

BIKE AND TRAIN: A EUROPEAN ODYSSEY

European Cyclists' Federation

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therein.

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SUMMARY

In 2006, ECF conducted a study on bicycle carriageⁱ and related services offered by European railway companies: The study concluded that services offered are insufficient in terms of quantity and quality, and - to make things worse - overall trends were pointing in the wrong direction.

EU Regulation EC 1371/2007 on passenger rights' and obligations did not bring about any improvements. The sections on bicycle carriage are open to interpretation: *"Railway undertakings shall enable passengers to bring bicycles on to the train, where appropriate for a fee, if they are easy to handle, if this does not adversely affect the specific rail service, and if the rolling-stock so permits."*

While the European Commission concluded that "railway undertakings will have to justify any refusal of carrying bicycles on a given rail service", railway companies continue to take a business as usual approach: ECF estimated in 2006 that bicycle carriage is allowed on less than 10 % of long-distance railway services in the EU. With the ongoing trend of replacing national and international IC trains by high speed trains, bicycle carriage on these rail services has not improved, and has tended to get worse.

ECF's position is as follows:

1) The provisions within regulation 1371/2007 stipulate that bicycle carriage on all long-distance trains is the default option. It should be deviated from only under specific circumstances and well established conditions. As a minimum requirement, railway companies need to run a pilot project, accompanied by a comprehensive and transparent impact assessment.

2) In the long-term, Regulation 1371/2007 should be amended. The opinion adopted by the European Parliament in 2nd reading should serve as a blueprint: *"All trains, including international and high-speed trains, shall provide, where appropriate for a fee, a specially designated area enabling passengers to bring on to the train baby carriages, wheelchairs, bicycles and sports equipment."*

1. BICYCLE CARRIAGE ON LONG-DISTANCE TRAINS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

1.1 ECF publication

In 2006, ECF conducted an analysis ranking 32 European railway undertakings (RUs) regarding their carriage offer on long-distance trains, ticket and reservation schemes, sales channels, and website information: Bicycle Carriage on Long-Distance Trains in the European Union.ⁱⁱ The aim of this study was threefold:

- To give an overview and an evaluation of the current market;
- To present the relevant conditions for developing the bicycle carriage on long-distance trains;
- To work out development scenarios for the policies and technologies being operated.

The study estimated that bicycle carriage, in general, is insufficient regarding quantity as well as quality:

- Bicycle carriage of bicycles is allowed on less than 10 % of long-distance railway services in the EU: "In many countries, only a few long-distance connections allow bicycle carriage, resulting in a lack of connections or unacceptable travel times.");
- Each railway undertaking adopts different rules and criteria for bicycle carriage: an organic and attractive European offer is still missing;
- Train producers have not developed adequate systems for bicycle carriage;
- Bicycle carriage is often based on emotional decisions without serious analysis.

The study concluded that the lack of bicycle carriage of bicycles is a consequence of the development of high-speed trains (HST) for the business travel market. The high speed train fleet reflects the nature of this market: HST compartments, in particular TGV trains of the first generation, are too small for large pieces of luggage or prams; The increasing trend in bicycle usage in Europe was not taken into account. However, ECF stated that the initial orientation towards business customers of HST had somewhat changed: European HST were attracting in increasing numbers new groups of customers, due to the need to compete with low-cost airlines and therefore to offer lower ticket prices. An improved service to passengers with bicycles in general did not follow suit.

2.1 Trends on bicycle carriage in HST

HST trains are gradually replacing traditional long-distance railway connections: in some EU countries (France, Belgium, Germany), the high-speed market share already comprises 50 % of the long-distance railway market (State: 2006). As HSTs usually do not allow bicycle carriage, there has been a corresponding downward trend of bicycle carriage on long-distance transport in Germany (1995 – 2003: - 57%). Since 2003, bicycle carriage has stabilized at these low figures (2003: 270,000; 2011: 262,200).ⁱⁱⁱ

Case study

Travelling to and from Brussels, which is served by ICE, TGV, THALYS, Eurostar (and FYRA) as of 2012, is a good example of how customers wishing to travel with bikes are left at a significant disadvantage:

Destination	Without bicycle		With bicycle	
	Duration (Fastest connection in hours)	Interchanges	Duration (Fastest connection in Hours)	Interchanges
Brussels Midi – Cologne Hbf	1:47 (THA) 1:50 (ICE)	0	6:32	2
Brussels Midi – Amsterdam Centraal	1:54 (THA)	0	2:56 (IC) This train is expected to be replaced by FYRA (HST) in 2012 which does not carry bikes.	0
Brussels Midi – Paris Nord	1:20 (THA)	0	9:54 (via Metz)*	3
Brussels Midi - London	Eurostar has no compartment with dedicated space for bicycles, but offers bicycle carriage via excess baggage service, to be booked in advance (€35 one way on the same train; €27,50 one way, not on the same train as the passenger)			

Source of time tables: www.bahn.de

* An additional problem is that website information on bicycle carriage is often incorrect, not user-friendly or non-existent. Travelling with a bike from Brussels Midi to Paris Nord can also be done faster than indicated on www.bahn.de (in 4:39, 3 interchanges).

2. REGULATION EC 1371/2007

2.1. Relevance for cycling

Regulation ECF 1371/2007 on railway passenger rights' and obligations is the legal basis we are working with. It was adopted in 2007 and entered into force on December 3, 2009. These sections are relevant for 'bicycle carriage' and related services:

2.1.1 Bicycle carriage

CHAPTER II: TRANSPORT CONTRACT, INFORMATION AND TICKETS, Art. 5:

"Railway undertakings shall enable passengers to bring bicycles on to the train, where appropriate for a fee, if they are easy to handle, if this does not adversely affect the specific rail service, and if the rolling-stock so permits."

Relevant issues include:

- i) The rolling stock: Does it have a dedicated area for bicycle carriage?
- ii) Outside the rolling stock: Is it well sign-posted and is there adequate information at the platform, allowing customers to quickly identify where he or she can load the bicycle(s) onto the train?

2.1.2 Pre-journey information

ANNEX II: MINIMUM INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED BY RAILWAY UNDERTAKINGS AND/OR BY TICKET VENDORS, Part I: Pre-journey information' included *"Accessibility and access conditions for bicycles"*.

This can apply to

- i) **Ticket and reservation schemes/ sales channels:** availability of tickets and reservations at manned counters, automatic machines, online as well as through other channels (telephone, on board), in particular for national and international long-distance transport;
- ii) **Website Information:** availability of bicycle carriage query in timetable search engines and of information about bicycle carriage condition in national and foreign languages.

2.1.3 Exemptions

CHAPTER I: GENERAL PROVISION, Art. 2.4 and 2.5 stipulated that Member States may exempt railway companies from carrying bicycles on domestic rail passenger services for up to 15 years (3 times 3 to 5 years) and on urban, suburban and regional rail passenger services for an indefinite period of time. As a result of Article 2.7, the Member States had to inform the Commission of such exemptions.

2.2 Legal interpretation

The German Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development, in an answer to a minor interpellation in the German Lower Chamber of Parliament (Bundestag), expressed that no legal obligation can be derived from the Regulation to force railway companies to provide for bicycle carriage, either while refurbishing existing rolling stock or purchasing new ones. The German Federal Railway

Authority (Eisenbahn-Bundesamt) has supported this interpretation.

This reflects the situation on the ground: Several railway companies refuse bicycle carriage, including Deutsche Bahn on all ICE trains, the Thalys consortium on all Thalys trains, the Railjet trains operated by Austrian ÖBB, a substantial number of TGVs operated by French SNCF, and many other companies across the EU. Thalys, who refurbished recently its rolling stock, did not use this occasion to provide for bicycle carriage.

Conclusion: The Regulation 1371/2007 has not improved at all the carriage of bicycles on board of trains.

- Thalys has never offered the possibility to carry bicycles. ECF does not know of any justification: no study has been published that came to the conclusion that bicycle carriage would not be easy to handle and would adversely affect the rail service.
- Deutsche Bahn operated the carriage of bicycles from 1999 – 2002 on ICE-T and ICE-TD on Stuttgart – Zurich and Stuttgart – Munich connections. Lessons learned from this operation have never been published, any adverse affect on rail transport is therefore unknown.

It appears that the provision “Railway undertakings shall enable passengers to bring bicycles on to the train, where appropriate for a fee, if they are easy to handle, if this does not adversely affect the specific rail service, and if the rolling-stock so permits.” leaves too many options/much opportunity for railway companies NOT to improve services for passengers with bicycles. In particular in relation to provide for bicycle carriage when refurbishing rolling stock or purchasing new ones, the regulation has merely an appellative character. Any substantial improvement seems to depend on the ‘good will’ of railway companies and/or, if they are state undertakings, on the political will of the responsible authorities to oblige railway undertakings to improve services.

However, the railway companies’ understanding of Regulation 1371/2007 on relevant sections for bicycle carriage and other services, has never been challenged in Court. ECF’s interpretation is that bicycle carriage on all trains is the default option. It should be deviated from only under specific circumstances and well established conditions.

The legal interpretation of the European Commission, in reply to a Written Question by MEP Gyula Hegyi^{iv}, is as follows: “According to the conditions laid down in the article, railway undertakings will have to justify any refusal of carrying bicycles on a given rail service.”^v

Among the reasons given by railway undertakings to refuse bike carriage belong:

- Costs of rolling stock adaptation;
- Costs of capacity reduction;
- Overcrowding and discomfort for other passengers;
- Punctuality reductions due to loading/unloading of bicycles;
- Seasonality and consistency of demand;

The ECF 2006 study concluded that “many RUs have admitted that they have never seriously investigated and analysed the bicycle carriage market. [...] In very few cases is there specific know-how and planning.”

Good practice examples from various railway companies underlines problems that can be overcome if properly managed. Therefore ECF demands that railway companies refusing carriage of bicycles must run a pilot project, accompanied by a comprehensive and transparent impact assessment of the effects of bicycle transport, involving bicycle user organisations and making the results public/publishing the results.

3. WHAT NEXT: REVISION OF REGULATION 1371/2007

As far as bicycle carriage on long-distance trains is concerned, Regulation 1371/2007 does not deliver on its promises. ECF is of the opinion that the current situation is unacceptable for the following reasons:

- It limits the freedom of people to move across the continent and therefore has adverse effects on the completion of the EU internal market;
- It does little to help achieve GHG emission reductions, an official policy by the EU. The White Paper on Transport has introduced a 60 % GHG emissions reduction target for the transport sector, using 1990 as baseline. It therefore cannot be in the interest of the EU not to foster one of the most environmentally-friendly ways of travelling for long-distance journeys, e.g. combining bike and train journeys as an effective alternative for individual car trips and/or flying. Bike and train travel can also reduce other negative transport externalities (air pollution, noise, accidents, land use segregation, loss of bio-diversity, etc.) and increase positive externalities of active travel (health!)^{vi};
- It stifles the potential of bicycle tourism. The EU has the ambition of becoming the No1 tourist destination in the world. Bicycle tourism is enjoying increasing popularity in Europe, and should therefore been given adequate support.^{vii}
- It fails to take into account the economic benefits of Bicycle tourism which already makes a significant contribution to regional development across Europe. A study commissioned by the European Parliament in 2009 estimated that there are over 2.8 billion cycle tourism trips and 25 million over-night cycle trips made every year in Europe or about 3% of the total number of tourist trips generated by the EU population. These have an estimated economic impact of €54 billion. EuroVelo, the European long-distance cycle route network, alone would generate about €5 billion in annual revenues if it was completed.^{viii}

A revision of Regulation 1371/2007 should at last provide for clear and improved rules on bicycle carriage of bikes on long-distance trains. A legal basis adopted by the European Parliament in 2nd reading and supported by ECF stipulated:

"All trains, including international and high-speed trains, shall provide, where appropriate for a fee, a specially designated area enabling passengers to bring on to the train baby carriages, wheelchairs, bicycles and sports equipment."

ENDNOTES

ⁱ By bicycle carriage ECF is referring to taking bicycles on trains which are not dismantled.

ⁱⁱ ECF, Bicycle Carriage on Long-Distance Trains in European Union, 2006. Accessible via ECF website: <http://www.ecf.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Bicycle-Carriage-on-Long-Distance-Trains-in-the-EU.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: Allgemeiner Deutscher Fahrrad Club e.V.

^{iv} WRITTEN QUESTION by Gyula Hegyi (PSE) to the Commission (E-0404/08; 04 February 2008):

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+WQ+E-2008-0404+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

^v Answer given by Mr Barrot on behalf of the Commission (E-0404/2008, 31 March 2008):

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2008-0404&language=EN>

^{vi} Positive health externalities of active travel are estimated of being twice as large as all negative externalities of motorized transport combined (measured in km travelled).

^{vii} Commission communication 2010: *Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination - a new political framework for tourism in Europe* - COM(2010) 352/final.

^{viii} The European Cycle Route Network EuroVelo. Study commissioned by the European Parliament, 2009.

http://www.ecf.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/EU-Study-EuroVelo_The-European-Cycle-Route-Network.pdf