Outside the train

Cycling and trains

Railfuture's response to the Strategic Rail Authority cycling policy consultation paper

Inside the train

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About cycling and trains:

Cycle carriage on trains enables environmentally sustainable door to door travel, in line with government policy to reduce the number of journeys made by car.

This helps to reduce congestion and pollution and improve public health.

More than 25% of “households” in Britain do not have access to a car and their lifestyle depends on the ability to take their cycles on trains.

Cycle carriage fits in with the government’s wish to promote socially inclusive transport policies.

Cycle carriage also reduces car-parking needs and traffic congestion at stations.
It can form the basis of ‘green’ tourism.

About our pictures:

The family in our cover pictures took their bikes on the train from London Waterloo to Portsmouth where they caught the ferry to Cherbourg in France for a week’s holiday. They used French trains to travel the long distances in Normandy and then their bikes to visit historic towns, cities, and beaches.
Being able to transport their bikes by train made it possible for them to leave their car at home, in contrast to the many other families travelling from Britain to holiday in France. The British rail industry and the European rail companies must accept that if they are to receive large amounts of public cash for investment, they should provide facilities for those without cars.
Note that the train sign indicates that only three bikes can be carried. In fact four were easily accommodated in the train without blocking the aisle.

About Railfuture:

Railfuture has more than 3,000 individual members and speaks on behalf on many rail user groups throughout Britain. It campaigns for greater use of and greater investment in railways.

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Railfuture's response to SRA cycling policy consultation paper

The SRA is to be congratulated on the support it has given to cycling in the past but a great deal more can and should be done.

Some train operating companies, particularly Anglia Railways, have been pro-active in providing facilities. But often cyclists fare better when they are just left to use trains, without interference from either managers or staff. Many unnecessary restrictions have been introduced.

The rail industry has failed to respond to the marketing opportunities provided by growing numbers of cyclists who are prepared to buy rail tickets, often on empty off-peak trains. Rail companies have been obstructive and short-sighted in not providing facilities.

Vast numbers of cycles are now seen carried around the country on cars, probably more than are transported by train. Cycle racks for cars can cost several hundred pounds and are often bought because cyclists are regularly frustrated in their efforts to use trains. Cycle magazines have even carried letters from cyclists saying that they have reluctantly resorted to buying cars because it has become impossible to take their cycles on trains.

Problems have arisen because new trains have been introduced without proper provision for cycles and, incidentally, prams, buggies and luggage. In some areas buses, not generally suited to carrying cycles, are beginning to accept cycles because of the rail companies' failings.

Rail managers suffer from a delusion that cycling is not mainstream. In fact, there are now 22 million cycles in Britain, as many cycles as there are cars. Even in London, cyclists make up 10% of the traffic.

Railfuture believes that rail is the backbone of the national public transport system and can perform a central role in providing transport access for all.

Because it receives financial support from taxpayers, rail must be more accessible and socially inclusive.

Although many cyclists are well off, cycles also provide those on limited incomes with good, reliable local transport. Combined with rail as part of an integrated transport system, the cycle can be efficient over a much greater range.

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Many individuals aspire to be more environmentally friendly in their transport choices and would choose bike and rail on more occasions if they could. The current niggardly approach of the rail industry to cyclists makes this difficult and sometimes impossible.

The rail industry should plan to accommodate the current demand for cyclists but should also look to the future when car driving will become less and less acceptable because of pollution, traffic problems, global warming and energy shortages. Growing numbers of former motorists can be expected to look to the railways for an alternative. Carrying cyclists by train will be a growing market.

It may be necessary to consider introducing inter-city trains with dual use carriages where half the carriage can be designated a cycle storage area. This is already happening in Austria and Germany.

In Britain there is an opportunity now to convert some relatively modern coaches which are being displaced by newer trains on Virgin's West Coast main line and CrossCountry Trains. These at least could be used to boost services to seaside and holiday areas at times of peak demand, while being available for strengthening under-pressure peak services elsewhere on the network.

Responses to specific topics

1. Introduction
The current provision of only two cycle spaces on trains run by Arriva Northern, c2c, Central Trains, First North Western Wales & Border and Wessex Trains is completely inappropriate, particularly as all these operators run trains to holiday areas. This restrictive approach prevents even the smallest family from taking their cycles to holiday areas by train. However, on a one-coach train Anglia Railways has shown that four cycles can be comfortably accommodated. Two-car trains should carry at least four cycles. The current absolute ban on cycles on Stansted Express trains is completely indefensible and an abuse of monopoly power. Both Gatwick Express and Heathrow Express accommodate cycles.
Stansted Express insists that cycles can only be carried in flat packs. This makes life impossible for cyclists and difficult for fellow passengers. If there is a problem, a bike can easily be wheeled to a less inconvenient space if it is not in a box. Unboxed, it also takes up far less space.

One important point regarding leisure use of cycle and rail has been omitted. Most leisure cyclists go as a family or a group of friends. Hence they need enough cycle spaces per off-peak train to allow for an average family to travel together. One train operator which for many years provided no more than two spaces per train gave as the reason that even these were not often used. Not surprising, if families needed to split up for their outing. A four-car train should easily be able to accommodate a minimum of eight cyclists and should also accommodate tandems.

The cyclists organisation CTC estimates there are some 7,000 tandems in use in Britain. Train operators should provide space for them on trains, particularly as they take less space than two bicycles but bring two fare-paying passengers to the railway.

For bad cycle provision, the diesel class 170 train is a classic. It is difficult to locate the cycle storage area and the "facility" is too cramped to allow two cycles to be stowed without blocking seats, access to the lavatory and access to the next carriage.
The new class 444 trains operated by South West Trains have better-designed storage space but there are only six cycle spaces on a five-car train.
It is often impossible to hire cycles in holiday areas, particularly to suit families of widely varying ages. Children's cycles are generally not available for hire. Most cyclists would anyway prefer to ride their own cycles, rather than hire types they are unused to.

2. Objectives

Question 1

Railfuture believes that it should not be left solely to the train operator's discretion to determine the appropriate facilities for carrying cycles on trains. Clear guidelines should be laid down so that a fixed number of cycle spaces are provided on every train. For a four-car train, that should be a minimum of four to eight spaces.

3. Policy overview

Question 2

Railfuture supports the SRA's policy overview but calls for more specific guidance to be laid down on the number of cycle parking spaces at stations.

It applauds the statement that "TOCs should promote the carriage of cycles on off-peak services" but urges that the phrase "with appropriate restrictions on numbers, charges, and reservations as appropriate for their specific markets" should be deleted from the policy.

Train operators should accommodate both commuter and leisure cyclists while also simplifying and minimising any necessary restrictions.

When procuring rolling stock or carrying out major refurbishment, Railfuture believes space for cycles should be "provided", not merely "considered".

Railfuture supports the SRA's call for clear information on provision for cyclists.

4. Benefits and costs of provision for cycles

Question 3

Facilities for cyclists on trains do not need to be expensive. Simple handles to which "stretchies" can be attached to stop a cycle moving are better than some of the more expensive equipment fitted at present. Both inter-city and local trains should have a clearly designated cycle carriage area.

Cycle carriage areas should be clearly marked on both train exteriors and interiors and cyclists should be given information on platform indicators about where to board the train.

In theory cycle racks can make very efficient use of space, but in practice, their design may render them useless. For example, few people have the strength and height to lift a cycle on to a six ft high vertical rack (as illustrated in the SRA's cycling consultation document, page 20) and many women in particular find it impossible to place their cycles in such racks. Luggage has to be removed from the bike to prevent it tipping out when the bike is lifted up.

Substitute buses should carry cycles.

Question 4
Not all the benefits of cycling have been properly identified. If cyclists' basic needs are met they will be much more reliable and loyal customers than the usual off-peak traveller. Cyclists who do not also own a car need the train to make their mode more useful for long distances, whereas car drivers have the option to choose their car. Cycling is also much more economically useful to tourist areas than cars, requiring less infrastructure provision. Research has also shown that cyclists sustain the local economy more than car drivers in tourist areas by spending more in local shops, restaurants and for accommodation. Car drivers often bring all their needs with them from their home area and do not stay.
Trains (and cycles) also have a role to play in the Government's overall policy of reducing social exclusion in regard to holidays. A cycle and a train can be a good choice for low-cost touring.

Question 5
The cost of provision for cyclists has probably been over-stated in view of the expensive and inappropriate equipment currently used. Simplicity is the best solution. How much does it cost to remove a few seats and fix a few handles? For roughly 90% of the train's operation, there would be no potential loss of overall seating provision. Trains often run empty contra-peak. And at peak times, the space is available for standing passengers. Convertible space with tip-up seats - as on Thameslink class 319s - make the area more flexible.

Question 6
The SRA must be careful to ensure that in its attempts to present a "business case", it is not creating the conditions for train companies to do nothing. The train operators will gain market share if they provide for cyclists for free and they will also be meeting government objectives to reduce car traffic and reduce social exclusion. The SRA must avoid the temptation to think only of short-term profit. Provision for luggage and cycles could be "valued" as customer care.

5. Access to stations
Question 7
Railfuture does not agree with the SRA policy that mere consideration should be given to cycle access to stations. Many local authorities and rail companies fail to recognise the

importance of making it easy to cycle to stations. Often over-lavish provision for cars is a barrier for bikes, buses and pedestrians. The SRA should direct that provision for access to stations should be in line with the following priorities: 1 Pedestrians 2 Public transport users 3 Cyclists 4 Taxi users 5 Private car users

6. Cycle parking at stations

Question 8

There should be provision for cycle parking at all stations. At smaller stations this can be designated areas, where cycles can be attached to fences or railings. The cost might be only for signage. Many stations can now accommodate cycle parking on platforms because there are fewer luggage trolley movements, following the withdrawal of local mail and parcels services. The SRA already mentions the need for protecting cycles from rain and snow. Equally important is for cycle sheds to be sited to avoid hot sun which can cause damage to the bike, particularly to tyres.

Question 9

The SRA should provide guidance on the number of spaces that should be provided, based on known examples of good practice.

Question 10

There should be no charges for cycle parking. Train operators should embrace the concept that every cyclist is saving the operator the cost of providing a car parking space. In circumstances where the operator feels it necessary to provide high-quality secure cycle lockers, a small fee might be acceptable.

7. Cycles on trains

Question 11

No charges should be made for cycle carriage. A cycle should be viewed as a reasonable item of luggage of a fare-paying passenger. Space on trains is at a premium for only very short periods of time. Many trains run empty for most of the day.

Question 12

Train operators should not be free to levy charges. This would give them the opportunity to have high charges to reduce demand and consequently an excuse not to provide for cyclists. Current charges are in no way a reflection of market forces. Rather they are the result of train operators' prejudices and hinder the development of an integrated transport system. The £20 single fare for a bike on Eurostar is unreasonable and seems designed to rebuff cyclists. A family of four would pay £160 return just for their cycles. Particularly now that large amounts of public money have been provided to build the Channel Tunnel rail link, this charge should be reviewed or better still abolished. By contrast, cross-channel ferries usually take bikes free.

Question 13
Pre-booking should not be made mandatory. It is very difficult for cyclists to plan for wind and weather conditions and many parents like to travel by bike and train with their children who may not be able to cycle to fit in with a timetable. On occasions, cyclists need to guarantee a place on a particular train, and in those cases, a small fee would be acceptable. In addition, cyclists should be able to book in advance to secure shared disabled/cyclists space.

Question 14
Cyclists should have second call (after wheelchair users) on any flexible space on trains. To prevent delays in boarding, clear, bold cycle signs should be provided on train exteriors so that boarding cyclist can quickly identify where to load their cycles. Thameslink has chosen to do this although regular changes of livery have undermined its value. In Austria, Switzerland, and Germany, large cycle signs on the outside of coaches are normal - and sensible.
All passengers (especially cyclists) would benefit from new trains being designed with wider doors.

8 Cycle hire and repair at stations
Question 15
Most cyclists will not want to hire bikes. But station operators should be encouraged to provide - or encourage others to provide - commercial cycle hire and repair facilities for tourists, but not at the expense of providing facilities for passengers bringing their own cycles.
Not all cyclists find hired machines acceptable. Children, older cyclists or those with a disability may not feel safe on an unfamiliar cycle. It is also often impossible to carry luggage on hired cycles.

9 Information policy
Question 16
Important information a train operator can provide for cyclists is a welcome sign, together with a clear explanation of any necessary restrictions. The sign should include the location of cycle parking, how to get your bike on to the required platform (eg if there is a lift or ramp). It should be displayed on one poster prominently positioned at the station entrance.

Question 17
The world wide web is the best channel for many young people to gain information. It is available in many homes and at most public libraries. But posters at stations must surely be the cheapest and easiest way for train operators to communicate policy and advice. For some reason, trains operators fail to do this at most stations. Leaflets are also useful as they can be consulted in planning trips.
Staff should be reminded that rules should be interpreted sympathetically to ensure that people complete their journeys with the minimum of difficulty - and anxiety. Platform staff can also provide basic information about where cyclists can board trains to avoid confusion and delays.

Question 18
Key issues which cyclists need to know before travelling are booking requirements and travel restrictions. Restrictions on peak-hour trains should be sensibly introduced and interpreted. If the peak hour begins at 7.30am, for instance, cyclists should be free to use trains before then. Consideration should also be given to exceptional circumstances when cyclists will need to travel during peak hours. Blanket bans are unnecessary.

Appendix B
Responses to rolling stock consultation
Design of dual-use carriages for carrying large numbers of cycles at busy holiday times should be considered. Wider and more doors with some specially designated for cyclists and clearly marked.

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This paper can be downloaded from the Railfuture website: http://www.railfuture.org.uk Click on briefings and then cycling.

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