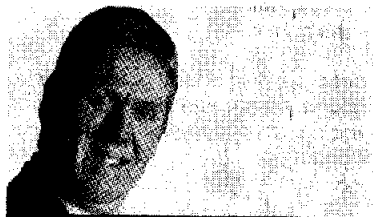


INSIDE TRACK: Answer for cyclists on busy trains is not 'bike and stow'



DOMINIC BOOTH
Managing Director Abellio

WHEN you are writing a bid for any kind of event or franchise, you always try to include a real stand-out item; something that separates you from your competition.

When we were bidding for the stewardship of the ScotRail franchise, we had many things to shout about: new trains, the largest ever train improvement programme in ScotRail's history and aligning the railway with economic development more effectively. These were all big-ticket items for us.

However, it was our plans for cycling that really caught the imagination of the people we spoke to during that bidding process.

Perhaps it's because of our Dutch heritage, but it was apparent that people were really excited by our ambitions to help turn Scotland into a nation of cyclists.

We have a really simple philosophy when it comes to our business. We don't think of the journey as starting when people sit down on the train; it starts the moment customers leave home. That is why cycling is so important to us.

We believe we can turn many more people on to cycling by making it easier for them to include their bike in their daily commute. This is what happens in great cities like Amsterdam. There's no reason why it can't happen here.

That's why we're working closely with the Dutch Embassy and Cycling Scotland to make it a reality.

To do this, we need to change our thinking. Trains are busy, especially in those morning peaks. We are taking action to address this. Our new fleet of faster, longer greener electric trains will add thousands of extra seats to our network when they arrive next year.

But joining up bike and trains journeys isn't achieved by trying to

cram more bike spaces on to busy commuter trains.

The solution is to think "Bike&Go", not bike and stow. We need to make it really easy for people to either cycle to the station and safely secure their bike, or have access to bikes for hire at either end of their journey.

That's precisely what we're doing. We are investing £2 million in new "Bike&Go" hire schemes across the country and providing extra bike racks in scores of our stations.

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Recently, there has been much discussion about cycling spaces on tourist routes.

We completely agree that we should be encouraging cycling tourism across Scotland.

It has an important role to play in supporting communities across the country.

This is, however, an entirely separate debate from how we provide cycling access on our commuter trains.

We are committed to working with the cycling community and our national tourism bodies to find solutions to this challenge. We have already found a way to remodel the trains to get more space for bikes, but there is undoubtedly more that can be done.

Our commitment to cycling is absolute and I know we can do it.

HERALD
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