



All aboard! Extending UK rail connections to Europe is popular in London and Great Britain

Polling results in London and Great Britain – YouGov Plc



September 2026

International rail between the UK and Europe: untapped potential

- **Used at 50% passenger capacity.** Opened in 1994, the Channel Tunnel offers a fast and environmentally-friendly link between the UK and mainland Europe. Eurotunnel has confirmed that only 50% of passenger capacity is currently utilised. Only 10% of freight capacity is currently utilised.
- **One in four of the UK's international rail stations are used for UK- European services.** Limited capacity at St Pancras International restricts the growth of international rail in the UK. Despite being built for international services, Ashford, Ebbsfleet and Stratford stations currently run only domestic trains.
- **Eurostar's monopoly.** Eurostar is the only company running trains through the channel tunnel. But this will change soon. Trenitalia has announced plans to launch services between UK and Europe by 2029. Gemini and Virgin have also announced plans to launch their own services by 2030.
- **We need political action.** Free capacity, available stations, and operators ready to run new trains: every condition is met to unlock the Channel Tunnel full potential but we need more policy progress and investment to stay on track.

Polling in GB and London

These surveys were conducted using an online interview administered members of the YouGov Plc GB panel of 400,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample according to the sample definition, inviting them to take part in the survey and providing a link to the survey. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile is normally derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data. GB and London surveys were performed independently

- Total GB sample size was 2,063 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 29th - 30th July 2026. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).
- Total London sample size was 1,141 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 29th July - 5th August 2026. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults in London (aged 18+).

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc.

Key findings from the surveys

Seven in ten

Brits support opening Ashford, Ebbsfleet and Stratford to international trains. Eight in ten Londoners support opening Stratford to international services.

Three times more

Brits prefer developing international rail over expanding airports. We observed a similar trend for Londoners.

Almost three quarters

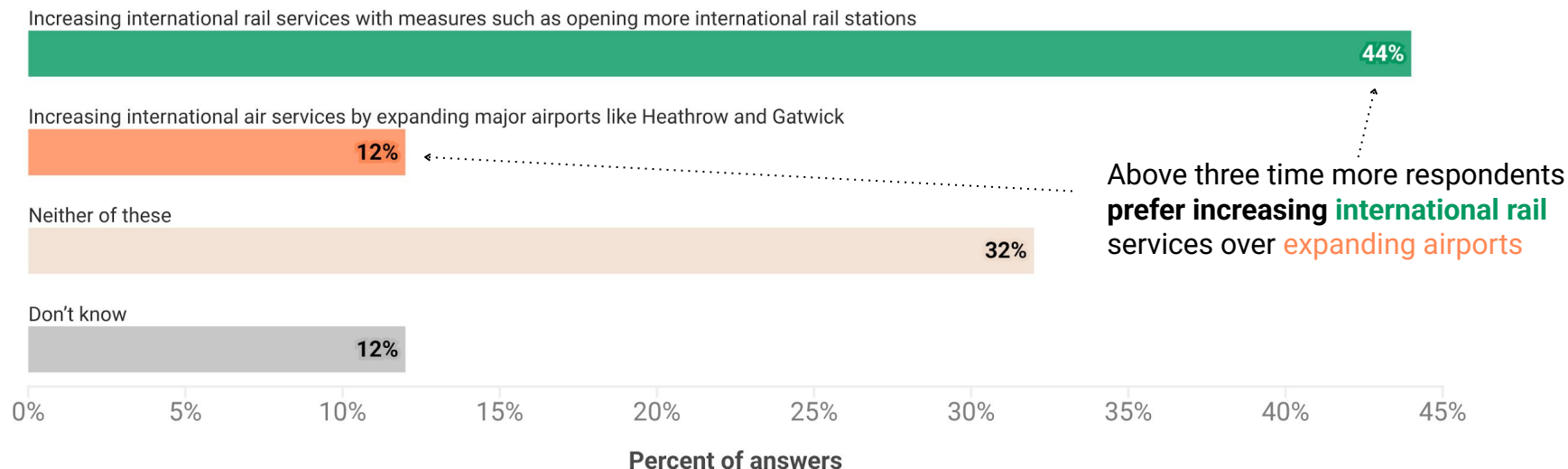
Brits think that more rail connections between the UK and Europe would be good for tourism and culture.

Great Britain results



Brits would rather Andy Burnham increased international rail services over expanded airports

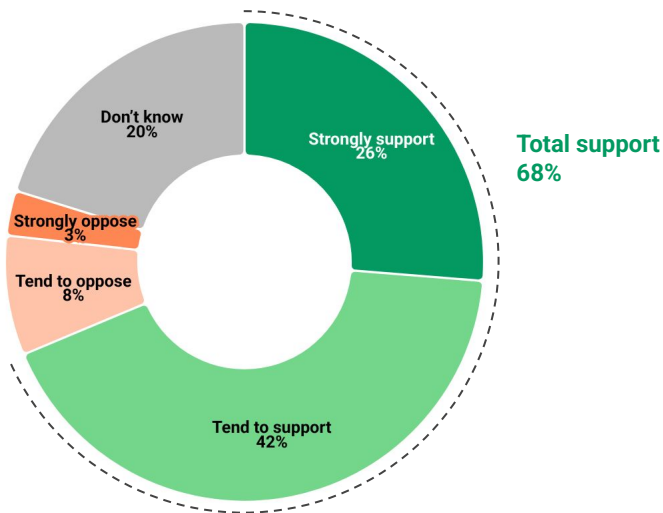
Which of the following two policies would you rather see the new Prime Minister prioritise?



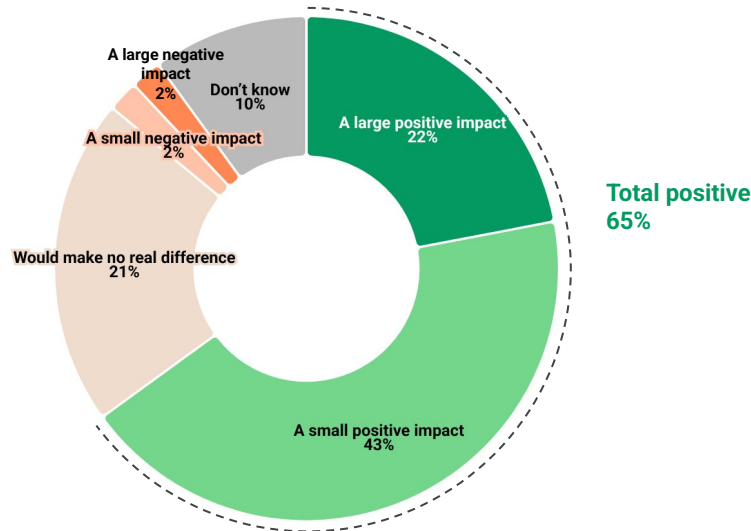
Source: T&E, YouGov Plc • Sample size : 2063 respondents in Great Britain

More than six in ten Brits support opening more stations to international rail and think this will benefit the UK economy

To what extent would you support or oppose the Government opening Ashford, Ebbsfleet and Stratford to international rail services?



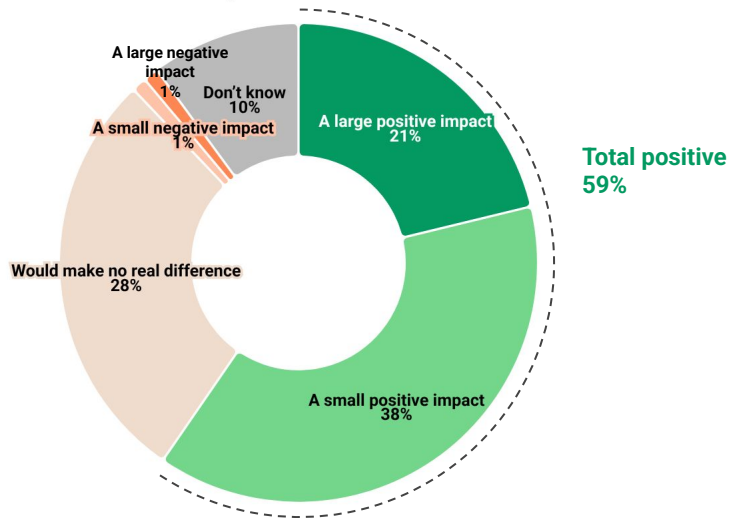
Do you think more rail connections between the UK and Europe would have a positive or negative impact on the UK economy?



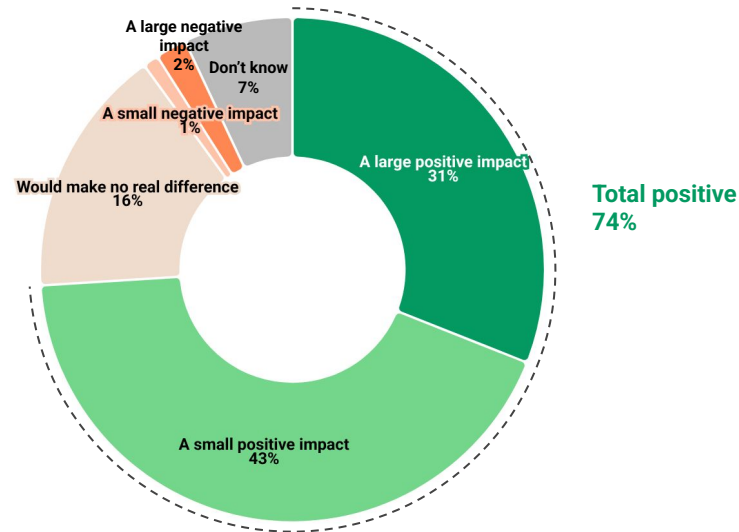
Source: T&E, YouGov Plc • Sample size : 2063 respondents in Great Britain

The majority of Great Britain think more rail connections to Europe would improve relationship with the EU and will be good for culture and tourism

Do you think more rail connections would have a positive or negative impact on the UK's relationship with the EU?



Do you think more rail connections between the UK and Europe would have a positive or negative impact on culture and tourism?



Source: T&E, YouGov Plc • Sample size : 2063 respondents in Great Britain

Section 2

Young respondents from Great Britain

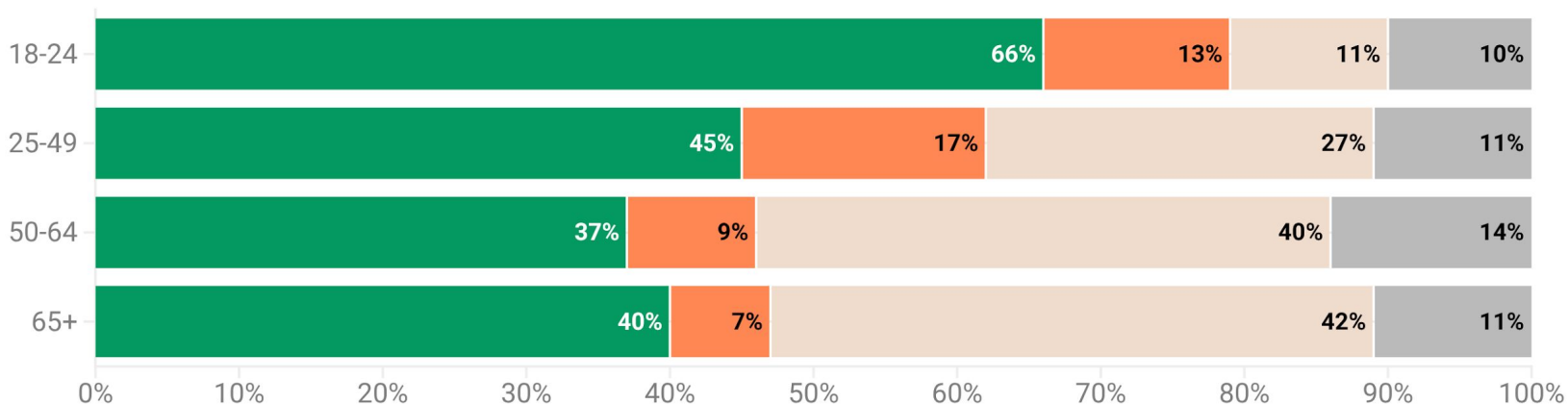


Young Brits largely support expanding **rail** to Europe over expanding **airports**

Which of the following two policies would you rather see the new Prime Minister prioritise?

■ Increasing international rail services ■ Increasing international air services ■ Neither of these ■ Don't know

Age of respondents

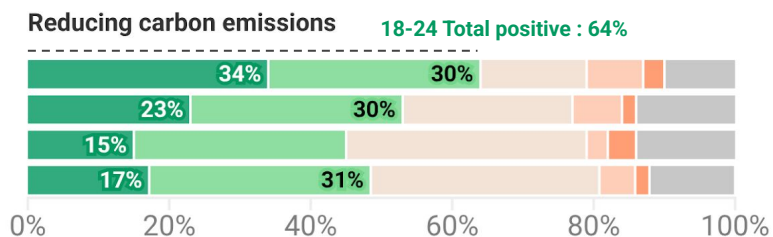
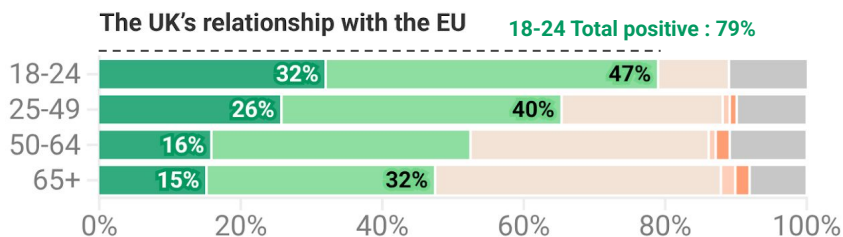
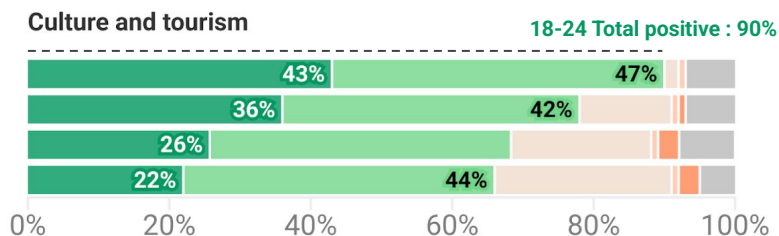
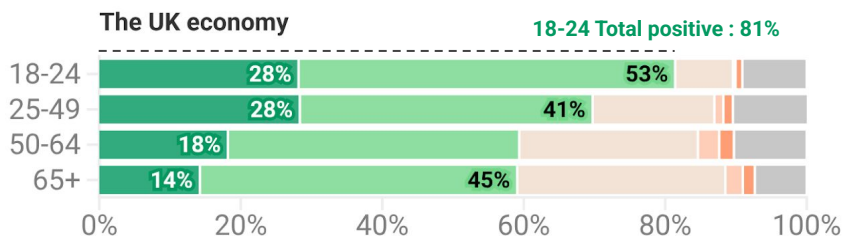


Source: T&E, YouGov Plc • Sample size : 2063 respondents in Great Britain

British youth have the highest expectations for new international rail connections

— Largely positive — Slightly positive — No real impact — Slightly negative — Largely negative — Don't know

Do you think more rail connections to Europe would have a positive or negative impact on :



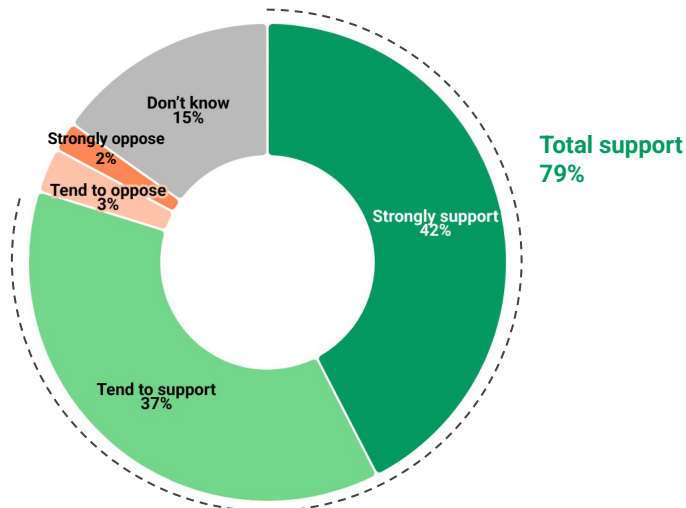
Source: T&E, YouGov Plc • Sample size : 2063 respondents in Great Britain

London results

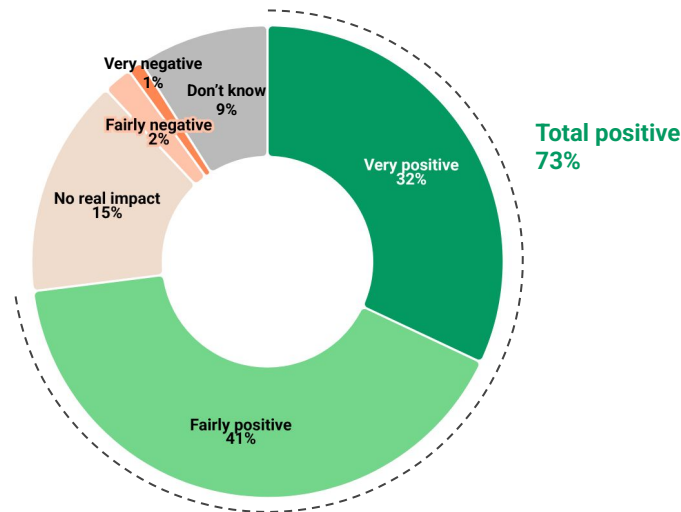


Close to eight in ten Londoners want Stratford International to run rail services to Europe. Seven in ten say this will benefit the city

To what extent would you support or oppose introducing international rail services at Stratford International?



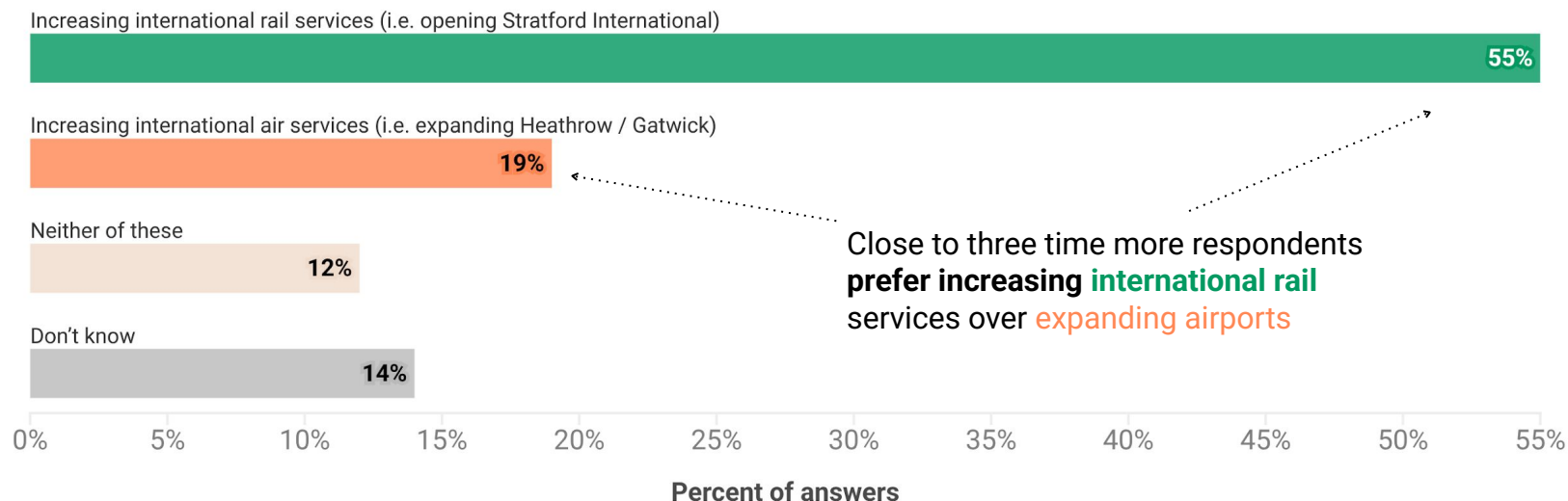
What impact do you think new direct rail routes to Germany and Switzerland, alongside more trains to Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam, would have on London?



Source: T&E, YouGov Plc • Sample size : 1141 London residents

Most Londoners prefer opening Stratford International for rail services to Europe over expanding London airports

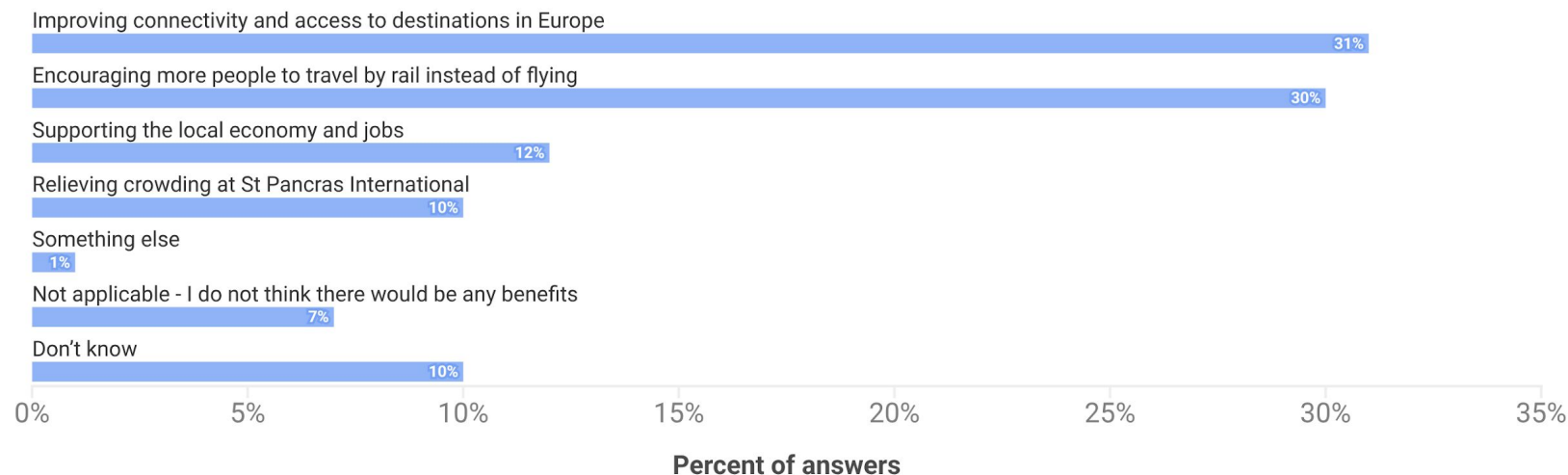
Which of the following, if either, do you think would be more positive for London?



Source: T&E, YouGov Plc • Sample size : 1141 London residents

Londoners expect new international rail connections to improve connectivity to Europe and support sustainable travel

Which of the following, if any, do you think would be the main benefit of introducing international rail services at Stratford International?



Source: T&E, YouGov Plc • Sample size : 1141 London residents

Priority next steps for international rail policy in the UK

01

Open Stratford, Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations to international services

The Government and infrastructure managers should publish a timetable to open the three remaining stations and commit to funding, prioritising Kent stations initially. All stations should be operational by 2030.

02

Introduce ambitious passenger and environmental targets in the Long Term Rail Strategy

The Government should introduce environmental modal shift targets, passenger targets and infrastructure commitments to encourage international rail and disincentivize flying and driving.

03

Urgently increase depot capacity by opening sufficient depot space within the UK

Rapid assessment of potential depot sites (for example: Ashford, Ripple Lane, Dollands Moor) and open sites to international services prior to 2030 to enable new competition.

An extended list of additional policy demands is available on request.

International rail expansion is popular, but needs more attention

- **Respondents across the UK and in London responded positively to opening all four international rail stations.**
Ashford and Ebbsfleet stations were operational until 2020. Despite being heavily invested in (£80 million was spent on Ashford International alone) these stations are being wasted. Opening Ashford International could inject £2.7 billion over five years. Meanwhile, St Pancras is overcrowded, and London's second international station is unused.
- **Brits would prefer the new Prime Minister prioritised expanding international rail over airport expansion.**
International rail is far more environmentally friendly than flying (96% less emissions per journey), requires less investment and is more popular but the UK has no international rail passenger targets. The Long Term Rail Strategy must include modal shift targets, and international rail passengers in order to ultimately reduce air passengers.
- **Seizing an opportunity.** In the next five years multiple new operators could run services through the Channel Tunnel. This could reduce fares by an estimated 30%. However slow progress in opening depots for example may hinder competitors access to the Channel Tunnel which would be a huge lost opportunity, urgent attention is needed.
- **UK/EU reset.** Brits, particularly young people, perceive increased rail services as good for the economy, tourism, culture and good for resetting our relationship with the EU. In the EU/ UK reset where youth mobility is being explored, young voices must be taken into account to improve international rail particularly as Erasmus resumes in 2027.

Acknowledgements

Report published: 3rd September 2026

Authors: Georgia Whitaker, Thomas Enriquez

Editeur responsable: William Todts, Executive Director
© 2026 European Federation for Transport and Environment AISBL

To cite this report

T&E (2026). All aboard! Extending UK rail connections to Europe is popular in London and Great Britain

Acknowledgements

The findings and views put forward in this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors listed above.

Further information

Georgia Whitaker
Rail Campaigns Manager
georgia.whitaker@transportenvironment.org

www.transportenvironment.org | [BlueSky](#) | [LinkedIn](#)