

CHANNEL TUNNEL RAIL LINK

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Even more than the Channel Tunnel the Channel Tunnel High Speed Rail Link has concentrated more minds in Kent more powerfully on the defence and protection of the environment than any previous threat and the Federation's efforts and resources have never been more demanded and stretched.

As with the problems of the Channel Tunnel, we have pooled our efforts and resources with our fellow members of the Kent Action Group, namely the Weald of Kent Preservation Society, the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation, the Council for the Protection of Rural England (both the national headquarters and the Kent Branch) and the Kent Association of Parish Councils. Last time round the quality of our efforts was such that Kent County Council stepped in with generous resources for the Select Committee parliamentary proceedings, with impressively successful consequences. This time the County Council was quick off the mark with the Kent Rail Action Group with the resources necessary to attempt better coordination of the even greater levels and extent of environmental outrage.

The Federation itself had initially to fight for inclusion in Krag which was rightly criticised for being insufficiently representative. Now that so many more groups have been included, Krag is now criticised for being a mere public relations exercise. Nevertheless the members of Krag unquestionably persuaded Kent's planners and leaders to take much more seriously questions of legislative procedures, to employ German rail expertise and to insist on much more stringent examination by British Rail of their own route proposals and those of the TALIS and RACHEL alternatives. Consequently British Rail has undertaken much greater environmental protection and expenditure and faces tough opposition to the November deadline for the Bill and to the whole process of getting it through parliament.

The costs of petitioning are horrendous, quite beyond the resources of relatively small voluntary organisations. It is therefore to Kent County Council, which has earmarked £2 millions for the defence of Kent, that we must look for the means to have our reasonable and rightful demands properly and professionally represented. With that and with the help of our Kent MPs, who have also been uniquely active and collaborative on an environmental issue, we may hope for maximum mitigation of the price Kent must pay for the necessary addition of rail facilities as alternative to even more road traffic and motorways.
