

SPOKES

The Lothian Cycle Campaign

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Cuts in train bike carriage, affecting Edinburgh-Glasgow and West Highland lines

Spokes has written to Derek Mackay MSP, Minister for Transport and Islands over plans by Transport Scotland to downgrade cycle carriage capacity on two of Scotland's key routes for bike/rail travel, at the same time as new and refurbished trains are being introduced.

On the **West Highland Line, Glasgow to Oban and Fort William** currently 6 bikes can be booked, and these places are often fully booked, especially in the tourist season, with further potential visitors left disappointed. Yet the trains are to be replaced by refurbished Class 158 trains with only 2 reservable bike spaces (plus 2 non-reservable spaces in the wheelchair area if the space is free). Thus even a small family of 2 adults and one child could not book space, let alone a group of friends.

Cycle tourism is an important contributor to the economy of the West Highlands and Islands and the slashing of this provision will have an adverse effect on the income of many small local businesses. A [2013 report](#) for Sustrans by Transform Scotland, *The Value of Cycle Tourism – Opportunities for the Scottish Economy*, found that annual expenditure by leisure and holiday cyclists in Scotland is at least £106m and possibly as high as £228m, and even higher if mountain biking is included.

Transport Scotland has not even consulted on this change. Had they done so we would have argued that, since these trains are also to be used on the Far North Lines from Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh and Wick/Thurso, retaining 6 bookable bike spaces could have boosted cycle tourism in those areas (where current on-train bike capacity is more limited).

On the **Edinburgh-Falkirk-Glasgow main line**, despite train length being increased from 3-coach to 4-coach, with many more seats, bike capacity is worsened. Instead of 2 bike areas (each with 2 official bike spaces) the new Class 385 electric trains will have only one bike area (with 2 official spaces) plus an awkwardly shaped 'flexible space' outside the universal access toilet. (In both the old and new trains the bike areas can squeeze in one or two extra bikes, at the guard's discretion).

The cycle storage area will have fold-up seats, irritating seated passengers if a bike gets on subsequently.

During the consultation Spokes had argued [see our [factsheet](#)] for a flexible space in every carriage, to accommodate pushchairs, bikes, bulky luggage, etc. However, there will be just the one 'flexible space' in one carriage of the new trains - namely the circulation space outside the universal access toilet - too short on one side for a normal adult bike and on the other side making access to the toilet less convenient.

As well as these tragic reductions in train bike provision, **Transport Scotland** has announced it will no longer attend the national rail/cycle forum which meets quarterly to discuss bike/rail issues in Scotland.

Ewan Jeffrey, Spokes Bike/Rail liaison, said...

“It is not too late for Transport Scotland to re-think these disastrous decisions on two of Scotland's most important routes for bike/rail travel. The Edinburgh-Glasgow Class 385 electric trains and the West Highland Class 158 diesels are not yet at the stage of internal fitting out. We urge the Minister to rethink these plans, which will cause a great deal of dissatisfaction once they become known to bike/rail users and to the many local businesses supported by them.”

Dave du Feu, Spokes Lead Organiser, said...

“With decisions like these it is no wonder that people are sceptical of how serious the Scottish Government is in its oft-stated ambition for 10% of all journeys to be by bike in 2020.”

Alison Johnstone MSP, Co-Convener of the Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Cycling Group, said...

“I have previously challenged Transport Scotland and government ministers over the lack of cycle space on our trains. Plans to downgrade space on the Edinburgh-Glasgow service and the West Highland Line show that neither the agency nor the government are taking this issue seriously. Even the new Borders rail line has little capacity which is astonishing given its proximity to notable biking venues like Glentress. “Tourism businesses across Scotland know the huge benefit that cyclists bring, and our aspirations to be a healthy nation mean we should be making it easier not harder to take a bike on a train. The Scottish Government must get a grip and create the cycle spaces Scotland needs. This is a social justice issue.”

Colin Howden, Director of Transform Scotland, which published the abovementioned research report, said...

"Cycle tourism already makes a substantial contribution to the Scottish economy. Research we published in 2013 found that the total value of cycle tourism could be up to £239m per annum.

"Limited bike carriage is already a key constraint to expanding bike tourism. As such, it would be especially foolish to cut bike carriage on routes serving the Highlands and other parts of the country where there is significant opportunities for improving these areas' tourist economies by the promotion of bike tourism. Rail operators should instead be looking at good practice examples we identified in Switzerland, the US, and Canada to expand bike carriage."

Important background notes

1. The Spokes letter to the Minister is [here](#).
2. Abellio/ScotRail wishes to encourage travel to and from stations by bike and is introducing **bike hire** at a limited number, plans which we very much support. However, given that bike hire is only likely to be available at perhaps 15-20 of Scotland's **350 stations**, this does not cater for large numbers of existing and potential bike/rail trips, nor for people (such as holidaying families) who have other reasons for needing to take their own bike.
3. The Franchise commitment drawn up by Transport Scotland was for a minimum of 2 bike spaces per train, but it would now appear that Transport Scotland is turning this into a maximum on these, some of Scotland's most significant bike/rail routes, even though this represents drastic cuts in current provision.

Contacts for further information

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