

Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions

Inquiry into the fire on heavy goods vehicle shuttle 7539 on 18 November 1996

Chapter III: The Sequence of Events:-

After the Incident Train Stopped

11. The incident train made a controlled stop at 21.58 hrs adjacent to the cross-passage at PK 4131. [Figure 6](#) shows the position of all trains in the tunnel at that time. The driver of the incident train was unable to see the number of the cross-passage door because of the thick smoke which had almost immediately enveloped the front locomotive. The power supply from the catenary was lost four seconds after the train stopped. The Chef de Train informed the Rail Control Centre of the alarms he had received and confirmed that the incident train had stopped.
12. At 21.59 hrs, the Rail Control Centre requested train 7533, immediately ahead of the incident train, to reduce speed to 30kph. At that point train 7533 was adjacent to the United Kingdom crossover. Tourist shuttle train 6527 and Eurostar 9059, which were ahead of train 7533 and close to the United Kingdom portal, continued their journeys at 100kph. The driver of the incident train informed the Rail Control Centre that he had stopped and lost power. Tourist shuttle train 6523 stopped 2km behind train 4899 in response to the signalling system.
13. The driver of the incident train then attempted to leave his cab but was prevented by thick smoke. At 22.01 hrs, he informed the Rail Control Centre that he was unable to leave his cab to organise the evacuation of passengers because the smoke was too dense. A second attempt by the driver to leave the cab, this time using his respirator, also failed. Smoke began to enter the Amenity Coach. The Chef de Train then opened the rear door of the Amenity Coach in an attempt to locate the cross-passage. This resulted in a significant amount of smoke entering the Amenity Coach and, unable to find the evacuation route, the Chef de Train immediately closed the door and decided to keep everyone on-board the incident train until the arrival of the emergency services.
14. Because of the fire, the administrative telephone network between the United Kingdom and France failed at 22.02 hrs. The concession radio was still available but was overloaded with traffic. The Rail Control Centre ordered the driver of train 6523 to go to the rear locomotive of his train and prepare to reverse out of the tunnel. The driver of the incident train informed the French Fire Equipment Management Centre at 22.03 hrs via the concession radio that he was in his cab, that there was too much smoke outside to leave, that the passengers were in the Amenity Coach and that he did not know exactly where he had stopped.