Eurostar: Contactless Arrival & UK Exit - Applying Biometrics & Seamless

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Mr Thillaye and Mr Wilson presented the pilot project carried out jointly by Eurostar and Entrust at the St Pancras International Station in London, where travellers will use a touchless biometric lane instead of being required to present their IDs or tickets. The pilot project is scheduled for launch in the second half of 2021 to coincide with the expected return to international travel.

To begin with, Mr Thillaye outlined the main challenges that initially sparked this pilot project. First, Eurostar is a major international rail operator with about 11 million passengers per year, comprising 80 % of the rail/air market share on the London-Paris and London-Brussels routes. Second, external factors, such as terrorism, COVID-19, industrial action and others, could easily disturb the project, as it is conducted in a constrained space with significant risks of delays and congestion. Third, this pilot will be the first application of the seamless biometric lane to an international high-speed rail operator, although there is uncertainty with regard to public acceptance of biometric verification for rail transport. Finally, but most importantly, this project will be implemented in a rapidly evolving regulatory environment, with the EES/ETIAS becoming operational across the EU, while the UK will introduce its equivalent systems (e.g., the ETA – Electronic Travel Authorisation).

In the second half of the presentation, Mr Wilson provided a step-by-step overview of the project's technical implementation. First, passengers will enrol their identity using their facial image (biometrics), e-passport and ticket data at home. Then, on arrival at London's St Pancras International Station, passengers will use a touchless biometric lane to check in for the train, and, in the process, their identity data will be associated with the Eurostar ticketing system. Finally, passenger exit data will be sent to the UK Border Force for an automated exit check.

Concluding the presentation, Mr Wilson and Mr Thillaye outlined the key characteristics of the seamless passenger identification/verification process implemented in the framework of their joint pilot project. First, the process will be based on explicit opt-in and consent. Second, passengers will need to perform digital on-boarding in advance of their trip, with their biometrics stored in the DTC (Digital Travel Credential) and shared only when necessary. Third, personal information will be retained only for the duration of the journey. Fourth, identity verification is ensured by Proven ID Verification (Entrust) and Genuine Presence Assurance (iProov). Finally, the solutions deployed comply with all relevant data protection regulations (i.e., DPA and GDPR).

Image 10: Slide from the presentation of Renaud Thillaye, Head of Public Affairs, Eurostar; Gordon Wilson, Vice President and Global Lead Seamless Travel, Borders & Immigration, Entrust

In summation, some of the expected benefits of this solution include enhanced passenger experience (especially for business travellers), less time spent at the railway station, reduced congestion, ability to accommodate recovery in traveller volumes, and many others.