



Waterloo International 

# The Train Now Boarding...

**N**ick Grimshaw's new international terminal at Waterloo station, completed in May, is a very impressive building. Admittedly it would be even more impressive if some of the less-than-attractive structures which surround it were removed (as indeed some of them will be) and the views from inside the spectacular arched glass roof made more pleasing.

In time it will play host to a fleet of around 30 Eurostar (the cross-Channel brand name for European Passenger Services' rolling stock) trains, plying between London, Paris and Brussels. Just how much time we are talking about is still unclear; though the first (empty) Eurostar train will pull into the North Pole depot near Paddington next month to await its call-up, the cross-Channel service will not start until summer 1994 at the earliest. The continuing uncertainty over the Government's preferred route for the 'high-speed' link, and confusion about what Waterloo's role will be when the other high-speed link to either Kings Cross or St Pancras is complete has led to fears that the new Waterloo terminal will be one of the most expensive and best-looking white elephants ever.

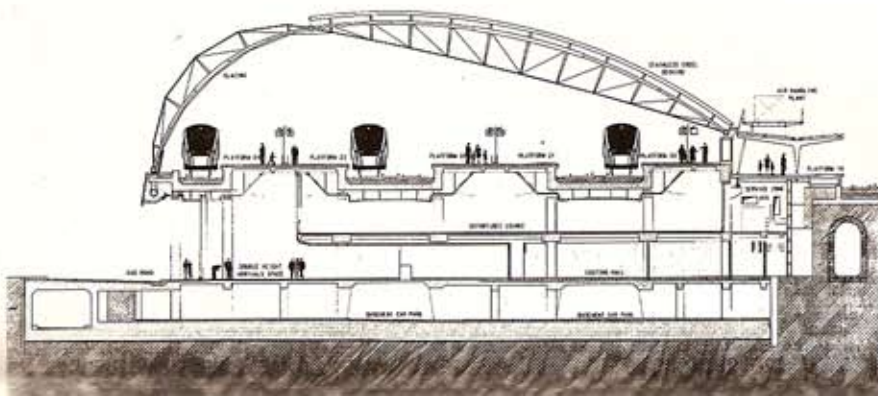
But if and when the quarter-mile long trains start pulling in to Waterloo EPS will be faced with another problem; how to shift, at peak times, 6000 luggage-laden passengers per hour – 3000 going one way, 3000 going the other – safely and quickly through the terminal. In other words, signage will be a crucial issue.

Over the last two and a half years Henrion,

The new terminal at Waterloo is a curious blend of railway station and airport. Paul Rainford looks at the signage which will guide passengers through this alien environment

developing the signage in close consultation with the architect, Nicholas Grimshaw and Partners, and EPS, the BR subsidiary which will run the trains. This has meant designing the individual signs and having a say in where they ought to be sited. Neven Sidor, a director at NGP, claims that the building 'signs itself', but HLS's Chris Ludlow would beg to differ: 'Because of restrictions imposed by the site, and the many changes in levels, it's not a simple building,' he says. Even the station manager, Alan Futter, admits that in an ideal world the terminal would cover a much greater surface area.

The terminal is basically on four levels (see below), the platforms being on the top level. Ticket checks and security take place on lower-level passenger handling zones, each of which is linked to separate concourses – departures on the west side by the Victory Arch entrance to Waterloo and arrivals on a the double-height



Site constraints meant that the Grimshaw building had to be built with four levels, with escalators leading from the arrivals concourse up onto platform level



concourse at the York Road level.

Due to the nature of the building, HLS had to be in at the start of the project, before the first stone was laid, to work out the logistics of passenger flow. With the help of computer simulations Ludlow envisaged the typical route decisions passengers would have to take. 'You have to put yourself in the position of the passenger and try to work out what comes next. For this reason you had to really understand what the architects were proposing,' says Ludlow.

The terminal is, in a sense, a rather curious hybrid; half-airport, half-railway station. Although the curved glass roof is very much part of the railways vocabulary (it is highly reminiscent of the Victorian roof at York station), the terminology and trappings are more Gatwick Terminal One: we have 'departure lounge' instead of waiting room, we have a check-in desk, customs and bi-lingual signs, – one suspects that the platforms could almost have been called 'gates' in this context.

The platforms perhaps deserve a grander name. Their immense length – to accommodate those quarter-mile trains – necessitates their being divided up into various sections (A, B, C and so on). To avoid an unwanted yomp along the platform, passengers need to be directed so that they emerge from the lower levels, by escalator, in roughly the right spot. (All passengers will have been allocated a seat.)

At the platform level, the showpiece part of the terminal, HLS had to take care that the signs did not spoil the overall effect. Explains Ludlow: 'Nothing was allowed to be hung from the superstructure: the architect did not want his arch interrupted – which was fair enough because it does form a very spectacular line.' The platform signs are mounted on

to steel which resists graffiti, vandalism, yellowing and static. The choice of this material was influenced by the experience of Network SouthEast which, says Ludlow, had found out to its cost that stove-enamelled signs tend to stain badly in the corrosive trackside atmosphere.

The signs throughout the new terminal use existing elements of BR signage, namely Jock Kinner's rail alphabet and BR standard pictograms. But doesn't this conflict with the desire to create Eurostar as clearly separate brand? Says Alan Futter: 'It was simply a question of choosing the clearest signing available, and the BR signing just happened to be it.' To differentiate it slightly from, say, Network SouthEast's red, white, blue and grey combination, HLS has incorporated a yellow band at the bottom of each sign both to echo the yellow in the Eurostar identity (created by design consultancy Minale Tattersfield's French spin-off, Design System) which will appear on the new trains, and to make the signs more visible.

Also, the French equivalent – where needed – of the English sign text has been picked out in a lighter shade of blue; an elegant solution about which Futter is particularly enthusiastic.

But as Maria Pether, a graphic designer who worked on the project with Chris Ludlow points out, HLS's role went beyond the signage hardware, painstakingly working out the layout of the text on the many VDUs and even the language and grammar used over the public address system – 'the whole information package', says Pether.

For the moment, however, there's one very striking station, a lot of signs, but not a passenger in sight. Before the hordes arrive and the signage system is really put to the test the Channel Tunnel needs to be completed and the



The snaking glass roof seen from above hints at the unusually long platforms – which will have to cope with trains a quarter of a mile in length



Foreign equivalents of English text are picked out in a lighter shade of blue, and the yellow band picks up on the Eurostar identity. The cantilevered sign gantries (right) echo the architecture of the terminal as a whole

