

# Call for U-turn as campaigners warn decision on key services will hit tourism

**HELEN MCARDLE**  
TRANSPORT CORRESPONDENT

PRESSURE is mounting on transport chiefs to rethink “shocking” reductions in bike spaces on key tourist and commuter rail routes, as campaigners warn cyclists will be driven away.

Rolling stock refurbishments and upgrades on the Glasgow-Falkirk-Edinburgh and West Highland lines will see bike capacity stripped away to boost the number of seats available to passengers to cut overcrowding.

On the Glasgow-Falkirk-Edinburgh line, the existing three-car Class 170 trains – which can accommodate up to four bikes – will be replaced by new electric Class 385 trains, each made up of four carriages, but with only one cycle space with room for two bikes.

The new bike zone will be located alongside a row of folding chairs so that the space can double up as a seating area for passengers when it is not being used by cyclists. However, riders fear this could result in a stand-off between bike users and seated passengers if the latter are already in the space.

The Class 385s, due to be introduced from late 2017, will also include a “flexible” bike space. As a result, Transport Scotland insists cycle capacity on the service “will not reduce”. However, campaigners complain this is nothing more than a “leftover bit of space outside accessible toilet”.

Separately, an overhaul of services on the West Highland Line from Glasgow to Oban and Fort William will see the current Class 156s – which have six pre-bookable bike spaces – replaced by refurbished Class 158 trains with only two reservable bike spaces.



**ON BOARD:** A cyclist prepares to use the facilities on a ScotRail service, but passengers are facing a reduction in space for bikes on some services. **Picture:** Stewart Attwood

The changes are in line with the terms of the new ScotRail franchise set by Transport Scotland, stipulating a minimum of two bike spaces per train.

The situation has been criticised by lobbying group Spokes Lothian, whose campaign is attracting widespread support.

John Lauder, the national director of charity Sustrans Scotland, said on social media it would cause a “real problem” for people trying

to access the Caledonia Way in Argyll.

Ewan Jeffrey, bike and rail spokesman at Spokes, said: “It means a family group can’t go [on

the West Highland Line]. Or groups of friends. And for bed and breakfasts, bunkhouses, and little shops that get a lot of their income from cycle touring – the people

won’t be able to get there.” He added: “I find it shocking that Transport Scotland has been happy to let that happen.”

Colin Howden, director of Transform Scotland, said the cuts were “foolish”. He added: “Limited bike carriage is already a key constraint to expanding bike tourism.”

A spokesman for Transport Scotland said it had to balance passenger growth “for everyone’s benefit”.

He added: “Many of the new Class 158 trains due to be introduced on the West Highland Main Line will come with extra carriages – to increase the number of bookable cycle spaces.

“This, together with the recent doubling of the number of services operating on the line, means any negative impact upon cycle passengers brought about by a reduction in spaces per train will be mitigated.”

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