

Rail Directorate

Buchanan House, 58 Port Dundas Road, Glasgow G4 0HF
Direct Line: 0141 272 7553, Fax: 0141 272
rose.tweedale@transport.gov.scot



Your ref:

Our ref:
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Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 23 March to Shona Robison MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport, regarding the number of cycle spaces on trains on the West Highland Line and the Edinburgh to Glasgow via Falkirk route. The Cabinet Secretary has asked that your letter is passed to me to respond.

The decision on whether to provide more space for cycles on train with less fixed seating was balanced against issues such as the impact on overall capacity and passenger comfort. As rail patronage continues to grow, it is important that we can accommodate this growth for everyone's benefit while still meeting our obligations to make our railways more accessible to disabled people.

The day to day operation of train fleets and how they manage passengers on board rests with ScotRail. It has a clearly stated policy on its website on how it accommodates and encourages integration with cyclists, including the free carriage of bikes on trains. It will continue to keep this under review and is committed to training its staff in cycle capacity procedures and how to provide additional ad-hoc spaces where there is demand, without compromising passenger safety.

The programme to deliver the fully refurbished fleet of class 158 trains, which are being cascaded onto the West Highland Line from late 2017, is already underway. This investment amounts to around £14 million across the fleet. Five trains have already been completed and the upgrades have been well received. The upgraded work was based on extensive consultation and delivers two toilets, one of which is accessible, two wheelchair spaces, companion seats, luggage racks and air conditioning in addition to new seating, lighting and carpets. Due to these requirements, the number of on train bookable cycle spaces will reduce to two per train, which is the minimum required in the Franchise Agreement (FA).

The refurbished trains will also support ScotRail's "scenic train" experience, offering passengers a better on board environment which aims not only to drive up patronage but also to boost businesses and the rural economy along the West Highland Line route from late 2018.

ScotRail carried out consultation exercises to finalise the layout of its fleet to deliver their franchise commitment regarding bikes on trains. As a business, it has made the decision that two bookable spaces are sufficient across the class 158 and class 170 trains which will form around 19% of its fleet by 2019. If these trains are coupled on some services it could see four or six bookable spaces provided.

Please be assured that Transport Scotland is working with ScotRail to understand the impact, develop options to manage this and to investigate how to deliver solutions which will balance the needs of all passengers who wish to travel on the route, in conjunction with relevant cycling groups. It may also be helpful to highlight that the number of services across the West Highland area increased in May 2014 and there are more carriages on specific journeys which means that passengers will still have many opportunities to take bikes onto these services.

On train cycle capacity on the Edinburgh to Glasgow via Falkirk line will not reduce by 50% and when ScotRail introduces the new electric trains onto the route in December it is looking at operational procedures which have worked successfully on other parts of the network, including Ayrshire and North Berwick. ScotRail plans to adopt a similar information campaign, staff training and on train management model that was rolled out on the North Berwick route when class 380 trains replaced class 322s in 2011, as this was very well received. These trains allow informal storage of cycles at vestibules, at the train crew's discretion, which has worked very smoothly in Strathclyde for many years. This will enable more bikes to be carried than the two which can currently be booked on three car class 170s. Phil Verster, Managing Director of the ScotRail Alliance, confirmed this at the Scottish Parliament ICI Committee on 9 March.

A similar policy will also be used when the new Hitachi class 385 fleet is introduced on the Edinburgh to Glasgow via Falkirk route in late 2017 before being cascaded across other central belt routes in the following months. The four routes between Edinburgh and Glasgow currently offer various means for on train cycle carriage and by 2019 all four routes will be operated by a mix of electric trains (c385, c380 and c334) allowing a more flexible approach to on train cycle carriage.

Abellio will invest around £4M to deliver the many obligations it offered Scottish Ministers in the current FA. This investment will provide significant enhancements aimed at boosting rail/cycle integration by improving facilities for cyclists at either end of their journey to reduce demand for taking bikes on trains. In addition, ScotRail has complied with its obligation under the FA to produce a Cycle Innovation Plan. This will be updated annually and shared with cycling groups and will include ways to develop cycling.

The cycle forum meeting, which is chaired by ScotRail, aims to develop ways in which more integration can be encouraged and promoted by them working in co-operation with relevant stakeholder groups to achieve this. The Transport Scotland Franchise Team has set up regular meetings, with ScotRail only, to review the cycle forum external stakeholder meetings, monitor franchise project delivery, analyse facility usage and discuss publicity/communication plans as part of a formal audit of the franchisee's output.

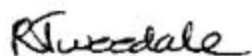
The new FA also contains further obligations to encourage patronage at off-peak times and ScotRail will continue to offer free carriage of bicycles unlike some other operators in England who are imposing charges and restrictions. The significant investment in new storage facilities at stations plus a greater focus on integration between the rail network and cyclists has been welcomed by official cycling groups and ScotRail will continue to encourage links with cyclists as part of its travel integration strategy.

Transport Scotland is working closely with ScotRail to ensure all rail users' needs are taken into account for everyday journeys, including cyclists. The Cycling Action Plan for Scotland (CAPS) identifies integration between modes as a crucial component of the promotion of active travel. CAPS is due to be refreshed later this year to assess how all sectors within the transport industry and wider society can support the overall Scottish Government Vision that 10% of everyday journeys will be by bike by 2020.

We remain committed to achieving this Vision and have significantly increased the budget for active travel in recent years to help achieve this. Compared to 2013/14 we have increased the budget for active travel by over 80% (from £21.35 million for 2013/14 to £39.2 million in 2015/16). This is at a time when our overall capital budget has decreased by 26%. In 2016-17 approximately £39 million has been made available for active travel infrastructure improvements and behaviour change initiatives.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely



Rose Tweedale
Rail Policy Officer