



Eurotunnel submission to the National Infrastructure Commission consultation – North

Eurotunnel welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation, having long been aware of the need to ensure that infrastructure projects in the UK are delivered rapidly in order to support economic growth.

Overview

Groupe Eurotunnel (GET) manages and operates the Channel Tunnel Fixed Link between Britain and France, providing the infrastructure for Eurotunnel's own Shuttle services and for international freight and high speed passenger trains. Completed in 1994, the Tunnel was financed entirely from private sources at no cost to the taxpayer.

GET also operates GB Railfreight, as the British arm of its Europorte rail freight brand. Acquired by Europorte in 2010, the business operates a variety of services including bulk traffic, biomass, coal steel, petrochemicals and metals transportation. GB Railfreight prides itself on its innovative approach to railfreight which has seen it win a number of rail industry awards and earn the standing as Britain's most reliable freight operator.

Maintaining effective transport links throughout the UK is crucial to ensuring the prosperity of the Northern Powerhouse, allowing businesses in the North to transport their products throughout Britain and beyond.

Response

As the operator of the Channel Tunnel, GET provides crucial infrastructure for the transport of goods to and from mainland Europe. The opening of the Channel Tunnel revolutionised the UK's accessibility to the European market, which can be reached faster and more reliably than at any time.

The UK economy directly benefits from the mature fixed link to mainland Europe. Key industry sectors have built import and export business models that are only viable because of the Tunnel. For example the automotive industry can transport time sensitive components; fish from Scotland and meat from Ireland can build key export markets across Europe. Prior to the Tunnel there was no economically sustainable business model to facilitate the UK's full participation in this trading revolution.

As outlined above, the Channel Tunnel is particularly important to the Northern Powerhouse because it provides rapid access to the European market for businesses across the UK. Many companies that need to reach the continental market rapidly rely on rail freight to transport goods for sale, and also to receive supplies from Europe. This was not possible in many instances, before the opening of the tunnel and makes the capacity of routes for rail freight from the north particularly important.

South East road highways capacity and Operation Stack

However, this summer saw access to the Tunnel limited by a combination of migrant incursions and striking ferry workers. Operation Stack was enforced for 28 days and during this time British manufacturers all over the country were placed under intense pressure. The goods transferred via the Tunnel tend to be high value components for the automotive, electronics, pharmaceutical industries, fresh produce and rapid courier services, and delays in their transportation result in large costs for business throughout the UK



Although Operation Stack has not been in force since then, the events of the summer highlighted the need to increase the resilience of road networks in the South East. The road network in Kent is vital for connecting the south of England to the rest of the country. With a predicted increase in truck traffic of 30% in the next five years, there is a clear need for a solution to Operation Stack and additional capacity in Kent and the South East road network. In order to maximise economic growth across the country we must keep vehicles moving. This requires long term solutions such as: adding capacity to the M20; upgrading the A2 to motorway standard; providing additional capacity across the Thames through a new Lower Thames Crossing (as noted below); and consideration of modal shift to rail freight.

These changes would ensure that products made throughout the UK are more likely to be successfully transported to Europe, than the current situation where Operation Stack is enforced.

UK wide rail freight capacity

Another opportunity for addressing congestion on the roads in the South East and to ensure greater security for time sensitive deliveries would be for the Government to invest in the creation of greater rail freight capacity across the UK.

This will encourage a modal shift from road to rail, taking lorries off the road network, releasing capacity for other vehicles and increasing the reliability of those companies using rail freight for deliveries. There would also be well-documented environmental benefits delivered by this modal shift.

The Government has committed to deliver additional freight capacity, but action needs to be taken, in particular:

- Implementing and funding the proposed European Rail Freight Corridor from Europe to London to ensure swift rail access to foreign markets.
- Completing the Kent Gauge Study proposed by Network Rail and upgrading freight routes through the county which link the Channel Tunnel to the wider UK.
- Investigating and delivering improvements to the network beyond London, so that businesses in the Midlands and North of England benefit from rapid rail freight access to European markets. This includes identifying and delivering capacity improvements on key rail arteries such as the West Coast and East Coast Main Lines.

Lower Thames Crossing

Finally, addressing capacity on crossings over the Thames through the creation of a Lower Thames Crossing is also crucial for ensuring prosperity. A new crossing would relieve congestion on the routes from the South East into the West Midlands and the North allowing businesses to transport their produce in good time and smoothing traffic flows into the Channel Tunnel. The M25 is one of the main transport gateways to the North and increasing the reliability of journey times could lead to more businesses investing in northern cities as they become more confident that money will not be wasted through freight lorries getting held up in the South East



Upgrading the local Kent road network, creating more rail freight capacity, and constructing a Lower Thames Crossing would benefit businesses in the north by improving their ability to connect to mainland Europe and reducing delays which cause their products to lose value or cause northern businesses to be unable to supply their customers. Ensuring smooth connectivity throughout the UK is vital to ensuring the success of the Northern Powerhouse project.

Contact:

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