

6 May 2024

1994-2024 The Channel Tunnel - 30 years of unique history

On 6 May 2024, Getlink is celebrating the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Channel Tunnel by highlighting the incredible human adventure that made it possible to build and then operate this emblematic link between France and the United Kingdom. This thirtieth anniversary comes at a key moment in history, marked by the need to decarbonise trade, of which the Channel Tunnel will be one of the accelerators.

To commemorate its first thirty years, Getlink and its subsidiary Eurotunnel are paying tribute to those who have contributed to the success of the project from the outset, as well as those who are now shaping the future of passenger, freight and energy transport between the UK, France and continental Europe.

A bold gamble, an extraordinary success

The Channel Tunnel was inaugurated on 6 May 1994. On that day, the first shuttle with Queen Elizabeth II and the President of the French Republic, François Mitterrand on board, paved the way for what was to revolutionise trade between France and the UK.

At 50km long, with the longest underwater segment in the world (37km is undersea), this engineering masterpiece is much more than just a transport infrastructure; it is a living testimony to human creativity and determination to overcome the greatest challenges. Since the early 19th century, 139 Channel Tunnel projects have been studied (including test tunnels dug as early as 1874) before the structure we know today was built.

The designers of the Channel Tunnel were visionaries. They had the idea of implementing an electricity interconnector in 1986 and enshrined it in the founding Treaty of Canterbury. This vision has been realised in 2022 with the installation of the ElecLink interconnector, with a capacity of 1 GW, enough to supply a city of 1.6 million inhabitants (such as Lyon or Birmingham). This interconnector has secured the energy needs of the UK and France.

Those who write the Tunnel's history

At the time of the Tunnel's construction, there were over 13,000 tunnel workers, mainly recruited from local areas on both sides of the Channel. Many of them then joined Eurotunnel, creating a corporate culture based on maintaining a pioneering spirit, solidarity and a deep attachment to the Tunnel and the *LeShuttle* service. With 4 to 5 departures per hour, these shuttles provide a service equivalent to an RER-type urban transport service.

A bi-national company, Eurotunnel now employs 2,600 people, including 400 who have been with the company since 1994. Eurotunnel contributes for around 5,000 indirect and induced jobs in France and is the largest private employer in the Calais area. In 2023, almost 60% of recruitment has been local. In 2024, Eurotunnel is continuing to strengthen its teams, with several hundred vacancies on both sides of the Channel. The diversity of our professions, with over 500 different skills (customer service, crew, driving, infrastructure, maintenance, planning, etc.) contributes to the richness of our business.

Over the last three decades, the Channel Tunnel has played a vital role in strengthening economic, cultural and social links between the UK and France. Half a billion passengers have used the Channel Tunnel in the last thirty years. It facilitates trade, which now accounts for 25% of the value of goods crossing between the UK and France. It encourages the development of tourism and brings families and friends closer together.

The environmental and technological challenges of the future

The Channel Tunnel is a high traffic infrastructure, with an average of one train every 4 minutes, or 400 trains a day at different speeds: 160 km/h for the *high-speed trains*, 140 km/h for the *LeShuttle* shuttles operated by Eurotunnel and 120 km/h for the national rail freight trains.

In 2023, Getlink has realised its growth ambitions on the high-speed rail link. Eurotunnel's simplification work to increase the number of direct links between London and European cities has led to several expressions of interest from rail operators wishing to launch new services between the United Kingdom and continental Europe. To anticipate future growth and ensure equal access to the Tunnel for all new entrants, Getlink has invested in a new power supply system. This will allow traffic to increase by up to 1,000 trains per day.

If crossing the Channel by train is the fastest way, it is also the most environmentally friendly. With 73 times less CO₂ emissions for a tourist vehicle transported by

LeShuttle and 12 times less for a lorry compared to a ferry crossing, the Tunnel is the ecological choice.

Through its innovation initiatives, including the use of artificial intelligence, Getlink has worked to simplify the administrative formalities involved in crossing the border. Since the Brexit, goods transport is once again subject to Customs controls. To ensure that this new constraint does not weigh heavily on its customers, Eurotunnel has developed an entirely paperless system for transferring the data processed during the crossing by the British and French customs services.

By anticipating, through the simulation of passenger flows by a digital twin of the terminals, the implementation by the European Union of the Entry-Exit System (EES) from 6 October 2024 for non-EU nationals, Eurotunnel will be able to guarantee crossing times which will remain the most competitive on the Short Straits. To this end, the Folkestone and Coquelles terminals have been the subject of a vast €80m investment programme over three years (2022-24), in order to create dedicated vehicle spaces, modify the existing infrastructure, and implement the biometric controls required for third-country nationals entering and leaving the EU.

A vision for the next thirty years

In the wake of the development of the link between London and Amsterdam, Eurotunnel is aiming for a further acceleration with the doubling in 10 years of direct high-speed links from London via the Channel Tunnel, for example between London and Cologne, London and Frankfurt, London and Zurich and London and Geneva. Eurotunnel has worked hard to prepare for this development, whether by strengthening the services of the current operator or by bringing in new operators for existing destinations or new services, by aligning the players in the sector - rolling stock manufacturers, rail network and station managers - in the United Kingdom and France, as well as in Germany, Belgium and Switzerland.

Several rail operators have already expressed an interest in launching high-speed services to link London to some of Europe's major cities.

Jacques Gounon, Chairman of Getlink, said: *"The Channel Tunnel, whose 30th anniversary we are celebrating today, is an exceptional human adventure that has revolutionised relations between Europe and Great Britain. Already ahead of its time when it was inaugurated, it is still incredibly modern, offering millions of people and goods the possibility of crossing the Channel very quickly while respecting the environment."*

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This success has been made possible by the visionaries who designed it, the investors who financed it, the builders who built it, and the employees who operate it every day.

With all of them, Eurotunnel has entered the history books."

Yann Leriche, Chief Executive Officer of Getlink, said: *"We have come a long way in the last 30 years and I would like to pay tribute to the Tunnel's designers and builders who, as true visionaries, designed an infrastructure that is unique in the world. Today, we are looking to the future, which we embrace with enthusiasm, because the Channel Tunnel and its 2,600 employees, whose daily commitment to serving our customers I salute, still harbour so much potential. The importance of the vital link between the United Kingdom and the European continent has been reaffirmed more than ever, and its role in decarbonising trade in Europe makes it an exceptionally modern structure."*

About Getlink

Getlink SE (Euronext Paris: GET), through its subsidiary Eurotunnel, is the concession holder for the Channel Tunnel infrastructure until 2086 and operates Truck Shuttles and Passenger Shuttles (cars and coaches) between Folkestone (UK) and Coquelles (France). Since 31 December 2020, Eurotunnel has been developing smart border services to ensure that the Tunnel remains the fastest, most reliable, easiest and most environmentally friendly way to cross the Channel. Since it opened in 1994, almost 500 million people and more than 102 million vehicles have travelled through the Channel Tunnel. This unique land link, which carries 25% of the value of trade between the Continent and the United Kingdom, has become a vital link, reinforced by the ElecLink electricity interconnector installed in the Tunnel, which helps to balance the energy needs between France and the United Kingdom. Getlink completes its sustainable mobility services with its rail freight subsidiary Europorte. Committed to "low-carbon" services that control their impact on the environment (through its activities the Group avoids the equivalent of 1.9 million tonnes of CO2 per year), Getlink has made the place of mankind, nature and the territories at the heart of its concerns.

<https://www.getlinkgroup.com>

Contacts presse :

Anne-Sophie de Faucigny : +33 6. 46.01.52.86

Isabelle Tourancheau : +33 7.51.62.61.63

Laurence Bault: +33 6.83.61.89.96