

“Grow in Kent” – Ashford International, 26 September 2025

Good morning everyone,

It is a great honor to be here today, in the heart of Kent to celebrate our shared commitment to reconnecting this region with international rail.

Let me begin by saluting Lord Peter Hendy, Minister of State for Rail, whose leadership on this issue is essential.

I warmly thank our hosts, Kent County Council and its Leader, Councilor Linden Kemkaran, as well as Stephanie Holt-Castle for their welcome and their vision.

I also wish to acknowledge the leaders of Ashford, Dartford, and Medway, together with all local government representatives here today. And finally, allow me to extend a warm greeting to all participants gathered here this morning: my fellow parliamentarians from Kent, elected of Calais, business communities, train operators and civil society.

For centuries, the Channel has not been a border but a bridge – linking our peoples, our economies, and our cultures. The rail connection through Ashford and Ebbsfleet has been a symbol of this partnership. Its revival is more than a transport issue: it is about opportunity, growth, and sustainability.

More than 150 years ago, a French engineer, Aimé Thomé de Gamond, dedicated his life and even his fortune to a bold dream: linking France and Britain through a tunnel beneath the Channel. He presented his plans to Napoleon III and Queen Victoria, convinced that our nations’ future was to be more connected. Legend even has it that he once threw himself into the Channel carrying pieces of chalk to demonstrate that the seabed could

support such a project. At the time, the idea seemed impossible. And yet, his vision laid the groundwork for what, more than a century later, became a reality with the Channel Tunnel – a symbol of cooperation, innovation, and our shared destiny. And what brings us together today, here in Ashford, is not only an ideal we share – it is the conviction that, together, we can make it a reality.

As MP for French citizens living in the UK, I have made this cause a priority. Earlier this year, I wrote directly to the CEO of Eurostar to urge the reopening of these vital services. This is not only a matter of convenience—it is a matter of principle: to ensure that French and British people living in Kent remain connected.

For the many French citizens living in Kent, the reopening of the line is a key issue. It means easier travel to France, closer ties with their families, and stronger cultural and economic exchange. It is about keeping our community here in Kent fully integrated in the life of both our nations.

Reinstating international services would mean easier journeys for families and businesses, new prospects for tourism on both sides of the Channel, and a concrete step towards greener mobility. France and the United Kingdom share the same ambition: to make rail travel the backbone of our future connections.

Today, our presence together – ministers, councilors, entrepreneurs, campaigners – sends a clear signal: we are united in our determination to bring back international trains to Kent.

Let us make this vision a reality, for our regions, for our citizens, and for the generations to come.

Thank you.