

Channel tunnel to break mobile-free silence in July

Signal technology breakthrough and reported telecoms deals mean passengers will have mobile phone coverage in tunnel

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Eurostar emerges from the Channel tunnel. Eurotunnel announced it had returned to profit in 2011 after it drew a record 19 million passengers. Photograph: Michel Spingler/AP

Passengers travelling through the [Channel tunnel](#) will be able to use their [mobile phones](#) 250ft under the seabed from July after a breakthrough in signal technology.

Eurotunnel, which manages the 23-mile link between Folkestone and Calais, has reportedly announced a deal with four mobile providers, including France Télécom Orange and Free Mobile.

The deal comes after the French technology group Alcatel-Lucent worked out how to link an undersea tunnel with mobile signals for the first time.

A spokesman for Eric Besson, the French industry minister, said that the new 3G and 2G enabled system would go live in July, in time for the London Olympics. The deal between Eurotunnel and the mobile providers will officially be signed next month, according to reports.

The Channel tunnel has, since it opened in 1994, been one of the few places where people can enjoy some mobile-free silence. But advances in technology have seen signals penetrate underground, with users already able to use their mobiles on the deepest parts of the Paris metro.

Last year, plans to enable passengers to use their mobile phones while travelling on the tube in London were shelved owing to funding.

Earlier this week Eurotunnel announced that it had returned to profit in 2011 after it drew a record 19 million passengers, while the Queen's Jubilee and the Olympics will boost this year's performance.

The operator, which runs its own car, coach and truck services, said the new peak came as it grabbed a bigger share of the declining car crossings market and [Eurostar](#) saw a 2% hike in travellers.

The company was also boosted by a 14% rise in rail freight and a €29m (£24.5m)

insurance payout following a fire in 2008. It made a post-tax profit of €11m in 2011 compared with a €58m loss the previous year.

It also announced that it would speed up trains by 10mph to 100mph for the Olympics to cut crossing times to 30 minutes to manage increase in passengers.

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