

Williams Rail Review evidence papers

Personal details

Q1. Your name and email address. We will only use these if we need to contact you regarding your response.

Your name Roger Geffen

Your email roger.geffen@cyclenguk.org

Q2. Are you responding as:

on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation details

Q3. Name of organisation.

Cycling UK

Q4. Type of organisation

lobby group or think tank

Evidence papers questions

Q5. The evidence papers set out the key themes and broad scope of the evidence on which the Rail Review will draw in the subsequent phases of our work. Are there other themes or areas of evidence that we should consider? If so, what are they and what evidence exists?

We suggest the following additional issues should be considered as part of the review:

1. Access to stations
2. Enabling end-to-end multi-modal journeys - e.g. the combination of rail with cycling (including hire-bikes)

Rail operators have substantially improved the quantity and, to some extent, the quality, of cycle parking at stations in recent years, with a few excellent examples of cycle hire facilities. However, passengers wishing to travel with their own pedal cycles routinely face a very poor journey experience. On some services, cycle reservations are impossible, in other cases they are compulsory, even though the reservation systems are utterly dysfunctional. The design of on-train cycle carriage provision is often terrible - notably on GWR's recent Azuma trains. Hooking systems to store bikes vertically on these and other trains are designed with total disregard for the needs of disabled passengers who use non-standard pedal cycles as mobility aids, or for shorter and less strong people, who often find it very difficult to use these hooks in tight and awkwardly laid-out spaces.

A policy package that maximises the potential for cycle-rail integration would include the following elements:

1. Cycle parking at stations (which should be well designed, conveniently located, sheltered and secure), together with cycle storage and/or hire facilities at larger stations or those with significant recreational cycling opportunities.
2. Provision for cycle carriage on trains (even if its use has to be restricted at peak-hour times and locations) - it should be designed to be usable including by people who are short and/or those with disabilities (e.g. those who cannot easily use hooks to store bikes vertically).
3. User-friendly cycle reservation systems - it should be possible to make reservations for any train service on which seats are also reservable. However reservations should not be compulsory, unless these can be made at the last moment - otherwise, they cause chaos.
4. Information and publicity - including leaflets (advising what the rules are, advertising cycle-rail opportunities), live on-line journey information, and information in stations and on trains (e.g. to help cycling customers know where to stand on the platform to load their cycles without stress and without delaying the train).
5. Stakeholder engagement - cycle-rail forums where operators can consult and obtain feedback on what cycle-rail measures are working, and what could be improved.
6. Data and monitoring.

We will elaborate on these points in our full submission.

Relevant evidence includes the following:

Evidence:

1. Numbers, and percentages of passengers, for each operator, who make journeys by cycle and rail, broken down by (a) those who park a cycle at one or both ends of the journey (b) those who hire a bike, (c) those who take a folding cycle with them, and (d) those who take a conventional folding cycle with them and (e) those who take a non-standard pedal cycle with them
2. Passenger satisfaction, for each operator, among those who make cycle-rail journeys by each of the means.
3. Numbers of cycle parking spaces at stations run by different rail operators.

Again, we will document the available evidence, and its implications, more fully in our final submission.

Q6. Has the Review identified the right areas in the proposed high-level objectives?

We agree with the high-level objectives.

In particular we strongly support the objectives relating to 'Passengers' and to 'Wider society'. In order to maximise the rail system's wider contribution to environmental and social policy objectives, it is crucial to improve passengers' experience of, and trust in, rail travel.

It is obviously necessary that this is also done in a way that delivers value for money for the tax-payer. However this is not necessarily the same as minimising the taxpayers' contribution. Taxpayers still gain from the reductions in congestion, pollution, road danger etc due to increased rail travel, even if they choose not to use the railways themselves.

Q7. Has the Review identified the key issues constraining the success of the railway? What relative priority would you place on each of the issues raised?

We largely agree with the problem statements. In particular, we strongly agree that customer service and responsiveness to customer needs is poor.

There are strong links between three of the other problem statements: the industry's fragmentation results in a lack of a single clear vision. The industry needs a far clearer sense of its role in delivering an end-to-end transport option involving journeys by more than one transport mode, so as to reduce car dependence and the associated problems of congestion, pollution, road danger, physical inactivity and (above all) greenhouse gas emissions. This fragmentation also hampers the industry's ability to innovate in providing a coherent response to passengers' needs.

We cite the specific example of the failures to provide a sensible integrated solution to the issue of cycle reservations. Some operators websites can do this for all train operators, others cannot do this. Some operators cannot offer cycle reservations, others make them compulsory (despite being unable, in some cases, to allow these reservations to be made on their websites). The lack of integration results in terrible customer service and experiences, and deters people from using the cycle-rail combination who might otherwise provide a valuable boost to passenger usage, and hence the economic viability, of off-peak rural train services.

Q8. Do the assessment criteria capture the right issues against which the Review should test its proposals? What priority should we attach to each and how should we balance trade-offs? Are there other issues we should consider?

We agree with the assessment criteria proposed on pages 8-9 of the document, but would add two more.

The first is simply passenger numbers. The more people who choose to travel by rail, the more it contributes to wider societal objectives of reducing car dependence, with its associated problems of congestion, pollution, road danger, physical inactivity and climate change.

The second is the proportion of people making rail trips who complete their journeys by other forms of sustainable transport (e.g. walking, cycling or other forms of public transport). The rail industry needs to focus far more on enabling end-to-end journeys by non-car means, including options such as the cycle-rail combination.