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Waterloo International to lie idle for a decade

Posted 14/08/13

Last day: Waterloo International welcomes Eurostar passengers for the last time

Waterloo is Britain's busiest railway station but four out of the five international platforms look set to remain out of use for at least a decade.

Proposals to bring the platforms into use for domestic trains were reaffirmed this week (TB 9539) but there are still no concrete plans or timescales for completing the work required for platforms 21-24. A spokesman for the Department for Transport indicated that the intention was to complete the work by 2019 but a spokesman for Network Rail refused to commit to having all platforms returned to service by that date saying only that it hoped to complete the conversions as quickly as possible.

The five international platforms at Waterloo closed in November 2007 when cross-Channel train operator Eurostar transferred its operations to St Pancras International following completion of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, now High Speed 1 (TB 4514). The move apparently took the government of the time and rail industry by surprise; neither had an action plan for dealing with the newly vacant station complex in the heart of London.

Since then there have been a succession of promises by ministers to bring the disused platforms into service but these have so far come to nothing. The station champions report (TB 6380) by Chris Green and Sir Peter Hall in 2009 highlighted the absence of an agreed masterplan but the rail and planning chiefs' recommendations appear to have been ignored.

This week Network Rail said there remain physical and process challenges in converting the international platforms to domestic use. A spokesman said this includes track infrastructure works to untangle the approaches to the platforms and issues relating to ownership. This at least should be resolved soon with ownership of Waterloo International due to transfer from BRB (Residuary) to the Department for Transport in September when the former holding company is wound up.

Earlier this year Tim Shoveller, Managing Director of the South West Trains-Network Rail Alliance, explained that the former international platforms are difficult to convert because of the lengthy access routes, designed for passport controls. He also said that existing escalators into the Waterloo International 'pit' would be unable to cope with the volumes of commuter traffic.

He explained that while a number of options have been considered and rejected, including building a deck over the pit, the most likely approach is new banks of escalators down to the station low level areas with a complete reconfiguration of the access routes to platforms.

On 29 April 2013 South West Trains ran a domestic train into platform 20 and it has committed to using the platform for regular passenger services



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by April 2014 at the latest. By creating access points through the wall between platform 20 and domestic platform 19, the former international platform can be reached through the domestic gateline.

When asked to clarify timescales for Waterloo International a spokesman for the DfT said: "The government is committed to bringing the former international platforms at Waterloo station into domestic use. Plans are already in place to start running services from platform 20 from 2014, which will help boost capacity. Meanwhile, Network Rail is continuing to progress plans to bring the rest of the platforms into use by 2019."

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