



Submission by EPF on the Eurostar inquiry, 12 January 2010

The European Passengers' Federation comprises 31 associations and organisations in 18 countries. Many members of those associations travel by Eurostar, either for journeys between the cities directly served or as part of a longer journey. We are therefore concerned to learn about any serious disruption to services.

During the pre-Christmas disruption, it appears that passengers' needs were not put first; and that measures could have been taken before the disruption to make it less likely to happen, and during the disruption to look after customers better.

Snow is not unusual and severe winter weather in northern France and southern England can be expected 4 or 5 times a decade. The trains should have been equipped to cope with this. The Eurostar trains travelling to the French Alps have snow protection. Surely this protection should have been given to all the fleet? Eurostar knew about the risk of snow problems on their core services but apparently did nothing about it.

In the event, the first stranded train was quite well handled, but the other four less so.

Eurotunnel do not appear to be at fault. They provided the two breakdown units as agreed. Maybe they should have used these just to pull the failed trains out of the tunnel as far as Calais-Frethun and Ashford. They could thus have evacuated all the passengers more quickly instead of pulling the first failed train all the way to London. Did they know at the time about the other breakdowns?

Perhaps they should have provided a third breakdown unit. This point should be considered by the review and weighed against the probability of how often it would be needed.

In the circumstances, Eurotunnel's use of a shuttle train was understandable, though not ideal, in order to evacuate everyone as soon as possible. Were those passengers warned that this type of train was being used to evacuate them and why?

Once the tunnel had been evacuated, was the option of running an Ashford - Calais (or Lille) service considered, on a temporary basis, with passengers transferring to/from domestic trains at either end? This might have been better than total suspension of the service.

The evacuation procedures used by Swiss and Austrian Federal Railways for their longer Alpine tunnels could also be usefully studied.

There has been some criticism of Kent Police for taking too long to check passengers. That should be investigated by the review.

Eurostar's level of customer care has been widely criticised and must be investigated by the review in order to:

- (a) establish the true position in the light of some of the more sensational reports;
- (b) ensure that customers received, or will receive, due compensation and assistance under EU regulations and CIV rules;
- (c) lessen the likelihood of similar problems by improving staff training and guidelines.

For example, it is reported that on-board staff did not relay useful information to passengers; that there were inadequate supplies of food and water on the stranded trains; and that insufficient advice was given to passengers with onward connections.

Some criticism has also been made of Eurostar staff for telling passengers to take their luggage with them on to the relief train, though we can understand the reasons why they did so.

Eurostar as a company is surely at fault for declining to accept liability for passengers who missed onward connections, despite CIV rules?

Finally, this was not an isolated instance of poor customer care. At the time of the lineside fire in south London in 2007, for example, trains were suspended but passengers waiting at Continental stations were given very little information on what was going to happen or advice about alternatives.

We have raised such issues at our own meetings with Eurostar management.

Therefore we believe that the review should consider recommendations to improve Eurostar's forward planning, contingency plans and customer care. Lessons must be learned and applied.

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Chairman of EPF