

NEWS FROM EUROPE

STORMS The storms that lashed Britain on 18th January 2007 continued across Europe on the 19th, gaining strength with wind speeds reaching up to 124 mph. Substantial destruction was caused to buildings and electric power lines across much of western Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic and later Poland. 43 people were killed as a result. There was a massive disruption to road and rail movements and the entire German rail network was closed for a time as a precaution. A 40 foot long girder was dislodged from the roof of Berlin's new Hbf and crashed on to a stairway. One of the more dramatic incidents was in Switzerland where an emu train was picked off the rails and thrown some distance to the side like scraps of rubbish. Another service in the Czech Republic was trapped overnight by fallen trees across the tracks.

INTERNATIONAL Significant cracks have been found at 50 separate locations in the concrete structure of the 7.8km long Oresund Bridge that links Denmark and Sweden. Urgent repairs have been performed and the bridge is now being monitored continually since it is feared that more problems will emerge. Large bridges in Europe have shown a tendency to show weaknesses, with the Forth Road Bridge in Scotland a major example. Because heavy lorries will be banned and motor car traffic limited during a long repair period, extra passenger trains will have to operate on the adjacent Forth Railway Bridge, restricting freight traffic on the railway. To accommodate diverted freight services the Dunfermline - Stirling railway is being reopened and Alloa will have its passenger service restored - an unexpected benefit from problems with the road bridge.

IRELAND The Luas tram in Dublin carried 26m passengers during 2006 - up 6m on the previous year. The Red Tallaght Line carried 25% more traffic and the Green Sandyford Line 17% more. Plans for a 1.5km long extension of the Red Line to The Point serving new office developments in the City West/Docks area have been approved. The route will be entirely on public highways and a consortium has agreed to provide £39m towards the cost with construction beginning in Spring 2008. The planned Sandyford - Cherrywood extension of the Green Line will cost €300m, half of which must come from the private sector. Progress has been halted by objections from the owners of a fine listed Georgian House that will have to be demolished to make way for the new line. The 3.5km long branch from the Red Line at Belgard to Citywest housing developments will be funded entirely by private developers. Four additional trams have been ordered to provide additional capacity on the Green Line although they will not be available for 18 months. On the Red Line a number of Heuston - Connolly shuttles are now provided at the rush hour for the benefit of commuters joining trains at Heuston.

FRANCE A shortened TGV set operating on a section of the still to be opened Strasbourg LGV broke the world rail speed record on 14 February 2007. It achieved 553 km/hour smashing the previous record of 515.3 km/hour set by a similar train in 1990. TGVs in normal service are limited to 300 km/hour but the new Strasbourg line will allow speeds of up to 320 km/hour.

THE NETHERLANDS Major civil engineering work on the 90 km long high-speed line extending south from

Asterdam to Rotterdam and the Belgian border was completed at the end of January 2007.

NORWAY Sixteen additional coaches have been ordered from Bombardier to lengthen the service on the Oslo Airport express train service from three to four cars. The

lengthened units will be in service by summer 2009.

BULGARIA West Coast locomotives 87012 and 87019 left Britain via the Channel Tunnel on 23 December 2006 en route for a new career in Bulgaria.