

Cycle-friendly trains



By Clara Zilahi

An excellent report on bike-rail journeys in the Midlands has lessons for the whole of Britain. I could pick out any number of points which tally with my personal experience as a cyclist and rail user (without a car).

I will quote one point which perhaps, if given wider publicity among the train operators, might eventually convince them of the potential benefit to them of a cycle-friendly policy.

On page 15 of the report, produced by the Rail Passengers Committee, there is mention of an unpublished report (1985) that restriction of cycle carriage was losing the then British Rail £10million annually.

Then, as now (except from Anglia) the answer to our complaints about inadequate cycle space was/is that they prefer more "bums on seats" and cannot afford to have the space taken up by cycles.

I could give figures for the revenue that BR and later the private train operators (especially Central) did not receive from one individual cyclist – me.

During the halcyon days of guards vans and free cycle carriage I made numerous leisure journeys involving cycling in one direction and returning by train (either because cycling both ways was too tiring, or would have been unsafe after dark).

In the east-west direction this means using Central. On WAGN trains there is no problem on off-peak trains – apart from the occasional weekend bus replacements.

Since the cycle restrictions came in I have made very few of these trips involving Central Trains. In the nature of things I could not be sure of the time when I would reach the railhead for a return journey and hence could not specify the train when pre-booking.

Also the excursions would be weather-dependent and hence doubtful until the actual day.

If you multiply my experience by every similarly placed cyclist in the country, the amount of lost revenue must be staggering. As a solo cyclist I am less affected by the restriction on the number of cycles carried which virtually rules out many family outings.

While the ideal long-term solu-



Cycling for all: Encouraging cycling is officially part of the Government's transport policy. With a bike and a train, you don't need a car. Some rail companies have made token gestures towards accommodating cyclists. Many others appear to make it as difficult as possible for cyclists to travel by train.

Some train companies and their managers have been so unsympathetic to the concept of bikes on trains that some campaigners have switched their attention to ensuring that buses can accommodate bikes on board. There are now 40 bus and coach companies that allow cycles on board. The best train companies were recognised in the CycleMark awards – sponsored by the Strategic Rail Authority – at Marylebone on 21 October. Anglia was named the best operator this year with c2c highly commended. The best individual was Alan Newton of Chiltern Railways. The best whole journey experience award went to Arriva Trains Merseyside while the best station was York. Chris Austin of the SRA said: "We are taking integrated transport seriously."

tion would be the reintroduction of the guard's van under a different name, and suitable for users of powered wheelchairs,

another problem close to my heart, there are minor adaptations (already introduced on Anglia's local trains) which

could help the problem of off-peak cycle carriage, given the will.

I understand the Health and Safety Executive opposes tip-up seating but am not aware of any genuine consultation to see if any form of this would be acceptable on safety grounds and provide cycle space when needed.

Bike-rail commuting involving peak-hour trains is also a problem – especially given the lip-service paid to reducing the number of cars – but more difficult to solve on existing stock.

Where trains are regularly overfull, and increased frequency is not possible without major infrastructure improvements, we may have, in the foreseeable future, to be content with better cycle storage facilities at stations and availability of cycles for hire at destinations, as WAGN is now attempting to provide at Cambridge.

Railfuture now has a small group of people to deal with cycle/rail matters, rather than a single officer.

Given the diversity of rules for the various train operators we felt it was too much for one person to cope with.

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I provide a link between the group and Railfuture's national executive.

A Truly Integrated Transport Alternative was published by the Midlands Rail Passengers Committee with help from the Cyclists Touring Club.

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The report was launched by Steven Norris, chair of the National Cycling Strategy Board.

Part of the problem

Rail managers are often ignorant of transport realities and the wider questions of why they receive large amounts of public subsidy for lessening the environmental impact of transport. At a rail conference in October, Connex commercial director Glen Charles said: "We don't really like cyclists."

The CTC's Tom Bogdanowicz commented: "Cycling and rail travel makes a perfect partnership in other European countries. So why not here?"