

Railwatch

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World beater

The world's largest-ever rail hub opened in May with a spectacular firework display and light show.

Berlin's enormous new main station (Hauptbahnhof) opened just in time for the World Cup football tournament.

Architect Meinhard von Gerkan calls Hauptbahnhof a transport cathedral, with twin glass towers and a 321-metre-long glass tunnel – which can be seen illuminated in the picture – for east-west trains.

Every day 300,000 passengers and visitors now pass through, with the daily timetable including 160 long-distance trains, 310 regional trains, and 800 metropolitan trains.

For the first time, rail passengers from all four directions can arrive at the same station.

The original Lehrter Station with its French neo-Renaissance architecture was a “palace among stations”. Opened in 1871, it linked Berlin with Lehrte, near Hanover.

The station was badly damaged in the second world war and its ruins were demolished in 1958.

The adjoining light rail station, Lehrter Stadtbahnhof was one of the great borders of the Cold War, the final stop in the western half of the divided city.

The next station was Friedrichstrasse in East Berlin.

But the centre of Berlin has been rebuilt over the past 10 years, following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

The new railway “cathedral” also has a large shopping centre over three levels.

Germany's strict opening hours laws do not apply to train stations, so shops will be able to stay open late and on Sundays.

The station's two towers will however not be complete until 2007.

The station has taken 10 years to build instead of the three originally

projected and has cost £500million. Long-distance trains will no longer stop at Zoo station which was the focal point of West Berlin.

Services to Ostbahnhof, the main station in the old East Berlin, have also been reduced.

Hauptbahnhof was ceremonially opened by Chancellor Angela Merkel, who arrived together with transport minister Wolfgang Tiefensee in an ICE high-speed train from Leipzig.

Although Britain has nothing to match Hauptbahnhof, major investment is going into the Channel Tunnel rail link and the upgrading of the West Coast main line.

The much-criticised WCML upgrade is showing better than expected returns, with passenger numbers up by 30%.

Launching a new report during a visit to view to Milton Keynes Central station, Rail Minister Derek Twigg said: “This project has been

a tremendous engineering feat, with over 1,200 miles of track laid already and improvements made so that trains can run at 125mph in tilt mode along the entire track.”

The West Coast main line is 1,660 miles long and runs from Euston to Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, North Wales and Scotland.

It has over 2,000 train movements each day and caters for over 75 million passenger journeys every year.

New platforms have been provided at Birmingham New Street, Wolverhampton and Stockport, a new fly-over and platforms at Nuneaton and three major new junctions on the route.

Sadly at the same time, some British services are being cut back and there is even ridiculous talk of closing some branch lines.

railfuture