

Bike carriage on long-distance trains: 7 basic services that give cyclists a smile

A collection of good practice examples from across Europe

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Summary

In April 2012, ECF published the position paper “Bike and Train: A European Odyssey”.¹ In the paper we deplored the fact that the services offered by railway companies often do not meet the basic requirements of cyclists and that current EU law² on passenger rights for railway customers does not help to advance this matter in a legally binding manner.

Fortunately, some railway undertakings have taken measures in recent years to improve the services they offer to cyclists, albeit that this has often been after continuous pressure from ECF’s members. It speaks for itself that the cycling community has welcomed these steps. Other railway companies should follow suit, for 2 main reasons:

- **Attract new customers:** Cycling tourism is a booming business, with well over 2.3 billion cycle tourism trips annually in Europe³. A service package that meets the needs of cycling tourists has the potential to attract millions of additional train passengers. A key message ECF made back in 1999 still holds true: “Only bicycle transport by train offers the flexibility to choose the starting point and destination of a cycling trip freely and this is a promising market for all rail investors to invest in.”⁴ The financial crisis and continuous drop in car sales, along with changing mobility behaviour, in particular among young adults in urban areas, has the potential to win customers for life.
- **Green your image:** For long-distance journeys, the combination of bike + train is among the most environmentally friendly ways of travelling. Bicycle user organisations have entered “mobility alliances”⁵ with railway companies to convey this message to the wider public.

This present collection of good practice examples on “Bike and Train” is by no means a complete overview, but rather meant to inspire railway undertakings who plan to upgrade their services in national and international long-distance trains.

The central question is: When is a railway customer carrying a bicycle a happy customer? ECF has identified 7 main service fields where needs have to be addressed:

1. **Bicycle carriage** of ‘complete’ bicycles is possible on all train categories and train services. There are at least 8 spaces for bicycles in a dedicated area. Bicycles can be locked and e-bicycles can be recharged. Ideally, there is sufficient space for storing and maneuvering tandems, recumbents and bike trailers. If coaches are not on ground level, loading and unloading of bicycles is made easier by providing ramps.
2. **Information** (website; on the platforms of railway stations; on the rolling stock): Online timetable search engines come with a bicycle carriage query function. Railway company websites have a dedicated page providing all necessary information on bicycles (i.e. terms and conditions) to the customer. At the railway station, timetables, either in paper or electronic version, indicate which coach

¹ ECF position paper, *Bike and Train: A European Odyssey*, April 2012.

² Regulation 1371/2007

³University of Central Lancashire, UK and Breda University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands, *The European cycle route network, EuroVelo 2012*

⁴ ECF and UCI, *Bicycle Transport on International Trains*, Brussels 1999.

⁵ Deutsche Bahn and ECF member ADFC (Allgemeiner Deutscher Fahrrad Club e.V.) have formed a “mobility partnership”:
<http://www.bahn.de/p/view/service/fahrrad/mitnahme/mobilitaetspartnerschaft.shtml>

carries bicycles; in addition, there are platform announcements; on the rolling stock, visible bicycle signs clearly indicate which coaches include the bicycle compartments.

3. **Accessibility to platforms:** Bicycles, in particular electric ones, can be heavy items for every age group. Even more so, if they carry luggage as it is the case with many cycling tourists. Elevators at busy stations should be a standard facility to help improving access to platforms. At smaller stations where elevators are too expensive to operate, bicycle escalators or bicycle stairways should be provided for.
4. **Prices of bicycle tickets** should be per journey, not per train. The cost for a bicycle ticket as accompanied luggage on a national train should not exceed 10 Euro. The cost for an international bicycle ticket as accompanied luggage should not exceed 15 Euro. Ideally, frequent travellers can benefit from annual bike passes or multipacks of 1-day bike passes.
5. **Ticket reservation schemes and sales channels:** When buying a ticket, a bicycle space can be reserved and bought at counters, automatic machines and online. The reservation is optional, and seats can be reserved near the bicycle.
6. **Bicycle parking at railway stations:** Depending on the size of the railway station, bicycles can be stored and accessed at least 15 minutes before the first and after the last train service at guarded stations with management, or 24/7 at stations with automated access systems or in bicycle lockers.
7. **Bike-sharing systems operated by railway companies:** For customers without their own bicycle, bicycles can be rented from the railway companies' own bike-sharing system. If the railway company is not rolling out its own system, integrated ticketing with local bike-sharing providers should ensure door-to-door seamless transport.



Source: www.merseyrail.org

1. Bicycle carriage

Of all the services offered to cyclists by railway companies, bicycle carriage is the most important one for obvious reasons. There are two types of services: the transport of bicycles either as accompanied luggage or unaccompanied luggage.

1.1. Bicycle transport as accompanied luggage

Bicycle transport as accompanied luggage means that the bicycle travels with the customer. Ideally⁶, there is a specific bicycle compartment where the 'complete' bicycle⁷ can be stalled and locked on bicycle racks. Among all European railway companies, Swiss railways SBB are setting the benchmark: On all train categories and services operated by SBB, bicycle carriage is possible. While the number of bicycle places may vary, there are at least 5 racks in each IC train.

On Deutsche Bahn long-distance trains, bicycle carriage has been declining between 1995 and 2003 with the ongoing replacement of IR, IC and EC trains by high-speed ICE trains and somewhat stabilizing since. The good news is that the future ICx trains that shall be put into service between 2016 and 2024 and replace gradually IC, ICE-1 and ICE-2 trains, will offer place for 8 bicycles. As for the TGV of SNCF, bicycle carriage is somewhat erratic: on a number of TGV services bicycle carriage is an option, while it is not on others. It is difficult to see a clear policy.

Good news arrived in autumn 2012 from Austria, when Austrian railways ÖBB announced that it would equip all 51 high-speed railjet trains with one bicycle compartment per train, allowing for the carriage of up to 6 bicycles. As for the European context, this announcement was particularly valuable as Railjet also serves international destinations (e.g. Budapest, Munich, Zürich). With the provision of electric chargers ÖBB also addressed properly the phenomenon of an increased market share of electric bicycles (pedelecs). Initially announced for being fully implemented by spring 2013, ECF has learnt meanwhile that ÖBB delayed the start of the refurbishment of its rolling stock well into 2014.



Until now only existing in a concept study: Austria's ÖBB high-speed Railjet trains with bicycle compartment. Source: ÖBB

⁶ Ideally, trains are also fit for carrying tandems, recumbents and bike trailers. However, this is beyond the scope of this good practice collection.

⁷ 'Complete' meaning that the bicycle does not need to be disassembled and put into a bag.

Second best possibilities of bicycle transport as accompanied luggage are requirements by railway companies to dismantle the bicycle and put it into a bag (Thalys; bag size 120 × 90cm). In our view this is not a practical 'solution' at all as it is time-consuming and requires a good deal of technical expertise. It also becomes an additional piece of heavy luggage to be carried.

Other railway companies allow bicycle carriage without having a dedicated bicycle area which can work fine but causes problems in crowded trains.

1.2. Bicycle transport as unaccompanied luggage

This last option is the only possibility with Eurostar, operating between London and Paris/Brussels. For the specific nature of this connection (passport control, security check) it seems to be a solution that is well accepted.

2. Information

2.1. Website of the railway company

i) Bicycle carriage query function

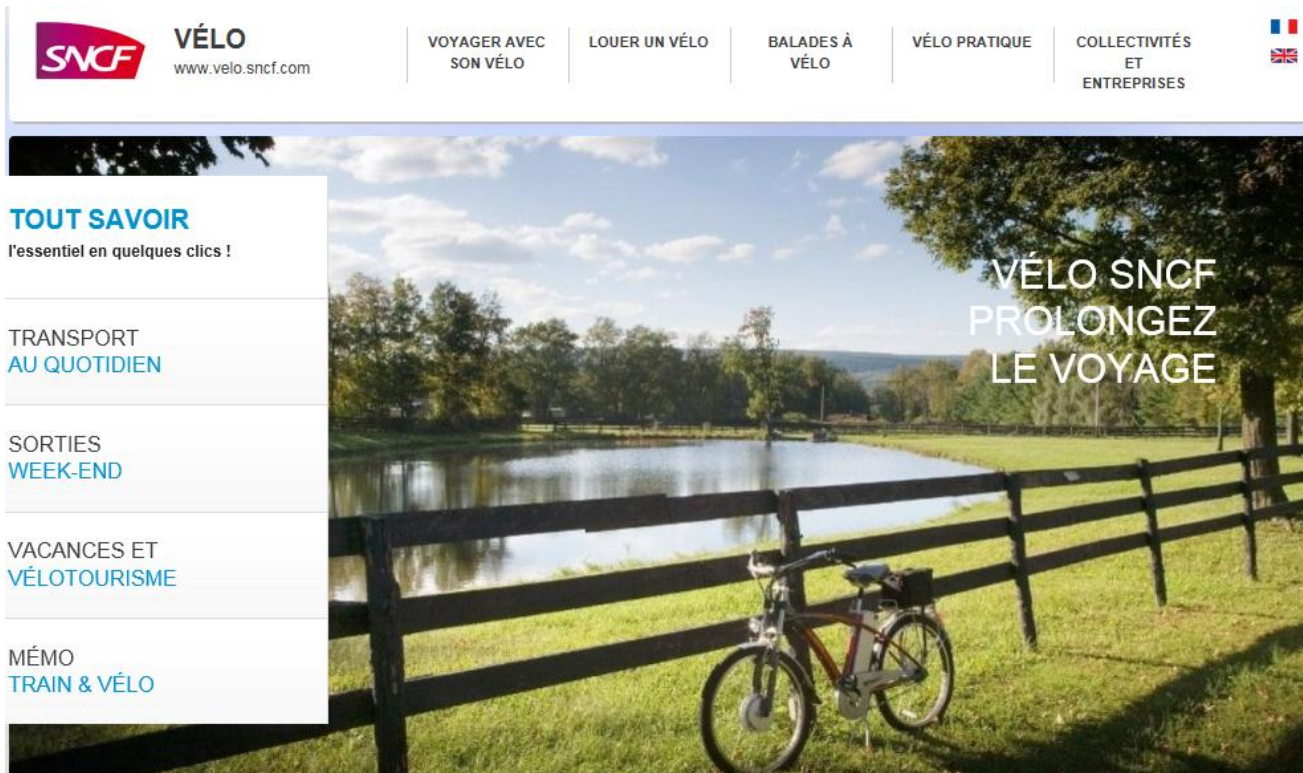
As long as bicycle carriage of 'complete' bicycles is not the standard, all online timetable search engines should come with a bicycle carriage query function.

Deutsche Bahn here clearly sets the benchmark with the best service to bicycle customers: at the bottom, customers can tick the box 'carriage of bicycles required'. The query function exists for national and international trips alike. The website of Swiss railway SBB also has a bicycle query function, but only for national journeys.

The screenshot displays the Deutsche Bahn (DB) website's search interface. At the top, the DB logo and navigation links (Contact, Help, Sitemap) are visible. Below the logo is a red navigation bar with links for Home, Offers, Destinations, Services, Trains, Tourism, and About DB Bahn, along with a 'My Bahn' link. The main search area is titled 'TravelService' and includes a progress bar with steps: Search, Select, Ticket & options, Payment, Check & book, and Confirmation. The 'Route' section has 'Start*' set to 'Bruxelles-Midi' and 'Destination*' set to 'Berlin Hbf'. Below this, there are options for 'Enter stopovers', 'Single ride', and 'Outward and return journey'. The 'Date and time' section shows 'Outward journey*' with a date of 'We, 17.04.13' and a time of '10:00', with options for 'Departure' and 'Arrival'. The 'Connections' section includes filters for 'Means of transport' (All, All without ICE, only local transport) and 'Duration of transfer' (standard). At the bottom of the connections section, there are two checked checkboxes: 'prefer fast connections' and 'carriage of bicycles required'. A 'frequent questions' sidebar is also visible on the right.

ii) Availability of general **online information about bicycle carriage**:

A dedicated page on 'terms and conditions' should inform the customer about all relevant aspects of bicycle carriage, prices, sales channels, etc. Ideally, this information is offered in both the national and as well foreign languages (in particular English). 'Vélo SNCF' fulfils all these requirements. Other good examples are from Deutsche Bahn http://www.bahn.de/p/view/service/fahrrad/mitnahme/bahn_und_fahrrad.shtml and Swiss SBB <http://www.sbb.ch/en/station-services/car-bike/on-the-move-by-bike.html>.



Source: www.velo.sncf.com

2.2. Information at platforms

High-speed trains often stop only for a few minutes. To properly manage the timely loading of bicycles, customers need to know at what platform section their coach with bicycle carriage will be situated. Window car indicators, either in paper (Deutsche Bahn) or electronic (SNCF) version are a helpful tool. In addition, platform announcements should be given with adequate information.



Coach no 12 is offering place for bicycles. Source: Deutsche Bahn

2.3 Information at rolling stock

The bicycle compartment is visible indicated by signposting as it is happening in below examples.



SBB



S-TOG Copenhagen/ Denmark.

3. Accessibility to platforms

Bicycles, in particular electric ones, can be heavy items for every age group. Even more so, if they carry luggage as it is the case with many cycling tourists. Elevators at busy stations should be a standard facility to help improving access to platforms. At smaller stations where elevators are too expensive to operate, bicycle escalators or bicycle stairways should be provided for. In the case of bicycle stairways, there should be enough distance from the railing to be able to leave the luggage on the bicycle.



Bicycle escalator. Source: <http://www.radtouren.net/htmlseiten/bahntipps/bahntipps.htm>



Bicycle stairway. Source: <http://www.wn.de/Muenster/2010/08/Nachrichten-Muenster-Fahrraeder-im-Bahnhof-Mit-Gepaeck-wird-s-eng>

4. Ticket Prices

Bicycle carriage is a service offered by railway companies to its customers, it is therefore acceptable that the latter pay an adequate fee to former. However, to reduce the barriers and encourage people to combine bike + train, bicycle tickets should be per journey and not per train. For an up to date overview, consult the annex of the EuroVelo 2012 study.⁸

In our opinion, the cost for a bicycle ticket on a national train should not exceed 10 Euro. The cost for an international bicycle ticket should not exceed 15 Euro. Ideally, frequent travellers can benefit from annual bike passes or multipacks of 1-day bike passes, as it is the case with SBB.

5. Ticket reservation schemes and sales channels

It should be possible to reserve and buy a bicycle space via the following channels: at the counter, at automatic machines, and online. In the earlier mentioned 1999 ECF paper, 5 different reservation policies were categorized, with A (Best) to E (worst).

A: reservation is optional, and seats can be reserved near the bicycle

B: reservation is optional, but there is no provision for reserving seats near the bicycles

C: reservation is mandatory

D: reservation is not possible, but there are at least 20 spaces for bicycles

E: reservation is possible, and there are less than 20 spaces for bicycles

Deutsche Bahn, for example, has a policy whereby a bicycle ticket needs to be purchased at the same time when travelling on IC and CNL trains. Unlike SNCF, this can be done online. The company says on its website the default solution is that the seat and the bicycle space are located in the same coach.

6. Bicycle parking at railway stations

When it comes to bicycle parking at railway stations, the Netherlands is second to none. Two figures illustrate and explain this: 40 % of daily train travellers arrive by bicycle at the railway station and 15 % take the bicycle after arrival to cycle to their destination. Dutch railways NS and ProRail therefore started a programme in 1999 running through to 2012, with the objective to create an additional capacity for 300,000 bicycles at railway stations to bring the total to 400,000 bicycle spaces. There are 3 main different types of bicycle parking:

- i) **Guarded stations with management**, operated by sub-contractors commissioned by NS.

The sub-contractor also runs a bicycle point (fiets punt) or bicycle shop for bike repairs and sale of bicycle and bicycle components. Guarded stations typically open 15 minutes before departure of the first train service and close 15 minutes after arrival of the last one.



⁸ University of Central Lancashire, UK and Breda University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands, *The European cycle route network, EuroVelo 2012.*

- ii) **Automated access system** by subscription card.



- iii) **Bicycle lockers** can often be found at smaller stations and can be rent on an annual basis.



7. Bicycle sharing systems by railway companies

This paper mainly looked into the services to be offered to customers *with* their own bicycle. However, to complete the picture and just to mention at this point, railway companies should ideally also rent their own bikes. A number of railway companies have already done so, notably:

- NS Netherlands: OV-Fiets <http://www.ov-fiets.nl/>
- Deutsche Bahn: Call-a-bike <http://www.callabike-interaktiv.de/index.php>
- NMBS/ SNCB Belgium: BlueBike <http://www.scotty.be/?subsite=blue-bike&path=%2f>

In the Netherlands, a single chip card has been introduced for all public transport systems (train, bus, trams, etc.) across the whole country. This will soon be the only valid public transport ticket for the entire Dutch public transport system. OV-fiets (Public transport-bicycle) can be used with the same card.

<http://www.ov-chipkaart.nl/afbeeldingen/5434/travellingwiththeovchipkaart>

In a trial project on integrated ticketing, Deutsche Bahn is offering its BahnCard 25 in combination with the use of bike-sharing, local public transport and car-sharing in Berlin: <http://www.bahn.de/p/view/bahncard/ueberblick/bahncard-mobil.shtml>



Source: http://www.brugge.be/internet/nl/Mobiliteit/fiestbeleid/verhuur_blue_bike.htm

If the railway company is not rolling out its own system, integrated ticketing with local bike-sharing providers should ensure door-to-door seamless transport. For example, holders of BahnCards issued by Deutsche Bahn have a 'City ticket' included in their train ticket at their point of destination, allowing them to use public transport for the final trip. This could be expanded to bike-sharing systems.

About ECF

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The European Cyclists' Federation (ECF) represents the interests of bicycle users, is based in Brussels and has about 70 member organizations across 40 countries.

As well as advocating for better cycling policies and promoting cycling at the international level in general, ECF has a range of programs including EuroVelo, the European cycle route network, the global networks "Scientists for cycling" and "Cities for Cyclists", the Velo-city and Velo-city Global conference series.

ECF is a main partner in several EU funded projects such as PRESTO and CYCLE Logistics.

