

North Somerset Cycle Campaign

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TRAIN COMPANY INUNDATED BY FAXES FROM ANGRY COMMUTERS

Campaigners in North Somerset have taken a technological approach to protest about Wessex Trains' blanket ban on bicycle carriage on trains across the South West. North Somerset Cycle Campaign have developed a form on their web site which allows cyclists to fax their concerns to Wessex Trains with just a few clicks. The form uses an internet gateway which allows users to send a fax for free.

In May this year, Wessex Trains - the primary rail operator in the South West, quietly announced modifications to their cycles on trains policy. On a large number of services, cyclists are now banned between 7 and 9am and 4 and 6pm. At other times, cycles are restricted to a maximum of 2 per train (when in some cases there is capacity for 12), many of which are not reservable in advance.

Tom Betts, spokesman for North Somerset Cycle Campaign, said: "The train is very good at moving people between fixed points, but the bicycle is the missing link which gets people from their homes and to their final destinations. It is inevitable that this ban is forcing the public to seek alternative methods of travelling end-to-end, such as the car. Wessex pre-empted the Strategic Rail Authority's 'National Cycle Policy' by imposing these new restrictions prior to it's publication, and we have seen with no reference to 'users' in their consultation."

North Somerset Cycle Campaign, along with other campaigners such as Bristol Cycling Campaign (who have their own postcard campaign) want to see this ban reversed and the restrictions altered. "As this policy affects cyclists from Penzance to Gloucester and Cardiff and through Bristol and Bath to Brighton, it's vitally important to raise the profile of the campaign across the region; that's why we've taken to electronic campaigning, because it allows the public from the whole region to take part in our protest, regardless of their location", said Tom Betts.

Steve Kinsella of CTC, the national cyclists' organisation said: "It's not just the blanket ban which is a problem, Wessex's '2-bike rule' with no reservations possible on many services ensures that cyclists have no idea whether they will be able to board a train or not until it arrives at the platform. This effectively makes rail travel impossible for cyclists across the whole of the South West, especially in rural and suburban areas where there are no alternatives."

Details of the electronic Wessex Trains campaign and the form, which takes only a few seconds to fill out, can be found at <http://www.nscycle.org.uk>

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Further information:

Wessex Trains bicycle restriction details

The bicycle ban affects rail users travelling on trains which arrive into Bristol Temple Meads, Exeter, Cardiff and Plymouth between 07:00 and 09:00, and depart between 16:00 and 18:00, regardless of their intended destination. The additional restrictions (limiting carriage to a maximum of 2 cycles per train) affects all cycling train users across the South West. Previously the ability to carry bicycles was at the discretion of the conductor, under the new restrictions, cyclists will be unable to board if 2 cyclists make up the only passengers on the train.

The inflexibility of rules for cycle carriage is demonstrated by the case of a National Trust Area Manager and his son who were refused access to a Wessex train with just 2 people on board - but that would have meant 4 bikes and the 150 seat train, otherwise empty, had a 2 bike restriction. One authority that

objected is Cornwall County Council, which saw figures for passenger loadings and concluded that the Wessex Trains action was overkill. Wessex Trains agreed to lift the ban on trains to and from Truro.

Wessex Trains' policy can be read in full at <http://www.wessextrains.co.uk/uploads/documents/284.pdf>

Wessex Trains and the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA)

Clause 8.3 of the franchise agreement between Wessex Trains and SRA states: "The Franchise Operator shall, so far as reasonably practicable and subject to the availability of appropriate space on its rolling stock, ensure that facilities for the transport of bicycles on trains are made available, at reasonable charges (if any), to passengers using or intending to use the Passenger Services."

North Somerset Cycle Campaign

North Somerset Cycle Campaign is a network of cycle users in North Somerset who wish to see a safer, more attractive and welcoming environment for cycling, whether for commuting, work, recreation or shopping. More information can be found at <http://www.nscycle.org.uk>