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 25% per traveller journey by the time of the Olympics in 2012.

Eurostar chief executive Richard Brown said: "People want to minimise their carbon footprint on the environment, and our aim is to help passengers tread lightly when they travel.

"Over the next five to 10 years, everyone will be seeking to change how they travel. Making greener journeys on High Speed 1, connecting with other high-speed rail services across Europe, will be a vital part of the solution."

Friends of the Earth executive director Tony Juniper said: "It's great news that Eurostar is leading the way in the travel industry with its initiative to cut passengers' carbon emissions by actually making a real reduction rather than just off-setting. It's easy for travellers to go green by opting for the train instead of taking short-haul flights."

In addition to the CO₂ reduction target, Eurostar's Tread Lightly Initiative includes a 10-point plan to minimise the environmental impact of all its operations by cutting the consumption of raw materials, sourcing responsibly and recycling more waste.

action. More long-distance railborne freight should be using the tunnel and there should be less concentration on rail shuttles for road vehicles.

The Rail Freight Group reckons there are enough lorries on the M20 motorway – which runs parallel to the Channel Tunnel rail link – to fill 200 trains a day.

But recently the access charges for freight trains in the Channel Tunnel went up by 15%, so each train has to pay Eurotunnel £15,500.

RFG estimates that is three times too high if there is to be fair competition between road and rail.

We need European governments, Eurotunnel and Eurostar to get together to work out a more sustainable policy for the future.

RFG suggests that a European Union body with powers similar to Britain's Office of Rail Regulation needs to be created.

RFG chairman Lord Berkeley said the Channel Tunnel must stop being a railfreight white elephant.