

London life is a rich cycle of experience



By Alix Stredwick
Campaigns Director

alix@therailcampaign.org.uk

Living in London for the past eight months has taught me a lot about how to get from A to B in a stressful environment. After getting increasingly frustrated with pedestrian crossings at traffic lights that take an age to show the green man, labyrinthine subways like the one under Old Street roundabout, and paying £3.60 on the Tube for a return fare between zones 1 and 2, I have donned my helmet and day-glo anorak to brave the streets of London on my bicycle.

Of course I still go by rail as well. After figuring out which Tube lines take bicycles, and preparing my wimpy arm muscles to wrestle my bike up the stairs at North London Line stations, I have come to the conclusion that bike and rail is the best way to get around London.

In fact, cycling is the quickest form of transport in the capital. Average journey time is 18 minutes, compared with 29 by car and 40 by bus according to the DETR journey times survey 2000.

Why shouldn't bike and train be the best way around for the rest of the UK? Unfortunately, mixing bikes and trains into your journey is beset with pitfalls.

Even getting to the station can be a nightmare. The only cycle route to Ashford station platforms takes the hapless cyclist through a massive car-park; hardly a safe route to the start of your journey on the safest form of land transit.

Then there may be a lack of facilities to store your bike at the station. Euston, one of the largest stations in London and the main terminus for routes to the Midlands and the north west, has nowhere to store your bike.

Left luggage was the best option given to me when I discovered this problem as I made my way to an RDS meeting in Birmingham.

With Virgin charging £3 each way to take a bike on their services, I might as well go on the Tube from my house to Euston, saving £2.40 – but with the increased risk of missing my Euston train. In the end I found some railings some way from the station to lock my bike to.

Without secure storage there is the problem of cycle theft, particularly rife in student areas, where there are rich pickings for the opportunist thief as I discovered when my bike was stolen from outside Stepney Green Tube station last year.

Of course, cyclists have to contend with a bewildering array of different rules for taking bikes on the train.

Each train operating company has its own rules, which is understandable when you consider the differing needs of inter-city and local services, but completely confusing if you are unfamiliar with the train company you want to travel with. Luckily there is a booklet explaining all: *Cycling by Train*. Tel Brompton Bicycles 020 8232 8484 for a

copy. So, with all these problems, rail and cycle campaigners have their work cut out, which is where you, dear *Railwatch* reader, can help.

The Cyclists, Touring Club (CTC), the UK's largest national cycling organisation, has asked RDS to support its campaign for better provision for bikes.

RDS cycling officer Andy Hoines is already on the case. But the CTC is asking RDS members to help directly because no matter how hard groups like the CTC lobby on behalf of their members, complaints and concerns also need to be raised by passengers themselves.

If you have a complaint about the difficulties involved with bikes and trains, please write to:

- your local train operator
- the Strategic Rail Authority
- your region's Rail Passenger Committee and copy your letter to me at RDS Central and Sue Hall at the CTC.

Please contact the RDS office (Tel 020 8981 2992) if you have difficulty finding contact details for any of the above.

Even if you do not cycle yourself, I hope you will see that RDS members will benefit from better facilities for cyclists on trains. If people are encouraged to cycle to the station, this will help tackle road congestion.

Ironically enough, sometimes the reason given by local authorities for why a new station would cause more traffic problems because people jump in their cars for the short hop to the station.

But 60% of the UK population live within a 15-minute cycle ride of a train station according to *Making the Connection* (The Cycle Challenge Report, Bikerail, October 1998, commissioned by the DETR and the Countryside Commission).

My talks with the SRA property arm have revealed that when deciding whether rail land they intend to sell should be sold for transport use, cycling does not seem to enter the equation.

It is always "that could be used for a car-park" rather than "that could be secure storage for bicycles, or car-parking spaces".

CTC has encountered its own problems. For instance, thetrainline.com, the online site for checking train times and booking tickets, has not replied to CTC's email!

Sue Hall, CTC's public transport officer, has tried to raise with them Trainline's failure to book bikes on trains.

So there is a long way to go before this aspect of our transport system is anywhere near integrated. But with the re-franchising of passenger services under way, RDS is looking to Mike Grant and Sir Alastair Morton at the SRA to sort out this bikes and trains mess. The pressure is on!

For information about integrating cycling with train travel, and the CTC's campaigns, contact Sue Hall at the CTC. Tel 01483 417 217 or email: sue.hall@ctc.org.uk or take a look at the web site: www.ctc.org.uk