

Bikes on Trains and Buses - what the companies say and real life experiences from passengers



This is what Virgin says:

Our West Coast Mainline trains can take up to four bikes, and our Pendolino trains even have space for two tandems (no penny-farthings though). It's free, but remember to reserve your space in advance.

You can reserve a bike spot up until your departure time, but space is very limited so the earlier you can reserve, the better. If your bike folds up, it can travel any time – no reservation required.

What you need to know about taking your bike on a train

You'll need to be at least 10 minutes early for your train's departure. Just head to Coach A and load your bike into the dedicated space. If you need a hand, just ask a member of staff. They'll be happy to help. Don't forget to grab a bike tag from the station ticket office. This lets our onboard team know how far your bike is riding with us. If you need a hand unloading your bike at the other end, just ask the Train Manager and they'll arrange for someone to be at your stop, ready to help. To make a bike reservation when buying your ticket, call 03445 56 56 50* If you've already booked your ticket, you can make your bike reservation at the station.

Any questions? Give our Customer Resolutions centre a shout on 03331 031 031 (01216 547 528 from a text phone).

Please note if you're travelling from Edinburgh you'll only be able to load your bike onboard at Edinburgh Waverley station.

This what Scotrail says:

I can confirm that we offer cycling reservations, free of charge, on specific routes such as longer distances or infrequent routes. These can be pre-booked through our Customer Relations office on 0344 811 0141, and we will book a cycle space (subject to availability) for those customers that book in advance. Alternatively, a reservation (if available) can be made at the time of booking your journey on our website.

You can book a cycle space (if available) up to two hours before the train starts its journey (or the previous evening for early morning departures). We require to close reservations in advance of departure to allow the reservation labels to be printed and placed on the train and for information to be prepared and passed to the on-train staff. This will include a print-out of all cycles booked for the entire journey.

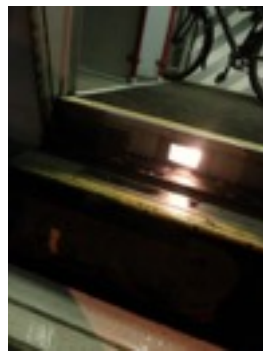
If you like to view the routes where you can book a cycle space, please visit <https://www.scotrail.co.uk/plan-your-journey/travel-connections/cycling>. The specific number of cycle spaces can vary from train to train as we operate different types of trains on the same route and I therefore would recommend that you do call out Customer Relations team.

I can confirm that not all routes have the availability to pre-book a cycle space and the specific number of cycle spaces can vary from train to train as we operate different types of trains on the same route. Our policy is clear - that although we welcome cyclists, the space available is limited. Therefore, if two spaces are available and these are in use, we would expect passengers to wait for the next available service. On longer distance and infrequent routes we require cycle reservations to be made in advance so that cyclists can have certainty about their planned journey.

Our conductors cannot permit further cycles on board once the capacity level has been reached. I can assure you however that we will continue to look into ways of expanding the capacity available. As I mentioned in my previous email, all information in relation to cyclists can be found on the ScotRail website at, <https://www.scotrail.co.uk/plan-your-journey/travel-connections/cycling>.

So what are the real stories behind the policy statements?

Full bike racks, high steps, difficult configurations - it's not easy!



Booking trains

Evelyn and Katharine are regular cycle tourists on the train.

As they use the main Inverness to Edinburgh line they have always booked in advance rather than take the risk of delay by not being allowed on the train. Nowadays they usually book online.

On one occasion **Margaret** was with them, and missed her return train from Glasgow to Dundee.

She had no trouble joining the other two on the next train.

In fact station staff at Glasgow were very helpful.

On another occasion Katharine and Evelyn were travelling on a **Virgin Train** to Carlisle.

The bikes were in a separate area at the rear of the train, with no access door to the platform and the passengers were told to sit in the carriage next to the bikes..

No one came to open the door. Luckily an off duty staff member heard the noise and used his key to let bikes and passengers off.

When Evelyn and Katharine protested to platform staff, their response was, "Where did you two come from? We didn't know you were on board!" The next stop would have been Preston!

Gordon had a similar experience with **East Coast**:

My one experience of travelling East Coast without going all the way to a terminus was similar to yours - booked to get off at Berwick no one came to open the guard's van door and I had to run back down the platform to stop the platform guard waving off the train before I'd retrieved my bike.

...and with Virgin again:

My boarding experience this time was that Inverkeithing station platform is too short to reach the guard's van end unless the train pulls further forward and traps those in the front of First Class who then can't get off (without walking to the next carriage, pair sowers.) A Scotrail member of staff said he'd inform VTEC that I would be coming on but then forgot and VTEC staff said afterwards that it was not their normal procedure anyway. Normal procedure is to load your bike in the middle at coach F,(where there is a wheelchair space but nowhere to tie up your bike to stop it falling over, so you have to stand with it) and then move it to the rear at Waverley. At Waverley I had to then get back off and make my way back down the platform to the rear with the bike, but that was very difficult in the short stopping period because of works to the platform which had narrowed the platform and I was trying to push my bike through passengers leaving and joining the train. On my return journey , at King's Cross, I asked to go through the gate early (as I'd read somewhere that you were meant to make yourself known to staff 10 mins ahead) but no one seemed to know of this. I managed to find the correct train (I hoped) and ended up loading the bike on to the guard's van with no member of staff around.

Laura says

For all the travelling I do, I only book on the Inverness line and the Oban line. In fact the only place I have ever not been able to get on the train was Dunkeld & Birnam in the early days of Greener Greenways when Lenka and I were scouting routes. We hadn't booked and the spaces were full - the conductor was very nice about it!

The booking system is another matter. Sometimes if I'm heading for a remote train after a long cycle, I just don't know which train I'll make, so I have been known to book my bike on two consecutive trains - but it's rare because there is no easy way to cancel whichever you don't need and that would mean anyone else trying to book would be told it was full. I don't think train companies understand that implication. For the trip I'm about to do, I had a bike booking I needed to cancel a few months ago, and they wouldn't let me as they said it didn't matter!



Gordon says

I've had recent trouble booking on Virgin Trains East Coast and forward an email I recently sent to a railway magazine that was looking for people's experiences with VTEC new web site which is less convenient for bikes.

I've booked my bike twice before on the old website and it was just a matter of ticking a box when booking your own seat and cycle reservation tickets arrived with no fuss along with my own tickets.

This time it took a complicated series of phone calls, which you have to make after booking your own ticket on line.

First off, it is not clear from the options at the call centre which cover cycle booking. The first operative had not, I think, heard of the system for booking bicycles so that required initial explanation from me. She was able to book my bicycle on my chosen train to London (and email confirmation was received) but then found that my return trip at 14.00 had no spaces for bicycles. She then booked me on the next direct train- 16.00 out of London - but I questioned this as I was using an off-peak ticket. She confirmed this was a peak time train and booked me on the 15.30.

Luckily, I was cut off before I could ask for a seat reservation for myself on the new train because on phoning back a different operative told me that 15.30 was also peak time and my own ticket would not have been valid. He successfully booked me on an earlier train and emailed me confirmation.

Given this history, I decided to travel the 18 miles to Inverkeithing the day before travel to print out tickets, but neither my confirmed bicycle booking to London, nor my own seat reservation or bicycle booking for return were recognised by the ticket machine. The staff at Inverkeithing were able to access and print out both bicycle reservations but were unable to print my return seat reservation given on the confirmatory email and suggested I just use the e-mail as the seat reservation (which did work- the seat was reserved under my name).

Excerpt from Suzanne's blog

<https://backonmybikeblog.com/2014/01/14/let-the-train-take-the-strain/>

Confused? You should be. All train companies operate different bicycle carriage options and it's up to you, the bicycle user, to find out what they are.

I'm a regular user of the train – with and without my bike and child – as my job involves travel throughout Scotland. Often, however, I'm just trying to travel the 30 miles to my office base in Edinburgh. Our local station, Dunbar, hosts three different train companies: East Coast, ScotRail and CrossCountry. If I want to travel with my bike and I haven't booked I need to get the 7am train, which is run by CrossCountry, as it allows one spontaneous cyclist and two organised ones.

Dunbar has quite a few cyclists, organised and otherwise. Some mornings we recklessly break all the rules and cram four or more (plus a Brompton) bikes into the bike racks and (empty) storage area. That's when we get Train Conductor Wrath,

The 7.43 train is East Coast, who do not let unbooked bicycles onto their train, unless it is at the express permission of the guard. I usually lack the emotional energy to beg the East Coast train guard to let my unbooked bicycle into his special place so if I get this one I either walk for 35 mins each side of the train journey or take the ruinously expensive bus (I've already paid £11.80 for the train and am seething about this already).

What about not booking?



Laura says

I travel with my bike between Glasgow and Edinburgh a lot, and have never not got on. Although admittedly I try to travel earlier than rush hour. I have once been asked to get off at the next station, when the conductor reached the bike racks when there were a lot of us, but we actually just managed to shuffle a bit and stay on! I sometimes am the third bike at the 2-bike bike rack, but there is plenty of space and no one has ever complained to me about me boarding. Mostly the train staff are incredibly understanding and will help.

At the weekend I was on the East Lothian line, which has the flip-up seats rather than the 2-bike rack. We managed to get five bikes in there with no one raising an eyebrow - I think the fact that it doesn't have a maximum number displayed helps!

Gordon says

In my experience Scotrail staff have been willing to turn a blind eye to more than 2 bikes, if you stand with your bike to avoid causing an obstruction, and I've been able to get on trains back to Perth on the Inverness and Aberdeen lines when I've finished cycle runs earlier than I had expected and booked for.

Suzanne says

I regularly (once a week or so) take my bike between Edinburgh and Glasgow and have never had any problems but that's not everyone's experience. Across all companies and routes I find much is up to the individual guard or inspector, some are very kind and helpful and others less so. At my own station the staff there will invariably intercede on my behalf to get my bike on if needed, although I now leave one bike at Waverley to reduce the need to take it on the Dunbar-Edinburgh section.

It is better Copenhagen style



And what about booking on buses?

This is what Stagecoach say:

Can I take my bike on the bus?

In some areas, you can take your bike on the bus. Please contact the local team in your area and they'll be happy to advise. However, if your bike folds up, can be stored in a suitable bag or box, can fit within the luggage pen on the bus, and you can lift it in and out yourself, it can be brought on at the driver's discretion.

And from specifically from east coast buses:

I can confirm non-folding bicycles are only carried on a very limited number of buses specifically modified for the purpose. Generally, bicycles may be carried at the owner's risk on coaches, as opposed to buses, where luggage boots are available. Coaches are generally allocated to the X7 route, however there are times, due to circumstances out with our control, where a double decker is allocated to the route.

Safety notices governing their carriage are clearly posted on the relevant vehicles with further information available from the local Stagecoach operating company.

Folding bicycles, safely and securely stowed in the designated luggage area in a suitable bag or box, may be carried on all vehicles.

Bikes can be loaded on to suitable vehicles at any point on the route. I can confirm non-folding bicycles are only carried on a very limited number of buses specifically modified for the purpose.

Generally, bicycles may be carried at the owner's risk on coaches, as opposed to buses, where luggage boots are available. Coaches are generally allocated to the X7 route, however there are times, due to circumstances out with out control, where a double decker is allocated to the route.

David's specific experience of the X7 Perth Royal Infirmary to Aberdeen bus station

The X7 is designed to carry 5 bikes but my experience was that the bike was slung in the luggage hold on its side rather than hung upright as expected which could do damage to the bike as it was not tethered. In fact my chain came off immediately once off the bus, so not a great experience. There was no charge for the bike carriage so it's difficult to complain about the service. In fairness, the driver seemed new and possibly not aware how to correctly load bikes.

And the prize goes to - Fishers Tours

Katharine and Evelyn regularly have used Fishers Tours, to Fort William, Inverness and Aberdeen. As long as you phone to book the bikes, there is no problem and we have loaded as many as 5 bikes at one time in the boot space. Free with a bus pass.

The season runs from the end of March to the end of October. The coaches start at various points in Angus and travel to Oban, Fort William Inverness, the Ayrshire coast and Livingston. They set off in the morning and return in the afternoon on a certain day of the week for each service, but as they are a bus service there are also designated stops on the way. Find out more from

www.fisherstours.co.uk Book by telephone on 01381 227290

