Campaign for Better Transport

Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
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CC Heidi Alexander MP, Secretary of State for Transport

CC Peter Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill, Minister of State for Rail

CC Dame Caroline Wilson DCMG

CC Ursula Von Der Leyen, President of the European Commission

CC António Costa, President of the European Council

Subject: Make international rail central to the UK-EU reset

Dear Prime Minister,

The Channel Tunnel is our direct railway connection to the continent: an extraordinary piece of infrastructure with enormous potential to support economic growth, closer European ties, greater youth mobility and action on climate change. Yet with only 50% of passenger capacity and 10% of freight capacity currently being used, ensuring maximum passenger and freight traffic through the Channel Tunnel is critical for the EU and UK's long-term relationship for trade, security and, in an ever more urgent climate crisis, our shared climate commitments.

Campaign for Better Transport's new report, *Tunnel Vision: seizing the international rail opportunity*, to be published in November 2026, shows that planned increases in services and routes, the entry of new operators, and significant investment in rolling stock could drive a surge in demand for international rail travel. Annual passenger numbers could rise from 11.8 million today to 24.5 million by 2031 and 28 million by 2040, but **only if a strategy is put in place and the barriers to growth are unlocked.**

Passenger and freight demand are growing, but underusing our international stations, cumbersome border processes, fragmented ticketing, limited regional connections, harmful business rates and barriers to international freight continue to constrain what rail can deliver. For young people, price also remains a significant barrier. Youth on Track research shows that 71% of European 15-to-24-year-olds say high ticket prices are the main barrier to choosing rail. Following the UK's agreement to rejoin the Erasmus exchange scheme from January 2027, rail will be increasingly important for enabling young people to travel between the UK and EU sustainably.

Expanding aviation while leaving existing international rail capacity underused would be a missed opportunity for both climate action and economic growth. Public opinion supports this direction: polling commissioned by T&E UK and Clean Cities found that **three times as many Britons support expanding international rail services compared with airport expansion**. Two thirds of respondents under 24 would like to see the Prime Minister prioritise international rail over airport expansion, and 79% of young people polled thought more international rail connections would help to rebuild our relationship with the EU.

As a coalition of transport, environmental and youth organisations, as well as operators, we therefore ask you to use the opportunity of closer cooperation with EU colleagues through and beyond the summit, alongside the development of Great British Railways and the forthcoming Long-Term Rail Strategy, to **commit to establishing an international rail strategy** incorporating passenger and freight, with ambitious targets for modal shift from air to rail, developed in close partnership with European counterparts.

That strategy should:

- **Make better use of the Channel Tunnel**, supporting the capacity, rolling stock and infrastructure needed to expand international services at London St Pancras.
- **Commit to reopening international services** at Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations.
- **Maintain commitments to opening Stratford International station**, providing an additional international London gateway in this fast-growing and well-connected part of the capital, while relieving pressure on St Pancras.
- **Include growth targets** for passenger and freight which reflect the projected growth demonstrated in *Tunnel Vision* and enable adjacent growth on the domestic rail network.
- **Make international rail easier and more affordable**, through better connections across Britain and Europe, integrated ticketing and proportionate, efficient border arrangements.
- **Unlock the potential of international rail freight**, with improved terminals, investment in W12 gauge, infrastructure and cross-border coordination to make rail a more competitive alternative to road haulage.
- **Put climate commitments into transport investment decisions**, ensuring that the potential of existing rail infrastructure is properly assessed to accurately reflect its environmental advantage over aviation, and pausing airport expansion approval processes while this is carried out.

These changes would bring practical benefits to passengers, businesses and communities across the country. They could improve access to European education and employment opportunities, strengthen trade and supply chains, and make lower-carbon travel a more realistic choice for people, beyond just London and the South East. The UK-EU summit is the moment to give that ambition political direction and establish a programme of cooperation with our European partners.

As a government committed to economic renewal, decarbonisation and closer practical cooperation with Europe, you have an opportunity to make international rail a central part of that agenda. We urge you to take it.

Yours sincerely,



Ben Plowden, CEO, Campaign for Better Transport

Celeste Hicks, Policy Manager, Aviation Environment Federation

Alexander Bienfait, Acting Chair, Bring Back Euro Trains

Emma Richardson, Head of Policy & Research, Climate Catalyst

Gereon tho Pesch, Co-chair, Erasmus by Train e.V.

Gareth Williams, General Secretary & Chief Strategic Partnerships Officer, Eurostar

Rosie Downes, Head of Campaigns, Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Luigi Corradi, CEO and General Manager, FS International S.p.A, Trenitalia

Adrian Quine, Chief Executive Officer, Gemini Trains

Paul Beckford, Policy Director, HACAN

Paul McGuinness, Chair, No 3rd Runway Coalition

Alethea Warrington, Head of Aviation, Heat and Energy, Possible

Cat Ainsworth, CEO, Protect Our Winters UK

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