

The IGC met in Paris on 8 October 2020, in a meeting chaired by the UK Delegation and covering the following points:

Current situation regarding cross-Channel traffic

Travel restrictions due to the pandemic continue to have a major impact on cross-Channel traffic. Although freight traffic has held up at satisfactory levels since the start of the pandemic, passenger traffic, despite starting to recover this summer, has slumped once again. This covers the passenger shuttles operated by Eurotunnel and Eurostar's high-speed trains.

As a result of this critical situation, the operators have had to reduce their expenditure, notably by furloughing staff.

ElecLink Project

The IGC told the Eurotunnel representatives that it would make a decision on reinstating consent for the ElecLink electricity interconnector project during its next meeting on 10 December 2020. This decision will be taken in the light of the CTSA's assessment of the safety case for the project.

Eurotunnel were pleased to hear this news.

The CTSA also wrote to Eurotunnel on 9 October specifying those areas where additional work is required to address outstanding concerns.

Brexit - end of the transition period

The transition period that the United Kingdom was granted with effect from 31 January 2020 following its withdrawal from the European Union will come to an end on 31 December 2020.

On this date, based on the detailed exchanges that have been ongoing between the UK and French authorities for some months now, the IGC can no longer maintain its status as national safety authority (NSA) for the Tunnel as a whole. As a result, and with effect from 1st January 2021, the Établissement Public de Sécurité Ferroviaire (EPSF) will take over this role for the French half of the Tunnel, while the IGC will continue to carry out this role on a temporary basis for the UK part of the Tunnel until the appropriate powers are transferred to the Office of Rail and Road (ORR).

At the same time, France is required to transpose the 4th Railway Package for the French half of the Channel Tunnel before the end of 2020, which will be achieved by means of a decree issued by the Council of State.

A new version of the Binational Regulation will be adopted in 2021 so as to ensure that there is still a homogeneous system for safety and interoperability throughout the Tunnel. The competent departments in the French and UK Transport Ministries are already working together to draft this new regulation.

The IGC confirmed that the Principals are keen to ensure that the forthcoming end of the transition period does not interrupt operation of the Channel Tunnel. Against this background, the French authorities are continuing to talk to the European Commission and the French and UK authorities are in conversation with the Tunnel operators to make sure that the necessary measures are taken before the end of the transition period.

Alongside discussions on the future rail safety framework governing the Channel Tunnel, the French authorities also said that they would initiate talks with their UK counterparts to discuss arrangements for setting up a juxtaposed customs office (BCNJ) at London's St Pancras station. By deploying French customs officers in this BCNJ, it will be possible for passengers boarding Eurostar trains and returning to a member state of the European Union to complete the potential customs formalities required due to the forthcoming end of the transition period. Reciprocal arrangements will be granted to UK Border Force officers should they wish to be deployed in French stations from which cross-Channel services depart so that they can complete customs controls there.