

## Eurostar misses the perfect 10 million figure yet again



The Dutch Olympic team leave on Eurostar - but others travelled with rivals Sean Dempsey/PA

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**Robert Lea**

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For the 15th year running, Eurostar has dashed hopes that one year it might carry more than 10 million passengers.

It has emerged that the high-speed passenger train service carried 9.91 million passengers — or, put another way, 88,351 passengers fewer than the number it was expecting to be handling by 1998.

The figures, which have emerged in the latest traffic data of Eurotunnel, the separately owned Channel tunnel operator, extend the curse of the long-subsidised, chronically loss-making Eurostar train service, which only last year turned its first profit.

The original forecasts of British Rail and the Department for Transport indicated that Eurostar was expected to carry 10 million passengers within four years of its launch in 1994. Dewy eyed forecasters were predicting a world in which a passenger would drag their suitcase on to a Eurostar at Edinburgh Waverley and only be reunited with it as the train pulled into Gare du Nord.

That never happened and for most of its life Eurostar, owned by the French, British and Belgian governments, has missed even the worst-case projections.

The rise of the budget airlines, the foot-and-mouth outbreak, the 2005 London bombings and the 2008 Channel tunnel fire have all been variously blamed over the years for worse-than-expected annual figures.

Buoyed by the 2007 move from London Waterloo to a new home at St Pancras International, Richard Brown, then Eurostar chief executive, confidently predicted “ten by ten”: 10 million passengers by 2010. That never happened and nor did it in 2011 either as footfall was hit by the ravages of the economic downturn.

The 2012 figures, which are a record and 2 per cent higher than in 2011, are a disappointment. The operator had been expecting a stronger boost in patronage because of the Olympics and Paralympics and the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

Eurostar sources indicated the miss was agonising for the company; detail on its operations and outlook is not expected until next month.

Eurotunnel meanwhile reported record revenues, putting it within sight of €1 billion annual turnover for the first time. A 14 per cent increase to €993 million was buoyed by a similar-sized increase in income from its shuttle trains, which handled a 16 per cent rise in truck numbers and a 7 per cent increase in cars. The group also bagged an extra €40 million from its freight train operations and a first-time €7 million for the opening weeks of its controversial MyFerryLink cross-Channel ferry operation, which is the subject of a competition inquiry.

“The group is getting the best from the infrastructure and operations it manages,” said Jacques Gounon, Eurotunnel’s chief executive.

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The complete traffic free for all at the Eurotunnel terminals hardly helps, either. They seem to be completely taken by surprise at peak demand and don't price accordingly.

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**edward walpole-brown**

8 hours ago

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