

## The Chunnel

Imagine that you are speeding along in a luxury train, traveling at speeds of up to 100 miles per hour. However, instead of the scenes of city streets and farmland dotted with villages that you would expect to see flying by on this ride, a black void fills your windows. It is a blackness darker than night. This train is traveling under the English Channel through a tunnel nearly 30 miles long.

The English Channel is an approximately 25-mile stretch of water that separates the isles of Great Britain from the coastline of France. In past centuries, the Channel served mostly to protect Britain from invasion. Today, people can fly across the Channel in a matter of minutes. Since it opened in 1994, the Channel Tunnel Railway – or Chunnel, as it is better known – has offered another option for people traveling between England and France.

Not everyone thinks the Chunnel is wonderful. From the beginning, critics have complained about a variety of issues: the tremendous cost, the mishandling of contracts, and the mismanagement of work. Many people thought there was no need for the tunnel since a good ferry system was already in place. They were apprehensive about accidents, about international terrorists, and even about a threat of rabies from animals transported through the tunnel. A fire in a Chunnel train in 1996 seemed to confirm their fears. Calls intensified for an end to the link.

But whatever controversy the building of the Chunnel has sparked, it seems the railway tunnel is here to stay. Advertised as “the fastest and most convenient way to get from Big Ben to the Eiffel Tower,” the Chunnel is a magical ride courtesy of an engineering miracle.

## Unit 16

- Why is the Chunnel so vulnerable to a crisis caused by terrorists?
  
- Would you be apprehensive about emerging in France from under the English Channel?
  
- Mass transportation such as the Chunnel has made life more efficient in many ways. But what about the plights of mass transportation? Can you think of any?