



Bring Back Euro Trains is run by volunteers who want to reinstate cross-channel rail services from Kent stations Ashford and Ebbsfleet.

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Bring Back Euro Trains Response: Rail and Urban Transport Review

Bring Back Euro Trains is pleased to submit this response to the above call for evidence. (urbantransportgroup.org/rail-and-urban-transport-review)

Bring Back Euro Trains aims to be the voice of the community who have been impacted by the loss of European train connections in Ashford and Ebbsfleet in Kent. Bring Back Euro Trains is managed by a small core group of dedicated volunteers working together for the good of Ashford, Kent and Cross-Channel rail networks generally.

Response:

Growth opportunity through unlocking planning

Q1. What do you view as the current key challenges hindering the delivery of rail and urban transport networks and infrastructure?

One of the significant barriers we are facing is the uncertainty about future UK and EU border crossing requirements. This uncertainty has created a cloud of doubt over the prospect of resuming European train services from Kent stations like Ashford and Ebbsfleet. As you may be aware, these stations have invested significantly in the infrastructure required for international train terminals, including dedicated platforms, signalling, parking facilities, and road connections.

The abrupt halt of Eurostar train services from Kent to the continent, especially those that used to call at Ashford and Ebbsfleet, has not only affected the comfort and convenience of hundreds of travellers in the South East but has also led to lost investments. Ashford, for instance, invested £8.5 million¹ in a signalling upgrade just before the pandemic to accommodate Eurostar's new fleet of trains. This investment, along with other taxpayer-funded infrastructure, now represents a sunk cost every day without intercontinental connections.

The Bring Back Euro Trains campaign firmly believes that long-term clarity on UK-EU border crossing requirements is crucial for the growth and sustainability of cross-border transport networks. The lack of certainty not only impacts the day-to-day lives of residents and businesses but also hinders the potential for the local economy to thrive.

Moreover, we see the restoration of European train connections as a vital step in addressing climate change. The Climate Change Act of 2008 mandates the reduction of carbon emissions, and taking a train to Paris, compared to flying, can cut carbon footprints by as much as 90%, according to Eco Passenger. Reintroducing Eurostar services to Kent aligns with the commitment to promote eco-friendly transportation options and contributes

¹ £8.5M - reported cost to upgrade to signalling infrastructure Ashford Station, by Rt. Hon. Damian Green speaking in adjournment debate House of Commons 25th October 2023.



to achieving legally binding carbon budgets.

We urge Labour to consider the implications of this uncertainty on the local economy, investments made, and the broader environmental impact. Long-term clarity on UK-EU border crossing requirements will not only reignite European train services but also contribute significantly to the growth and sustainability of the region.

Q2. What spatial planning and associated policy and legislative changes would help unlock the delivery of rail and urban transport projects?

We strongly advocate for a commitment from rail planning authorities to officially designate Ashford as a regional hub. This designation is pivotal in relieving congestion at the HS1 and Eurostar London Terminal. Ashford, with its state-of-the-art international stations and substantial infrastructure investments, can serve as a strategic alternative, distributing the load and enhancing overall operational efficiency.

Elevating Ashford as a regional hub will inherently relieve pressure from the congested HS1 and Eurostar London Terminal. Recent events, such as the flooding of the HS1 tunnel, underscore the vulnerability of singular points of connectivity. Designating Ashford as a hub creates a more resilient railway system, providing alternative routes and options during unforeseen crises. This strategic move aligns with the imperative to ensure continuous and reliable cross-Channel connectivity.

Our proposal highlights the economic viability of Ashford as a regional hub, emphasising the need for careful spatial planning and scheduling. By doing so, we not only address the immediate need for congestion relief but also lay the groundwork for sustainable, long-term economic benefits. Additionally, the environmental impact cannot be understated, as the campaign supports a shift towards rail travel, reducing carbon footprints compared to alternative modes of transportation.

The substantial investments made in Ashford and Ebbsfleet, including the £8.5 million signalling upgrade at Ashford, necessitate a strategic approach to maximise returns. Each day without intercontinental connections represents a missed opportunity and a financial burden on taxpayers. Elevating Ashford as a regional hub justifies these investments, ensuring they contribute effectively to the demand for cross-Channel train services and the overall growth of the region.

Clarity and certainty of policy and funding

Q1. What are the key tenets of a successful, strategic long-term policy for the delivery of rail and urban transport networks, taking into account wider decarbonisation and transport integration goals?

A successful, strategic long-term policy for the delivery of rail and urban transport networks should encompass several key tenets. From the perspective of encouraging low-carbon transport, here are some essential components that should be considered:

Central government's commitment to encouraging low-carbon transport is paramount. Emphasising the importance of sustainable modes of transportation, such as rail, aligns with broader decarbonisation goals and contributes significantly to reducing the overall carbon footprint of the transport sector.

A strategic long-term policy must prioritise the seamless integration of rail services with other modes of transport. Enhancing connectivity between rail networks and urban transportation systems facilitates a more efficient and accessible transportation experience for commuters. This integration promotes the use of public transport and reduces dependence on individual vehicles, thereby supporting decarbonisation efforts.



Protecting the investments made in infrastructure for international train terminals, such as those in Ashford and Ebbsfleet, is crucial. The commitment of resources and taxpayer money to build and upgrade these facilities must not be in vain. A successful policy should ensure the continued utilisation of these assets, safeguarding the economic and social benefits they bring to the region.

Recognising the economic benefits associated with international rail connections, a strategic policy should aim to revitalise the local Kent economy. By reinstating Euro trains, particularly with a carefully considered train timetable, the policy can attract residents and businesses, fostering economic growth in the region.

Addressing climate change is a global imperative. A successful policy should actively promote the use of railways over air and car travel, contributing to the reduction of carbon emissions. This aligns with the Climate Change Act 2008's commitment to carbon budgets and the broader national decarbonisation agenda.