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## **EUROSTAR OPENS FOR GUIDE DOGS**

From today, blind and partially sighted people are able to take their guide dogs with them on Eurostar journeys from London Waterloo to Paris and Brussels.

When booking, all the guide dog owner has to do is specify that they have a guide dog with them and the adjacent seating space will be booked for the dog free of charge.

In order to implement the scheme, Eurostar has worked closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which manages the Pet Travel Scheme, and with The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. The necessary screening facilities are now in place at Waterloo to check animals returning into the UK.

Paul Charles, Eurostar's Director of Communications, said, "Eurostar is delighted to be opening its doors to guide dogs. We want to be as accessible as possible and this service will be a further aid to mobility. The timing is perfect as we are just about to reduce our fastest journey times by 20 minutes to only 2 hours 35 minutes to Paris and 2 hours 20 minutes to Brussels."

Robin Hutchinson, Guide Dogs Head of Communications, said: "We are delighted that Eurostar is committed to the guide dog partnership ensuring that blind and partially sighted people can maximise their independence achieved through the guide dog. Guide dogs offer their owners freedom and mobility, ensuring confidence from owners when using train services."

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Dogs must, of course, comply with the existing Pet Travel Scheme regulations and be microchipped and have the appropriate rabies vaccination certificate. They must also be treated against ticks and tapeworms 24-48 hours before returning to the UK. Passengers on day trips can have this treatment performed in the UK before departure.

Eurostar's existing "Companion" fares, which enable companions of blind and partially sighted people to travel at preferential rates, will still be available as an alternative.

At present, the service for guide dogs is available at London Waterloo, Paris Nord, Brussels Midi and Lille Europe. Guide dogs cannot yet be accepted through the intermediate stations at Ashford (Kent), or Calais.