



Compulsory seat reservations and standing in trains

Anyone who buys a ticket to travel on the British railway network enters into an agreement with the companies that provide that service. That agreement gives a passenger the right to make the journey, or journeys, between the stations or within the zones shown on their ticket. [The National Rail Conditions of Carriage](#) (NRCC) also form part of that agreement and apply to all domestic (non-international) journeys by scheduled passenger train services on the railway network.

The NRCC set out passenger rights and any restrictions of those rights. The train companies may provide more extensive rights than those set out in the NRCC but cannot give less unless, in the case of some types of reduced and discounted fare tickets, a Condition specifically allows for this.

The NRCC includes the following on seating/standing:

“40. Reserving seats

Seats in some trains can be reserved before you travel and you may have to pay a fee. Unless you have a seat reservation, the Train Companies do not guarantee to provide a seat for your journey. You must have a valid ticket for your journey before reserving a seat. Each ticket allows you to reserve no more than one seat per person for each part of your journey.”

In effect, this means that a seat for a rail journey within Great Britain is only guaranteed where reservations are available and such a reservation is made. Reservations are generally only available on longer distance services, meaning that a seat cannot be guaranteed on many rail services. Even where seat reservations are available, passengers without reservations can still travel – which may see some passengers standing on these services.

The only scheduled rail service which operates in Britain where seat reservations are compulsory and standing is not allowed is the international Eurostar service between London and Paris/Brussels. This is in line with some other high speed and long distance intercity rail services operated across Europe, including:

- **France:** All seats on TGV and Intercités
- **Italy:** All seats on Frecciarossa, Frecciargento, Frecciabianca & InterCity trains
- **Spain:** All seats on AVE, Alvia, EuroMed and Alaria long distance trains

However, some international operators, such as Germany's Deutsche Bahn, have adopted a similar approach to British rail operators and do not require seat reservations for long distance services. I have been unable to find any international rail operator which requires seat reservations for commuter or shorter distance rail services or prevents standing on such services.

Crowding on trains and safety

The Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) is the UK railway safety regulator. The ORR states the following on standing/crowding on trains:

“There is no legal limit on the number of passengers that can travel in any given train coach as trains differ from other modes of transport – most notably buses and aeroplanes - because of the heavy engineering design involved. This permits trains to operate effectively and safely even when fully loaded to maximum capacity.

But despite being uncomfortable, and at times making passengers feel unsafe, there is no conclusive evidence linking crowding on trains with anything other than low level health and safety risks to individual passengers. However, we continue to review the available evidence of links between overcrowded trains and ill-health effects on passengers.”

Figures for crowding on ScotRail trains are not routinely published by either Transport Scotland or First Group, the current ScotRail franchise holder.

Alan Rehfish

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