

Bikes on TfW trains

At the meeting of the Cross Party Group on the Active Travel Act held in November 2018, Mr James Price, Chief Executive Officer of Transport for Wales (TfW) asked for views on the configuration of bicycle carrying space on the trains TfW was planning to bring into service. We have set out below the considered views of the representatives of the various Welsh cycling groups who participate in the Cross Party Group and who represent many cyclists who use TfW services.

Capacity

There is general agreement, including in the European Parliament, that there should be at least eight spaces for bikes on each train. However, there is concern that if this is broken down to two bikes per coach it would mean that the provision would be entirely dependent on the number of coaches that happen to make up a specific train. We would require a reassurance that eight spaces on a train would be the norm. This may require that certain coaches were designated as cycle carrying coaches, perhaps each taking four bikes and that there would be at least two of these types of coaches on each train.

We would ask that proper consideration is given to the potential, in many parts of Wales, for combining train travel with cycle tourism. Cycle tourism could be enormously valuable to the Welsh economy; across the EU it is estimated to be worth €44 billion per annum. It is also a very sustainable form of tourism. However, for people to be prepared to commit to travelling on the train with their bikes there would need to be certainty that at least on some trains to some key destinations there would be ample bike storage. The heart of Wales line is a prime example where rail/cycle tourism could boost the local economy if the rolling stock accommodated more bikes. Scotland is addressing this issue with rolling stock that can carry large numbers of bikes to popular cycling destinations. We would ask that TfW work with Welsh Government to adopt similar measures.

Managing peak demand

We accept that there may need to be restrictions on the carrying of bikes on peak hour commuter trains, but we would ask that these times be kept to the minimum, be clearly advertised and that the restrictions be consistent and easy to understand.

To compensate for this, it is essential that there is adequate secure bike storage at rail stations, so that commuters can still make the non-train part of their journey by bike. We cannot overemphasise the importance of "secure", theft of bikes from stations is a major problem and a significant disincentive to more bike riders using train services. We would also want to see TfW working with bike hire providers, such as Nextbike in Cardiff, to provide easy access to bikes at as many stations as possible.

Reservations

On longer distance services, where frequency tends to be less, it is important that people can be certain of being able to get a space for their bike on a train. This means that there needs to be a system of reservations for bike spaces. This must be accessible in the same way as any other ticket transaction, in particular through the TfW website and app. We believe that it should be possible to reserve a bike space on any service on which a passenger can reserve a seat.

We believe cyclists would be prepared to pay a reasonable charge for this service, as they do in other European countries, in exchange for certainty of carriage.

Staff Training

We greatly appreciate the way in which TfW staff generally use their discretion to allow more bikes than the strict maximum. However, not all staff are so generous, and we are aware of female cyclists being denied a place on the last train. We would therefore recommend that the correct way to exercise their discretion should be an essential part of staff training. We would, of course, be very happy to provide any help we can in helping to improve your staff's understanding of cyclists' needs.

Storage



German intercity carriage for bikes, buggies and wheelchairs with tip up seats

We appreciate the need to minimise the space used mainly for bikes in order to allow as many passengers as possible to have a seat. However, that should not result in storage spaces that are unusable or inaccessible for many people, as is the case on the new GWR Hitachi trains. Similarly, the arrangements need to enable cyclists to extract their bike easily when arriving at their station, i.e. bikes cannot be piled on top of each other regardless of which bike will need to be extracted first. It is also important that, in bike storage areas, bikes always have priority over luggage.

On all journeys, but particularly those mainly used by commuters, we believe that tip-up seats are a solution that allow maximum capacity for seated passengers, but also for bicycles at off-peak times. We have seen carriages that provide a large majority of seats as tip-ups, and thus maximize the flexibility of the available space. Where tip up seats are not possible, we would prefer horizontal arrangements for bikes. We would be very wary of arrangements that require cyclists



German Intercity train: bike storage and tip up seats



German Intercity train offering horizontal and vertical storage options

to hang their bikes on hooks. Bikes can be heavy, particularly the increasingly popular e-bikes, and many cyclists are unable to lift them to the height required. It is also important to consider the variable dimension of bike wheels and handlebars and ensure that the storage area can accommodate as wide a variety of configurations as possible. We would be prepared to consider arrangements that provide assistance in raising the bikes, such as ramps. On German trains, a combination of horizontal and vertical racks is provided, offering an

important alternative for people unable to lift their bikes.

It is important that bikes are secured in place in a manner that will not damage wheels or other parts of the bike. We would recommend a system of straps, or at least to have hooks available that can be used to secure bikes with bungees.

Accessing the Train

Finding the right part of the train for your bike can be stressful for the cyclist and detrimental to the punctuality of TfW services. It would therefore be in everybody's interest if the carriage doors to be used by cyclists were clearly marked on the train and signed on the platform. We would also hope that the design of the new trains would facilitate platform level access onto the train.



German Train with clear signing of bicycle entrance

Non-standard bikes

The current arrangements make it extremely difficult for people with adaptive bikes (often people with disabilities) trikes, tandems, child trailers and cargo bikes to access trains. We would ask that the new arrangements take the need of these users fully into account. We would also wish to make clear that we do not consider folding bikes to be bikes for the purpose of this paper; given how little space they take up, they should continue to be considered as luggage.

Future developments

Welsh Government is committed to dramatically increasing the number of people who travel by bike. There is already clear evidence of increasing levels of cycling in Cardiff and other parts of Wales. We would therefore ask that you build into the new configuration sufficient flexibility for you to be able to add bike carrying capacity as demand grows.

We believe that allowing people to combine cycling with public transport is key to the success of Wales Active Travel Act and would hope that Transport for Wales would play its part in carrying out the duty the Act imposed on Welsh government to promote active travel.

Further Engagement

We would be very happy to engage with your designers on the details of bike carriage. We strongly believe that the best configuration of the provision for bikes is most likely to be achieved through discussion with the people who will be using the provision.