

## Taking your bike on the train: some cautionary tales

I thought it might be worth sharing the experiences by several members of the St Albans B-Group of taking their bikes on trains. You are usually allowed to take a folding bike at any time (officially as long as you fold it before going through the ticket barrier), but there are various complications for non-folding bikes.

Each Train operator has different regulations – and there are many variations, including day of the week, time of day, direction of travel, distance from London, and even the number of bikes allowed on board each train.

### Some traveller's tales

Several members of the St Albans B-group have experienced situations where unexpected problems have nevertheless arisen. First on train services when spaces are limited – the '**rule of six**'.

**Tale A: Greater Anglia, Ely to Cambridge.** Regulations on this line say that bike spaces are limited to six per train. Boarding at Ely, when train has come from a station further up the line, there is no way of knowing how many bikes already on the train, and so how many spaces there are for new boarders. The ticket office was reluctant to sell tickets to a group of six B-group cyclists for the same train, with no guarantee that there would be six empty spaces – and as it turned out, there were more than six cyclists on the platform and many already on the train. Fortunately, when the train pulled into the platform, the Guard on the train, seeing around ten cyclists on the platform, just called out that we should all quickly get on, two per set of doors – and so we quickly scuttled along the platform and boarded. With more than six cyclists on the platform it would be rather hard for the Train Guard to try and enforce a first come, first served regime anyway.

**Tale B: Greater Western, Oxford to Paddington.** Regulations again say that bike spaces are limited to six per train, but additionally that prior reservation is required. A B-group member was travelling on the train (albeit just as a passenger without his bike), but heard the Train Manager announce, after the train had left Oxford, that he would be coming through the train checking tickets and any cyclist without a reservation would be turned off the train at the next stop, Didcot.

Secondly, the greatest hazard is the notorious and dreaded '**bus replacement service**'!

**Tale C: Greater Anglia, Ely to Cambridge,** again. The driver of bus replacement service between Ely and Cambridge did not want to take cyclists arriving at the station with their bikes – and the bus driver is not an employee of the Train operator. However after some considerable argy-bargy between bus driver, cyclists and train staff, the bus driver was finally persuaded to take the bikes in the luggage storage under the coach (fortunately it was a coach and not a bus).

**Tale D: Thameslink, St Pancras to St Albans.** Bus replacement at West Hampstead was a bus (not a coach), and the driver would not take cyclists with their bikes under any circumstance. The cyclist had no recourse but to phone a family member to come and pick them and their bike up, and drive them back to St Albans.

### ***The rules in summary***

*Each rail operator has different regulations. After reviewing the websites for Great Western Railways, Thameslink, Great Northern and Greater Anglia, the rules are broadly as follows: non-folding bikes are not allowed on peak hour local trains, and reservations are required on Intercity trains.*

*For local train services, peak hour trains are generally defined as trains on Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays) timed to arrive at any central London station between 7:00 and 9:30 or 10:00 say, or travelling away from London that are timed to depart between 16:00 or 16:30 and 18:30 or 19:00 say, with exact timing depending on which Train operator is involved (for actual peak hour times see each Train operator's website).*

*You can take a non-folding bike on some local train services at any time of day on those lines further out from London, such as on Thameslink services between Bedford and Luton Airport Parkway, and on Great Northern services between Stevenage and Hertford North.*

*Some Train operators have space restrictions, for example on Greater Anglia local services in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, non-folding bikes are limited to six cycles per train (first come, first served), and on Great Western Railways there is space for two full-size bikes in each train (some services are made up of more than one train). However reservations for bike spaces cannot be made on such local train services.*

*On London Liverpool Station to Norwich and Great Western Railway Intercity trains a pre-booked bike reservation is mandatory (and spaces are limited).*

*Please check these regulations on the relevant Train operator's website before travelling.*

Finally, even when bikes are allowed, it is not always possible to know where to stand on the platform to conveniently board the carriage with the permitted bike spaces. Thameslink has recently improved its platform signage – see following picture taken at Farringdon Station, with A to E showing the section markings on the platform.

