

**David Reed**  
**Senior Executive, Access & Licensing**

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Arthur Velavs  
Regulatory Manager  
HS1 Limited  
5th Floor, Kings Place  
90 York Way  
London, N1 9AG

Jason Lewis  
Head of Railway Network Strategy  
Eurostar International Limited  
6th Floor, Kings Place  
90 York Way  
London, N1 9AG

Dear Arthur and Jason

## **Pre-Approval of the framework track access agreement between HS1 Limited and Eurostar International Limited**

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has today pre-approved a new framework track access agreement between HS1 Limited (trading as London St. Pancras Highspeed, LSPH) and Eurostar International Limited (EIL) (jointly the parties), submitted to us on 20 January 2026 under The Railways (Access, Management and Licensing of Railway Undertakings) Regulations 2016 (the 2016 Regulations). The parties may enter into the agreement in the form attached to the approval notice by 16 February 2026. The purpose of this letter is to set out the reasons for our decision.

Approval of this new agreement between LSPH and EIL will allow the continuation of existing international services until 2029.

Some consultees raised concerns over EIL continuing to not provide international services at Ashford or Ebbsfleet International stations. While we understand the passenger desire for international services to be reinstated to these stations, we cannot insist that EIL provides specific services or enters a contract to do so.

EIL (or any other operator) can apply for track access rights to serve Ebbsfleet International or Ashford International at any time. We are keen to actively engage with any party wishing to provide international services to Kent.

### **Purpose of the agreement**

EIL's current framework track access agreement expires on 16 February 2026. The purpose of this agreement is to grant EIL the rights necessary to continue operation of its international services from 17 February 2026 until 16 August 2029. The new agreement also provides a small number of additional Brussels rights beyond EIL's existing agreement, and converts some contingent Amsterdam rights to firm. The



new agreement does not include reference to a collateral station access agreement at Ebbsfleet International Station, and does not include the right to call at Ebbsfleet International Station.

## **Consultation**

A pre-application consultation was carried out by LSPH in line with the process set out in the HS1 Criteria and Procedures document. Comments were received from EMR, Evolyn, Ashford Borough Council, Medway Council, Swale Borough Council, Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Gravesham Borough Council, Dartford Borough Council and Kent County Council.

EMR and Evolyn confirmed that they had no objections or comments to make on the application.

Medway Council, Swale Borough Council, Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Gravesham Borough Council, Dartford Borough Council and Kent County Council all advised of their disappointment that EIL proposed to remove its right to stop at Ebbsfleet International and has indicated it is currently seeking to do the same with Network Rail Infrastructure Ltd concerning Ashford International. Ashford Borough Council submitted an explicit objection to the new EIL agreement, noting:

*“The removal of Ebbsfleet from the HS1 access agreement, and the removal of a track access agreement for Ashford International Station by an operator will create greater costs and barriers to the reopening of these stations, so we object to the new proposed track access agreement for HS1 and any removal of the Ashford Track Access agreement on the grounds that this will create greater costs to passengers, and reduced accessibility to international rail services.”*

LSPH responded to Ashford Borough Council clarifying that its network is open access and it cannot require operators to serve certain stations. Further, it should be noted that the proposed agreement does not remove references to Ashford International, although EIL has entered preliminary discussions with Network Rail Infrastructure Limited in respect of early termination of the agreement for Ashford International Station. At this point, however, no application has been made to ORR in this respect.

## **ORR review**

Approval of a new agreement between LSPH and EIL will allow the continuation of existing international services until 2029. It will also enable growth in services between London and Amsterdam and Brussels.

While we understand the passenger desire for international services to be reinstated to Ashford International and Ebbsfleet International stations, we cannot insist that EIL provides specific services or enters a contract to do so. LSPH and EIL (or any other operator) can apply for track access rights to serve Ebbsfleet International or



Ashford International at any time. We are keen to actively engage with any party wishing to provide international services to Kent.

We queried with LSPH the arrangements for detraining passengers in the event of emergency. LSPH confirmed that EIL's stranded trains protocol identifies Ebbsfleet International and Stratford International for contingency access. The HS1 Emergency Access Code allows EIL to use these stations without other access agreements in place.

Our review of the application raised no other operational, performance or economic concerns.

### **ORR's conclusions**

Pursuant to Regulation 31(1) of the Regulations, in considering the application and in reaching our decision, we are required to weigh and strike the appropriate balance in discharging our statutory duties under section 4 of the Railways Act 1993 (as amended). Approval of this application is consistent with these duties; in particular our duties to:

- protect the interests of users of rail services;
- promote the use of the railway network in Great Britain for the carriage of passengers and goods, and the development of the railway network, to the greatest extent that ORR considers economically practicable;
- contribute to the development of an integrated system of transport of passengers and goods;
- promote competition in the provision of railway services; and
- enable persons providing railway service to plan the future of their businesses with a reasonable degree of assurance.

### **Public register and administration**

Pursuant to the C&Ps, within 14 days of the agreement being entered into the parties are required to send us a copy. We will place a copy of the agreement on our public register. The parties have not asked us to make any redactions prior to it being placed on the public register. Copies of this letter and the agreement will also be placed on the ORR website.

Yours sincerely

**David Reed**