

# Family friendly travel: how does each Train Operating Company fare?

## Executive summary

This is the first scorecard to assess and compare train operating companies across the UK for their provision of family-friendly services and facilities.

The research finds that, overall, train operating companies across the UK are failing dismally to support families with young children to travel by train.

- Only five companies - TfL, c2c, LNER, Merseyrail and GTR - scored above 2 out of a possible total of 8 points.
- Overall the scores were disappointingly low. The highest scoring company - TfL - achieved a mere 3.5 points.
- The location of the two highest scoring companies - TfL and c2c - show that across the UK network, family friendly facilities/services are more available within Greater London and a small area of the South East. Journeys on these lines are relatively short.
- 10 companies failed to respond suggesting they have little concern for the issues affecting families of young children using their services. These were: Chiltern Railway, East Midlands Railway, Eurostar, Great Western Railway, Greater Anglia, London Northwestern Railway, Northern, South Western Railway, TransPennine Express, and West Midlands Railway.
- Seven companies scored half a point for having some spaces available in train carriages to put an *unfolded* buggy. No company scored full points for this question, as none of the spaces available are dedicated solely for pushchair use.
- For three-quarters of the companies that responded, step-free access to the platform is possible at all, or the vast majority of stations along the routes, but only five companies said level boarding was available in some places. For most train services, level boarding was not available.
- Best examples of passenger assist service to help customers with young children board the train were given by Merseyrail, Southeastern and TfL. Yet all three companies could do more to publicise the service.

It was clear from responses (or lack of) that the majority of train operating companies are not taking the issue of family-friendly travel seriously. However, a small handful of companies - particularly TfL, Transport for Wales, Merseyrail, and LNER - indicated they are currently discussing the needs of families travelling with young children and aiming to find solutions in the design of newer trains and through additional services.

## Introduction

Many parents have difficult and negative experiences of travelling by train with young children in the UK. The primary challenges for parents with young children travelling by train include, but are not limited to, storing prams, embarking and disembarking, booking appropriate tickets and using changing facilities for babies and toddlers. However, the ease of travelling by train with young children can vary depending on which train operating company is running the service.

To obtain a clearer picture of the family-friendly facilities and services on offer, at the beginning of 2022, we reached out to 23 train operating companies across the UK with a questionnaire to ask about the provisions for parents and carers travelling with young children on their service(s).

## Methodology / scoring

The questionnaire consisted of eight questions related to three broad areas of concern:

- a) dedicated space for unfolded pushchairs/prams and other facilities available on board trains;
- b) step-free access and assistance available for boarding the train, and;
- c) the accessibility and quality of information available for families

See below for a full copy of the questionnaire. Responses were gathered between January and March 2022 and points were allocated for each question answered. One point was awarded for companies that were aware of the issue and had taken significant steps to address the problem, half a point was awarded for some provision of facilities or services, and zero points were awarded for companies that failed to provide facilities or services, or ignored the issues.

The maximum number of points that could be awarded was eight. The final scores are colour coded as follows:

	<b>Failed to respond</b>
0-2	<b>Low score</b>
3-5	<b>Medium score</b>
6-8	<b>High score</b>



London Northwestern Railway (operated by WMR)									
Northern									
South Western Railway									
TransPennine Express									
West Midlands Railway									

## Analysis

Over half of the train operating companies (13 out of 23) responded to the questionnaire. At the top of the table, the highest score of 3.5 was claimed by Transport for London, who operate services across Greater London including the Underground, Overground, DLR and TfL Rail. c2c came in second place with 3 points. c2c operates a service running from Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness which runs through 26 stations in East London and South Essex.

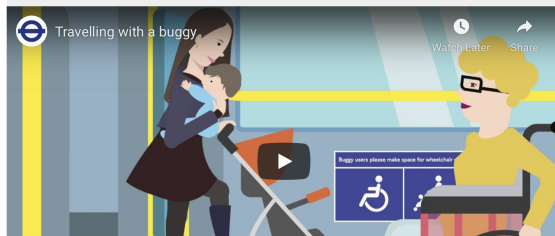
Overall the scores were disappointingly low; a high score of 3.5 is not something any train operating company should be celebrating. The location of the two highest scoring companies - TfL and c2c - show that across the UK network, family friendly facilities/services are more available within Greater London and a small area of the South East. Furthermore, journeys on these lines are relatively short compared to long-distance services, for example between London and Glasgow.

Across the 13 operating companies that responded, very few answers stood out as good examples of best practice. However, Avanti, LNER and TfL scored highly for making information about travelling with young children as accessible as possible. These companies have a dedicated page on their website for families, with clear information about facilities available and how to access them. This was a question where every train operating company should have scored highly: it is shocking to see how few companies provide necessary travel information to families with young children. We would encourage companies to look to Avanti, LNER and TfL as an example of good practice in this regard.

## Pregnant women & buggy users

If you are a mum-to-be, or if you travel in London with a pushchair, we want to make public transport easy for you to use. Here are a few resources to make your journeys with us easier.

### Top tips for baby & toddler travel



## Tips for travelling on trains with children

Whether you're travelling to visit the grandparents, taking a family holiday, or enjoying a big day out at a theme park, get your trip off to the best possible start with a smooth journey. Here are our top tips for an enjoyable train ride.

### Get your entertainment sorted

Keep boredom at bay by coming armed with entertainment for the whole family. Bring their favourite toys, games and books along, and don't forget to download the [Avanti Media app](#) on your phone or tablet for access to our free onboard entertainment, including loads of kids' TV shows and films.

### Pick a seat

## TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

Are your children under five? Lucky you, they get a free ride with us.

Mums and Dads, you deserve a medal. But how about free travel for up to two children under five instead? After all, kids love trains. However, you might have to sit them on your lap if we're busy.

Travelling with older kids? You can save money on travel with the [LNER Family Return](#). Up to two adults and four children can travel for one great price.

Alternatively, with a [Family and Friends Railcard](#) you can save up to 1/3 on adult fares and up to 60% on most child fares.



Seven companies scored half a point for having some spaces available in train carriages to put an *unfolded* buggy. However no company scored full points for this question, as none of the spaces available are dedicated solely for pushchair use. Multi-use spaces, particularly for long-distance rail travel, are often not an ideal solution for parents with young children and can cause conflict between passengers at busy times. Uncertainty over the availability of space for a pram or pushchair is frequently cited by parents as a barrier to train travel.

Several train operating companies are thinking more about the needs of families in the design of newer trains. For example, Transport for Wales highlighted the new trains to be used on the Core Valley Lines routes that have 4-6 multi-use areas (generally one area per carriage) with tip-up seats that allow parents/carers to sit nearby. Similarly, Merseyrail's new fleet of trains due to enter service this year have one area per four-carriages with four tip-up seats specifically designed for prams, pushchairs and luggage. TfL already has multi-use spaces on trains where unfolded prams and pushchairs can be placed and with fold-down or perch seats in the immediate vicinity.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the lack of dedicated space for unfolded pushchairs or prams, none of the operating companies in the scorecard scored full points for extending their seat reservation system to enable bookings for unfolded prams/pushchairs. Yet none of the companies scored half points for this question either, highlighting the inability of families to reserve a luggage space for even *folded* pushchairs, in stark contrast to the provision on some services which allow cyclists to reserve a storage space for bicycles. It is worth noting that folded pushchairs are often large and bulky items and not all models fit easily in normal luggage racks. If travelling with a young baby, many pram bassinets do not fold at all. Furthermore, a pushchair is not just another luggage item but a place for a young child to sleep and sit during the journey and it is often unrealistic and dangerous to expect a parent travelling alone to fold a pushchair while also dealing with a child and luggage.

We received a range of answers about the availability of baby changing facilities on trains. c2c told us every toilet on its trains is accessible with a pushchair/pram and all toilets include baby changing facilities. CrossCountry said 70% of their toilets were accessible and included baby changing facilities. All Lumo train toilets and the majority of ScotRail train toilets have baby changing facilities, although it was not clear if these toilets were also accessible for a pram/pushchair. GTR said all its accessible toilets have baby changing facilities but failed to mention what proportion of the on-board toilets were accessible. Avanti simply said '*all trains have baby changing facilities*' but did not indicate whether this facility was limited to certain toilets on-board, which given the length of the company's long-distance trains, may not be especially helpful to a parent if the baby changing facility is several carriages along. No company scored full points for this question because none of the toilets contained a toddler toilet seat.

For three-quarters of the companies that responded, step-free access to the platform is possible at all, or the vast majority of stations along the routes. Only five companies said level boarding was available in some places. For most train services, level boarding was not available.

A number of companies told us about their accessible travel policies. Merseyrail, Southeastern and GTR specifically mentioned their passenger assist service is available to help customers with young children board the train. TfL offers an assistance service called Turn-up-and-go which is available to all customers on demand on the London Underground, London Overground and most TfL Rail services. Although these were the best given examples of passenger assist services for families with young children, and should be emulated by other companies, all four operating companies could do more to publicise the service.

At the other end of the scale, 10 companies failed to respond to the questionnaire and as a result scored zero points. The lack of response suggests these companies have little concern for the issues affecting families of young children using their services.

## **Conclusion**

This is the first scorecard to highlight facilities and services available for family friendly travel across the UK rail network. Overall, the scores reveal the woefully inadequate provisions for families travelling with young children.

It was clear from responses (and the lack of) that the majority of train operating companies are not taking the issue of family-friendly travel seriously. However, answers from a handful of companies - particularly TfL, Transport for Wales, Merseyrail, and LNER - indicated they are discussing the needs of families travelling with young children and aiming to find solutions in the design of newer trains and through additional services.

Many train operating companies could boost their scores in the first instance through relatively easy changes, such as making passenger assist and early boarding services available to families with young children, designing a specific family-friendly module as part of customer accessibility training, clearly marking family-friendly or multi-use spaces, and having a dedicated page on their website for families looking for information about travelling on their service.

Beyond this, there are huge opportunities for train operating companies to improve the offer to parents with young families; and equally, companies that publicise the facilities and services already on offer may benefit from higher takeup.

## **Recommendations**

We want the rail network to be designed with the needs of families in mind. We are asking for:

- 1) Dedicated space on trains for unfolded prams and pushchairs with seating for parents/carers nearby.
- 2) Clean and accessible toilets on trains with baby changing facilities and a toddler toilet seat.
- 3) Step-free access and level boarding (in line with the Campaign for Level Boarding target to achieve level boarding across the rail network by 2040)

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