

SPOKES *The Lothian Cycle Campaign*

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Email: scottish.ministers@gov.scot [attention Derek Mackay MSP]
cc: Roy Brannen, Chief Executive, Transport Scotland
Aidan Grisewood, Director of Rail, Transport Scotland

6 April 2016

Dear Minister

Thank you for your comprehensive reply dated 16 March 2016, to our letter of 5 March, re bike carriage on new and refurbished trains, and related issues.

We would be pleased to meet Transport Scotland to discuss the above, as suggested in your letter, and are writing to Aidan Grisewood accordingly. However we are also replying to you as we feel there are a few issues where government input to Transport Scotland could be valuable.

First, we were disappointed that your reply did not, as far as we could see, cover the unfortunate decision by Transport Scotland to withdraw from the ScotRail Cycle Forum.

Turning to bike carriage, whilst some of what you say is encouraging, much is discouraging. The gist of your letter appears to confirm that, under present proposals, bookable spaces will be reduced substantially on the West Highland line, and bike storage conditions on the Edinburgh-Glasgow lines will be less good than at present. More positively, within those parameters, guards will be trained to do all they can to help people needing to travel with a bike, which is welcome.

With regard to bike storage and hire at stations, we greatly welcome the developments now underway at a number of stations, including Haymarket, Linlithgow, Livingston and others, and we will certainly be publicising these positive moves - though, of course, they do not negate the need for adequate ontrain bike carriage for the significant number of local and tourist travellers who do need to take their own bike.

Our members feel that the message from Transport Scotland continues to be that passengers with bicycles – or indeed pushchairs or bulky luggage - are tolerated rather than welcomed. The ScotRail subsidy is a large Scottish Government's expenditure - indeed it was recently reported on BBC Radio that every ScotRail journey carries a £6.70 cost to the taxpayer. Despite this, TS doesn't specify that it should be operated equitably for all stakeholder/taxpayer groups.

Beyond our membership, there continues to be great concern over the planned changes - our tweet on the subject has now been retweeted by a remarkable 170 individuals and organisations (by far our most popular ever tweet) including tourist interests, such as @isleofeigg who said, "*V bad news for Small Isles tourism. No cars allowed on isles, so visitors bring bikes.*" Some of the many comments received are at <http://www.spokes.org.uk/2016/03/bikerail-cuts-opposition-mounts/>

On the West Highland Line, we were very disappointed that your letter suggested no intent to rethink the proposals to reduce bookable spaces from 6 to 2 on 2-coach services and from 12 to 4 on 4-coach. However, following the subsequent extensive media coverage and public interest we have heard from ScotRail that the engineers have re-started looking for an engineering solution for the interior of these trains. **We would much appreciate if you would request them to find a solution such that bookable bike capacity is no less than it is currently.**

On Edinburgh - Glasgow and other central Scotland lines, we were not aware when we wrote to you that the 'flexible space' would be designated to accommodate two bikes (though possibly with some difficulty) and we therefore now accept that the official number of spaces is unchanged - although that itself is disappointing given that the number of carriages is increasing. However, conditions will be worse due to tip-up seats in the bike area and the limitations of the layout of the flexible area next to the large toilet. Vestibule storage, as an addition, will help somewhat, though this means that the person has to stand with their bike throughout quite lengthy journeys such as Edinburgh-Glasgow (and cannot therefore easily do any work while travelling). We look forward to discussing these issues with Transport Scotland.

We had not written about **Borders Rail**, but note your comment that two bookable spaces are considered sufficient on the class 170 trains. It has recently been announced that 3-coach class 170s will soon become the standard on Borders Rail, instead of the previously announced refurbished 2-coach class 158s which have 4 bike spaces (or 2, depending on wheelchair occupancy). These longer trains are very welcome, but on this route from Edinburgh to the Borders there is a strong need to ensure more than the minimum of bike space. Many class 170s, certainly most of those operating Edinburgh-Glasgow, currently do have 4 official bike spaces (2 in each of the end 2 coaches), but some other 170s only have 2 bike spaces. **We ask you to ensure that the class 170s operating the Borders line all have 4 bike spaces – or are upgraded to that. Indeed, we suggest that all remaining 170s are progressively upgraded to 4-bike standard, to benefit all routes served by Class 170s.**

We continue to believe that the best way to achieve a fair balance between the different needs of the various rail user stakeholders would be the provision of well designed flexible use space in every coach of new and refurbished trains. During the consultation, ScotRail thought that there would be operational and commercial advantages in having good quality flexible-use space, thus boosting patronage in the loss-making off-peak hours, but was constrained by Transport Scotland's wish to maximise the seat-count. Although it is a Franchise Agreement requirement, very little such space is being provided on the class 385 and none on the class 158. This misses a valuable opportunity to increase off-peak travel, an opportunity seized by many other European rail services. (Please see our attached submission on this, sadly rejected by Transport Scotland, which shows how great flexibility is achievable on the class 385 at the expense of only two sub-optimal rigid seats per coach - seats which are never going to be comfortable!) **We ask you to implement flexible-use space on all of Scotland's trains as they are replaced or refurbished.**

Finally, it is unfortunate to see the flak that Abellio is receiving publicly over this issue, when much of the problem originates in the Invitation to Tender produced by Transport Scotland and the subsequent Franchise Agreement. Against our comments, the ITT specified a 2-bike minimum capacity for all trains - regardless of current capacity, current bookable capacity, or of the fact that many trains would have more coaches than now. Nor is sufficient emphasis being placed on flexible space capacity for pushchairs and other bulky luggage as well as bikes. **Even now, a Transport Scotland re-think, such that no route gets worsened bike capacity, and ideally that every carriage includes a well-designed flexible space, would be widely welcomed.**

Yours sincerely

Dave du Feu, Spokes lead organiser
Ewan Jeffrey, Spokes bike/rail liaison

Please Lets Make Our Trains More Family Friendly!

Families groups with a child in pushchair or pram face a particular problem using our trains. If you are travelling with a child in a buggy or, say, golf clubs or a bicycle, it is often difficult and sometimes impossible to get on a train *which otherwise has lots of empty seats*. If they can get on (and we've seen a family with pushchair being refused onto an off-peak train at Falkirk Grahamston) they can seldom sit close to the pushchair. If the child is asleep, the parent must stand and it makes it harder for the group to sit together. These are some of the comments on the *Mumsnet website*:

- *I am looking forward to the day I no longer need to travel with child and buggy on the train*
- *I hate hate hate taking a buggy on trains*
- *I sometimes forget how awful it is and take xx on the train on a day trip. We inevitably end up stuck on the fold-down seat by the exit because there's nowhere else for the buggy to go.*

Abellio Scotrail have inherited a train fleet furnished almost entirely with rigid inflexible seating. However, the purchase of the new train fleet for central Scotland electrification (EGIP) represents a unique opportunity for a step change in the accessibility of Scotland's trains.

It is particularly important to act now to get the EGIP train specification right. The indications from the current consultation are that *Scotrail* is in favour of flexible use space. *Transport Scotland*, however, have the final say and appear to still favour maximising the number of fixed seats. More use of flexible use space is a win-win situation as:

- **It provides fairer equality of access and a welcome to Scotland's railway to a wider range of stakeholder groups, and**
- **There are acknowledged commercial and operational benefits.**

Our recommendation is that every coach of every train should have a multi-use flexible space. The *every coach* recommendation is important because families, understandably, get into the nearest coach and can't easily scurry along platforms.

The EGIP Opportunity : The new EGIP trains are an opportunity to get this right from day one.

We suggest that, as a minimum, there should be additional flexible use space at one end of each centre coach (TPS1 and TS1), consisting of six comfortable lateral fold-down seats beside the luggage stack. This flexible use space would replace the proposed combination of six standard and two sub-optimal rigid seats (the latter being both narrower and with much reduced pitch). Great flexibility is thus achieved at the expense of only two sub-optimal rigid seats per coach - seats which are never going to be comfortable!

Many Passenger Benefits:

Such space would afford a welcome for:

- Commuters, as short distance seating or as standing space in the rush-hour. Flexible spaces are not a disadvantage to commuters on peak-time journeys, *Scotrail* having commented that friends currently often elect to stand and chat informally in vestibules.
- Families with prams and pushchairs, with the benefit of being able to also sit nearby.
- Elderly people with walking aids or shopping trolleys.
- Golfers with golf clubs (common on East Lothian and Ayrshire trains)
- Passengers with bulky luggage
- Passengers with bicycles (giving extra flexibility).

Real Commercial and Operational benefits:

As well as being helpful to passengers, there are also *commercial and operational advantages* to having some flexible space in *every* coach:

- Station dwell times are less likely to be extended by the need to find the "right" coach
- It helps to keep vestibules clear and improves circulation throughout the train
- It encourages valuable extra discretionary off-peak revenue.

This is a much wider issue than merely how many bike spaces there are on a train, although that in itself is very important given the government's ambition greatly to increase cycle use for utility and for tourism.

Flexible use space is a valuable opportunity to make our trains more family friendly.



Dutch train, with a useful mix of fixed and flexible seating



Scotrail train, jam packed full of rigid seating