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Dr Caroline Lucas MEP  
European Parliament  
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8 January 2007

Dear Dr Lucas,

Thank you for your recent letter, dated 27 November, regarding Eurostar's stopping patterns at Ashford International following the completion of the UK high-speed rail line in November 2007.

I do understand your concern at the reduction of services at Ashford, however, it is important to emphasise that Eurostar remains committed to Ashford International. The station will retain three daily services to Paris, timed carefully to suit both business and leisure travellers. This level of service is on a par with the airlines and will, we believe, meet the residual demand at Ashford once Ebbsfleet International station has opened. We will also retain a service between Ashford and Brussels via Lille, by introducing an additional stop on the daily Disneyland Resort Paris service. The seasonal Avignon and French Alps services will also continue to serve Ashford. In total, more than 80% of current Ashford users will continue to have direct services to the destinations to which they presently travel.

Some 90% of Eurostar travellers who currently use Ashford access the station by road (car, taxi, bus or coach) - with only 9% using domestic rail services to reach the station. Ashford International attracts passengers from across south east England; most (60%) UK users of the station live outside Kent and many of these passengers effectively have to 'drive past' the new Eurostar station at Ebbsfleet to reach Ashford.

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Eurostar undertook detailed research prior to devising its new stopping patterns. This research has shown that, following the opening of Ebbsfleet International, up to two-thirds of travellers currently using Ashford will choose to switch to the new station because it will be equally or more convenient – in other words, their journeys will be either be the same length or, in fact, shorter.

We recognise that for the small number of Ashford users in south Kent and East Sussex who wish to catch a direct service to Brussels, there will be a longer journey to Ebbsfleet International. However, this number will be vastly outweighed by the volume of travellers who will need to travel less far or who, instead of driving to an airport to use short-haul air travel, will switch to Ebbsfleet to catch Eurostar's far less environmentally damaging high-speed rail services.

Recent independent research shows that a passenger journey by air between London and Paris or Brussels generates ten times more carbon dioxide than travel by high-speed Eurostar.

Ebbsfleet International's catchment is geographically significantly larger than that of Ashford and contains over 10 million people - a very substantial increase on Ashford's catchment size. We anticipate that well over a million passengers will use Ebbsfleet International annually – up to two and a half times the number that currently use Ashford.

Following its opening, nearly half of Eurostar services will call at Ebbsfleet International; with seven daily services to Paris and five to Brussels. The station is expected to attract many new travellers to Eurostar who currently choose to drive and fly from airports such as Gatwick, Luton and London City, thus significantly reducing the overall carbon dioxide emissions from their journeys. The convenience of the new station is also expected to attract leisure travellers to go by train for a short city-break in Europe who might otherwise fly to other destinations on the continent.

Ebbsfleet further provides an attractive alternative for existing Eurostar travellers who live to the south and south west of London and who currently access Eurostar via domestic rail to Waterloo. The option of travelling by car to Ebbsfleet will encourage these travellers to continue using Eurostar services and not switch to the more environmentally damaging option of flying from Heathrow or Gatwick.

I would also like to reassure you that Ebbsfleet International will be accessible by public transport, with the Fastrack bus service providing frequent – every ten minutes during peak hours – connections to fast domestic rail services at Gravesend, Greenhithe and Dartford. From 2009, the launch of high-speed domestic services in Kent will ensure seamless connections with international services at both Ebbsfleet and Ashford.

You mention in your letter that you find it difficult to accept that the added time needed to stop at Ashford – which adds 7-8 minutes to a journey – is critical in affecting people’s decision to travel by train. However, it has long been widely recognised in timetable planning, both by UK and French train operators, that even marginal increases in journey times reduce the attractiveness of a service, and thus the number of passengers boarding in London, Paris or Brussels. Our analysis shows clearly that scheduling an extra stop at Ashford for Brussels-bound trains will lose more passengers than it will gain.

We have a commercial remit; we run a limited number of trains; and we must get the balance of stopping and non-stop services right. To stop our services at all intermediate stations would nullify the purpose of high-speed trains, and we must meet demand where it lies.

The opening of Ebbsfleet International is good news for Kent overall. It will complement Ashford International, and together the two stations will deliver a very substantial increase of 45% in the number of international services stopping in the county.

We have said that we will further discuss with Kent County Council and SEEDA the objective of increasing the level of services in the longer term. We will also monitor closely levels of demand once the new services start running – and keep timetables under review.

If you would like to discuss any of these issues in more detail please do not hesitate to contact me on 020 7922 4422 or [richard.brown@eurostar.co.uk](mailto:richard.brown@eurostar.co.uk)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Richard Brown', written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Richard Brown