

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3930/08
by Peter Skinner (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: EU funding for cross-border high speed rail services

Balanced and sustainable economic development is a key aim of the EU. The Trans-European Network (TEN) was designed to contribute to this objective and has received important public funding from EU institutions - a key EIB objective has been to support the development of Trans-European Networks and regional development.

In order to encourage the development of cross-border, high-speed rail services for the benefit of European consumers and contribute to the development of the south-east region of the United Kingdom, the EIB made public funding available to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. Section 1 of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link to the outskirts of London - via Ashford - benefited from an EIB loan of £200 million in 1998. In 2003, a further European Investment Bank loan of € 560 million was signed between the EIB President and the Chief Executive Officer of London and the Continental Railways for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

A clear advantage of rail services over air transport, in addition to being environmentally more friendly, is that they can serve intermediate points and contribute to regional regeneration, economic growth and cohesion in the regions with only a limited impact on end of journey time. The CEOs of both London and Continental Railways and Eurostar have consistently pointed to the regeneration benefits high-speed lines and transport infrastructure can bring to the regions.

In the light of the financial support given to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link by the EIB and the importance for the region of South East England to benefit economically from this high-speed line:

Can the Commission advise:

How the South-East of England region is expected to maximise the economic benefit to be potentially derived from the length of the EU-funded high-speed line cutting through the region, when Ashford International station has been completely close to direct traffic from Brussels?

Whether it will call on the sole service provider on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, Eurostar, to reinstate services for passengers travelling direct between Brussels and the intermediate station of Ashford International, so that both consumers and the South-East of England region can benefit, as intended, from the EU-funded Channel Tunnel Rail Link?