

Junction ahead: the UK rail industry's family-friendly divide

Contents

Executive Summary	1
1. Introduction	2
2. Methodology	4
3. Scorecard results	6
4. Analysis	8
a) Overview	8
b) Best in class	9
c) Emerging middle tier	11
d) Persistent challenges	12
The buggy space crisis	12
Level boarding: still a distant dream	14
Disruption policies: families forgotten in the chaos	14
The non-responders: action required	15
5. Areas for improvement	15
Quick wins: information, signs and staff training	16
Passenger Assist: untapped potential	16
Disruption: supporting families during service failure	17
Future procurement: embedding family design	17
6. Conclusion	18
7. Recommendations	18
Annex	20

Executive Summary

This year's family-friendly train scorecard reveals a UK rail industry increasingly divided between progressive operators demonstrating genuine commitment to families and a substantial group showing minimal engagement with their needs. With leisure travel now representing over half of all rail journeys, the misalignment between passenger demographics and service design represents not just poor customer service but a missed commercial opportunity. Almost 80% of train operating companies responded to the scorecard questionnaire, an encouraging increase that suggests growing industry awareness, yet the results expose persistent systemic failures

across fundamental areas including dedicated pushchair space, level boarding, and disruption support for families with young children.

Merseyrail tops the leaderboard with 8 out of 10 points, proving that comprehensive family-friendly design is achievable at scale, while LNER continues to set the standard for long-distance operators with 6.5 points through systematic staff training and family-specific policies. An emerging middle tier of operators achieved scores between 4 and 5 points, showing some engagement with family-friendly travel but falling well short of comprehensive provision across all aspects of the journey experience. However, seven of the eighteen respondents (nearly 40%) scored in the low bracket, and five major operators failed to respond entirely.

Persistent challenges remain entrenched across the network - from operators' continued reliance on spaces protected by law for wheelchair users as an adequate solution for unfolded buggies to the near-complete absence of family-specific disruption policies. However, significant opportunities exist for quick wins through implementing comprehensive staff training, providing clearer information, and extending Passenger Assist services to parents travelling solo with young children. Longer-term transformation requires commitment to never order another train without dedicated space for unfolded pushchairs alongside seating for parents. Operators beginning procurement processes have the opportunity to embed family-friendly design from the outset and involve families directly in train specification and testing. The question is no longer whether family-friendly rail travel is possible, but which operators will seize the commercial opportunity and which will be left behind.

1. Introduction

The Campaign for Family-Friendly Trains is a grassroots group of parents and carers advocating for better facilities for children and families on the UK rail network. Across the UK rail network there is a high demand for leisure travel - seeing family and friends, attending events, and going on holiday - compared to commuter and business travel. In April 2025, new research from the [Department for Transport](#) revealed that leisure is by far the most common reason for travelling by train in the UK. In the nationwide survey, more than half of respondents (54%) said they were travelling for leisure, compared to under a third (30%) for work or education, and just 15% for business.

Over the past few years, it is clear that leisure travel makes up a significant proportion of the rail industry's revenue. Yet UK trains have traditionally been designed for business and commuter passengers, not for families with young children and pushchairs. The network's traditional business/commuter focus is now increasingly misaligned with the reasons why passengers state they travel. Many parents still have negative experiences of travelling by train with young children in the UK, and those experiences can vary greatly depending on which operating company is running the service.

The main challenges include storing prams/pushchairs, embarking and disembarking, using changing facilities and, increasingly, receiving appropriate support when trains are severely disrupted or cancelled. However, these difficulties need not be the norm. The Campaign for Family-Friendly Trains continues to advocate for better facilities for families travelling with young children on the UK rail network. Three years since our first scorecard, the landscape shows both exciting progress from some operators and frustrating stagnation from others. Crucially, a handful of operators across different service types are demonstrating that family-friendly design is achievable. By contrast, some appear unwilling to engage with the idea of family-friendly design, despite this issue becoming economically essential to the future of the rail industry, not an added extra that can continue to be ignored.

In 2023, our campaign published [the second family-friendly scorecard](#) and in 2024 we engaged more deeply with operators and other rail industry bodies following the results. This year, we reached out to the same 23 train operating companies with the same questions as in 2023, enabling us to compare the results. This year's scorecard continues to highlight the network-wide picture of family-friendly services on offer across the UK rail industry. It congratulates the leaders that have made progress in the last two years, and exposes the laggards who haven't.



Photo: children enjoying the view on a UK train journey (Credit: Campaign for Family Friendly Trains)

2. Methodology

We invited 23 train operating companies in the UK to complete a self-assessment against ten family-friendly criteria, each worth one point (maximum 10 points). The assessment covered the following key areas:

- 1) Facilities on the train (3 questions)
- 2) Facilities at the station (2 questions)
- 3) Support for families (3 questions)
- 4) Information for families (2 questions)

For the complete questionnaire and scoring matrix sent to train operating companies, please see the annex. Responses and self-assessment scores were gathered between May and July 2025. We then reviewed the self-assessment scores and the accompanying information provided by operators and compared practices across the industry.

In some cases, it was necessary to adjust the self-assessed score provided by the operator to align with the scoring matrix and similar answers from other operators. We then sent each operator who had responded to the questionnaire their final score before publication. This provided an opportunity for the operator to share additional information.

The final scores are colour-coded in the table below as follows:

8-10	High
6-7	Upper medium
4-5	Lower medium
0-3	Low
	No response

The questions and methodology remain the same as the 2023 scorecard, enabling a direct comparison of results. Based on our experience in previous years, we provided train operators with more clarity on some of the questions by adding detailed guidance on the evidence required to score highly. For question 2 relating to seat reservation, we aimed to provide a clearer distinction between the way different types of operators (i.e. long-distance vs metro) should approach the question. However, we recognise that tailoring questions to different types of operators is an area that we could expand in future scorecards.

There will always be operators that feel a set of ten questions is too narrow in scope and does not adequately capture the full range of activities they offer to families travelling on their service. Our analysis, however, does not aim to examine every family-friendly activity on offer from UK train operators but rather focuses on critical pain-points experienced by families travelling with young children. We have not included the nice-to-have marketing activities, but rather the essential services for safe and easy family-friendly travel. In the few instances where the scores

do not provide the full picture, we have highlighted this in the narrative and aimed to draw out examples of good practice which may be too limited to gain a high score but should nonetheless be celebrated.

3. Scorecard results

Train company	Scores										
	Dedicated buggy space & seating nearby	Buggy reserve system	Toilets	Step-free access to platform	Level boarding from platform to train	Passenger Assist/ early boarding	Customer service trained to assist families	Policies to support families during disruption	Family friendly facilities easy to locate	Family info easy to find	TOTAL
Merseyrail	1	1	0	0.5	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	8
LNER	0.5	0.5	1	1	0.5	0	1	1	0	1	6.5
Eurostar	0	0	0.5	1	0	1	1	0.5	0	1	5
London Overground	1	1	0	0	0	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	1	4.5
Northern	0.5	0	1	1	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	1	4.5
Southeastern	0	0	1	1	0.5	1	0	0	0	1	4.5
Cross Country	0	0	1	0	0.5	0.5	1	0	0	1	4
Hull Trains	0	0	1	1	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	1	4
Lumo	0	0	1	1	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	1	4
ScotRail	0.5	0	0.5	1	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	4
West Midlands Railway / London North	0.5	0	1	1	0.5	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	4

Western											
East Midlands Railway	0	0	0	1	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	1	3.5
Avanti West Coast	0	0	0	1	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	1	3
Greater Anglia	0	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	1	3
Transport for Wales	0	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0	0	0	0.5	3
TransPennine Express	0.5	0	0.5	1	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	2.5
GrandCentral	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chiltern Railways	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Failed to respond	c2c, Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), Great Western Railway (GWR), South Western Railway, TfL Rail										

4. Analysis

a) Overview

This year's results demonstrate that family-friendly rail travel in the UK remains a tale of two networks: innovative leaders showing what's possible, and a substantial tail of operators showing minimal engagement with families' needs.

In an encouraging start, nearly 80% (18 out of 23) of train operating companies responded to the scorecard questionnaire; an increased response rate from previous years that suggests growing industry awareness of the campaign and the key issues. In every category, at least one train operator managed to gain a top score - also an improvement from the previous scorecard. This continues to show that the ideas exist and the technology is feasible, but what appears lacking within many operating companies is determination, buy-in from senior leadership, and long-term vision needed to implement the changes. The spread of results demonstrates that while some operators are proving family-friendly design is achievable, many continue to show only limited commitment.

Merseyrail once again sets the benchmark, with eight out of ten, firmly establishing that comprehensive family-friendly design is achievable, particularly for commuter rail networks. It scored highly across a range of areas, including dedicated pushchair space, level boarding, and disruption policies. LNER continues to lead the way among long-distance operators, with a score of six and a half, thanks to strong staff training, accessible information, and family-specific disruption planning. LNER's score shows what is possible for long-distance operators when family-friendly travel is prioritised internally - and we are hopeful that the operator's score will increase in time given it has signed the Family Friendly Pledge.

Eurostar, a new entry to this year's scorecard, sits just behind with five points, while a cluster of operators - London Overground, Northern, and Southeastern - all scored four and a half. This emerging group is not yet making transformative progress, as their overall scores remain below half, but they are beginning to tackle the more straightforward improvements. Some operators, such as ScotRail, Southeastern, and TransPennine Express, have signalled that future train designs will incorporate family-friendly spaces, although these will not be realised for several years. This suggests that planning processes in new train design are embracing families' needs, even if the practical benefits for families travelling today are limited. The Campaign for Family Friendly Trains met with key stakeholders and made recommendations for the [Key Train Requirements document v.7](#) which includes consideration of designated pram/pushchair space and modifications to toilets to make them more accessible for those travelling with children.

Despite these positive signs and best practice guidance, seven out of the eighteen respondents (nearly 40%) fell into the low-scoring bracket, with results ranging from three and a half points down to zero. In addition, five operators – c2c, Govia Thameslink Railway, Great Western Railway, South Western Railway and TfL Rail – failed to respond at all. Given the size and significance of some of these operators, their lack of engagement gives the impression of a

worrying disregard for the needs of families, particularly when leisure travel now represents the majority of rail revenue.

There are also systemic gaps that cut across the industry. Dedicated space for unfolded pushchairs remains a major challenge, with only two operators scoring full marks in this category - Merseyrail and London Overground. Too many operators continue to rely on spaces protected by law for wheelchair users as an interim solution for pushchairs; a practice that places people in direct conflict and fails to provide a satisfactory solution for either group. Level boarding remains rare, with Merseyrail still the only operator to deliver it comprehensively across its network, although both Greater Anglia and Transport for Wales have introduced level boarding on some of their routes. Most concerning of all, very few operators appear to have disruption policies which specifically mention families with young children and which reflect an understanding of their specific needs when trains are unexpectedly cancelled or delayed. Aside from Merseyrail, LNER, EMR, Eurostar and ScotRail, the majority of operators do not seem to consider families *at all* during disruptions, leaving parents with babies and young children extremely vulnerable when services are delayed or cancelled.

Compared to the previous scorecard, the 2025 scorecard shows both exciting progress and frustrating persistence. On the one hand, more operators are engaging with the process, and a growing number are beginning to make improvements in areas such as staff training, station accessibility, and information provision. On the other hand, the fundamentals of family-friendly design – from designated spaces for unfolded pushchairs to safe boarding and proper disruption support – remain patchy at best. The result is a network where a family's experience of rail travel continues to depend too heavily on which operator runs the service.

b) Best in class

Across the 18 operating companies that responded, there were a couple of standout performances that demonstrate what is possible when train operators genuinely prioritise the needs of families with young children.

Merseyrail (8/10) - commuter rail operator

Merseyrail's score of 8 out of 10 represents the highest achievement in our three years of family-friendly scorecards. Building on strong foundations from 2023, Merseyrail has continued to develop its approach and now stands as proof that comprehensive family-friendly rail travel can be delivered at scale across an entire commuter rail network.

The operator achieved full scores in five categories, demonstrating strength across multiple areas. Most significantly, Merseyrail is the only operator to score full marks for both dedicated buggy space with nearby seating and level boarding from platform to train - arguably the two most fundamental requirements for accessible family travel. Its new fleet, which has completed its rollout across the network since our last scorecard, was designed from the ground up with families in mind. Rather than having isolated spaces for pushchairs, the entire train has been

designed to be buggy-friendly, with wide aisles and dedicated bays where tip-up seats allow parents/carers to sit alongside an unfolded pram or pushchair throughout their journey.

Merseyrail has also achieved what no other operator in the UK has managed: level boarding across its entire network. All stations in the network now offer access from the platform to train via a sliding step that automatically meets the platform edge. Merseyrail also scored highly for disruption policies by going beyond generic customer support to address the specific challenges families face during service failures. Its rail replacement services use double-decker buses with 'kneel to curb' technology that allows parents with young children to board together and gives the ability to travel with unfolded pushchairs on all services. Staff are also empowered to arrange accessible taxis for parents/carers with very young children, although this service was highlighted in responses from some other operators too.

Merseyrail demonstrates that when family-friendly design is treated as a core principle rather than an add-on, substantial progress is possible. Other metropolitan and commuter operators should look to Merseyrail as proof that comprehensive family-friendly design is achievable.

LNER (6.5/10) - long-distance operator

LNER continues to set the standard for family-friendly long-distance rail services. With a score of 6.5 out of 10, it demonstrates that sustained commitment to family-friendly improvements can deliver consistent results even on more challenging long-distance routes. The operator scored full marks in four categories, with particular strength in staff training.

LNER has developed the most comprehensive family-focused training programme in the industry. Its induction programme for new starters now includes a dedicated 'Family' module that addresses the specific needs of passengers across different age groups and provides practical guidance on supporting families during boarding, throughout the journey, and when disembarking. In addition to new starters, all existing frontline staff received the updated training in early 2025. The training goes beyond generic customer service to include practical requirements, such as having all staff present at doors at each station, with a focus on assisting families with prams or young children.

LNER has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to family-friendly travel that has accelerated in the two years since it signed the [Family Friendly Pledge](#). The operator is piloting innovative ideas, such as a Family Friendly Coach trial over summer 2025, designed to offer a safe, visible, and more relaxed space for families where staff can provide proactive support. Although not measured in the scoring, the operator has expanded its family lounge spaces, opening a third lounge at Edinburgh in addition to existing family lounges in London Kings Cross and York. For other long-distance operators, LNER demonstrates that family-friendly improvements require consistent commitment from senior management and integration into core service delivery, rather than treating it as a marketing afterthought.

c) Emerging middle tier

A cluster of operators achieved scores between 4 and 5 out of 10, representing a middle tier that shows some engagement with family-friendly travel but falls well short of comprehensive provision. These operators typically scored well in one or two areas but appear to lack the systematic approach needed to serve families comprehensively across all aspects of the journey experience.

Eurostar sits at the top of this middle tier as a new entrant to the scorecard, having responded briefly in 2023 but without completing the questionnaire. The international operator this year achieves full marks for passenger assist provision, being one of only four operators (alongside Merseyrail, Southeastern and Transport for Wales) to advertise assistance for parents travelling solo with young children. Eurostar has also developed staff training that includes specific guidance on different age groups, showing an understanding that families have varying needs depending on the ages of their children. However, like many operators, Eurostar's score is constrained by fundamental infrastructure limitations, particularly regarding dedicated buggy space. London Overground scores full marks for both dedicated pushchair space with nearby seating that is marked as priority for parents with pushchairs. Its approach demonstrates what urban rail networks can achieve within existing constraints.

The remaining operators in this tier typically did well in one or two areas. For example, several companies consistently had baby changing facilities in toilets across their fleet, and many have step-free access to the platform at the vast majority of stations along their routes. Northern, ScotRail, and West Midlands Railway have multi-use spaces on their trains that - although not dedicated spaces - can be used for unfolded pushchairs. Additionally, West Midlands Railway indicates on the outside of train carriages where the accessible multi-use spaces are located with a pram/pushchair symbol. Cross Country told us its staff training includes specific material on different age groups of children and actively promotes breastfeeding awareness in staff briefing materials and as part of initial customer-facing training.

Some operators in this group are beginning to look further ahead. ScotRail told us its future intercity fleet will have a family friendly area separate from the space for wheelchair users that will allow for unfolded prams/pushchairs. Southeastern mentioned its aspirations to include a flexible space that would accommodate prams/pushchairs in future procurement of new trains. These commitments will take several years to materialise, but they do indicate a growing recognition that family needs must be deliberately designed into the next generation of rolling stock.

While this middle tier shows some elements of good practice across different service types and route lengths, the scores highlight how most of the network remains far from being genuinely family-friendly. Perhaps most disappointingly, many companies in this tier have made little or no progress in their scores since 2023, suggesting that without sustained pressure, family-friendly improvements remain a low priority even for operators that are aware of the issues. Incremental and scattergun improvements, while somewhat welcome, are insufficient to address the

systemic barriers that families with young children continue to face on much of the UK rail network.



Photo: a pushchair symbol used on the outside of a West Midlands Railway operated train carriage to show the best place for families to board. (Credit: Campaign for Family Friendly Trains)

d) Persistent challenges

Despite encouraging progress from leading operators, fundamental barriers to family-friendly rail travel persist across much of the network. Our scorecards since 2022 reveal that while individual operators can achieve impressive results, systemic problems remain stubbornly entrenched.

The buggy space crisis

Only two operators - Merseyrail and London Overground - score full marks for dedicated space for unfolded pushchairs/prams. A small handful of other train operators have multi-use space that can be used for a range of things, including unfolded buggies. This represents minimal progress from 2023, and the slight increase in numbers is due to the fact that more operators responded to the questionnaire this year. The vast majority of the network continues to rely on wholly inadequate arrangements - such as expecting pushchairs to be folded - that leave families stressed and forced to choose between complying with operators' policy and waking a sleeping baby or sitting in inadequate areas, such as the floor of the train vestibule throughout their journey.

Most concerning is the persistent practice of directing non-disabled families to use spaces legally protected for wheelchair users. Multiple operators continue to suggest these areas are

'multi-use' spaces suitable for pushchairs, despite our repeated warnings that this approach pits disabled passengers directly against non-disabled families. Several operators in this year's scorecard tried to score points for having 'multi-use' space while simultaneously admitting that the space is not flexible but protected by law for people who use wheelchairs. When a person in a wheelchair boards, non-disabled families using the space need to rapidly relocate children, pushchair and accompanying luggage, often on trains that are already busy, all while the train is stationary. This causes a great deal of stress and anxiety, both for non-disabled parents and for people using wheelchairs needing the dedicated space. Spaces for pushchairs/prams *must* be separate and distinct from dedicated, legal space for wheelchair users.

A small group of operators show promise for future improvement and have indicated intentions to include dedicated family spaces in new train designs. We commend this longer-term vision and recognise that new trains take time to design and order. Given the timeframe involved, we would have expected to see more operators with similar plans.



Photo: family sitting in the vestibule due to lack of space for unfolded pushchairs (Credit: Campaign for Family Friendly Trains)

Level boarding: still a distant dream

Greater Anglia led the way in 2019 with the first mainline trains in the UK that allowed for level boarding on some of its routes, and Transport for Wales introduced its first trains with level boarding technology along the Rhymney Valley Line in 2023. This year, Transport for Wales introduced new trains onto the South Wales Valley lines that have level boarding technology to reduce the gap between the train and the platform. Transport for Wales also told us it is working to alter station platforms along the South Wales Valley lines to deliver full level boarding. Despite the huge positive impact of these improvements, Merseyrail remains the only operator to achieve comprehensive level boarding across its entire network. This represents perhaps the most damning indictment of the industry's approach to accessibility.

In the scorecard we gave half a point to operators who told us about ramps that could be used by parents with pushchairs for safe boarding as long as details were also provided about the assistance available from trained staff to deploy the ramp. However, evidently we need to adjust how we approach the question of level-boarding in future scorecards. The persistent reliance on staff-operated ramps demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of family travel realities. Train operators continue to treat ramps and manual boarding assistance as adequate provision, appearing to ignore the frequent unavailability of staff, particularly on very busy or rural services. For solo parents attempting to board with a buggy and young children, the large gap between the platform and the train presents a serious safety hazard.

The economic case for level boarding has never been clearer. With leisure travel now representing over half of all rail journeys, operators can no longer justify infrastructure that puts up a barrier to travel for a large section of the population, including young families, people with reduced mobility, older people, and passengers with pushchairs, luggage, and bikes. Yet progress remains concentrated among a minority of forward-thinking operators, while the majority appear to treat level boarding as a luxury rather than an operational necessity.

Disruption policies: families forgotten in the chaos

Also troubling is the near-complete absence of family-specific disruption policies across the UK rail network. Only Merseyrail, LNER, East Midlands Railway, Eurostar, and ScotRail demonstrate an understanding that families with young children face particular challenges when services fail.

We found that 72% of operators that responded (13 out of 18) said their Passenger Information During Disruption (PIDD) plan made no mention of families or children. East Midlands Railway, Eurostar and ScotRail showed good awareness that families with young children need to be supported during times of disruption, but included families within a broader category of 'vulnerable passengers'. In our opinion, this approach does not acknowledge that parents travelling with babies and toddlers have specific, practical needs during disruptions.

When trains are cancelled, parents cannot simply wait indefinitely on platforms with hungry, tired children. When a severely delayed train eventually arrives at a platform, passengers crowd

around doors, making it virtually impossible to get a pushchair/pram and young children on an already busy train. When rail replacement buses are deployed, standard coaches cannot accommodate unfolded pushchairs, forcing parents to collapse buggies while holding young children and managing luggage. It is not guaranteed that rail replacement buses will accommodate pushchairs or prams even in luggage storage, meaning families may not be able to use rail replacements at all. When taxis are ordered, car seats are generally unavailable.

The best answers in this category described specific policies and procedures to support families with young children during disruption, or combined mention of young children in policies with strong staff training. Merseyrail's use of accessible double-decker buses with "kneel to curb" technology is a good example of a technical solution for families in disruption planning, while in contrast, LNER places heavy emphasis in its staff training on identifying and prioritising support for families during disruption. Across much of the rest of the network, families with young children appear to remain an afterthought in crisis management, left to cope with wholly inadequate alternatives that assume all passengers have identical needs.

The non-responders: action required

Five operators - c2c, Govia Thameslink Railway, Great Western Railway, South Western Railway, and TfL Rail - did not respond to our request for information. Chiltern Railways replied but would not answer the questionnaire. Collectively, these operators represent a significant portion of the network, particularly concentrated in the South East, where many families depend on rail services for essential journeys.

Their silence speaks volumes about priorities and values. These operators serve millions of passengers annually, yet seemingly cannot spare time to engage with basic questions about family accessibility. In an era when leisure travel drives industry revenues, such disengagement represents not just poor attention to customers' needs, but appears to show lack of awareness of a commercial opportunity that other companies are more alive to.

The persistent refusal to engage from Great Western Railways, South Western, and Chiltern Railways after three scorecards suggests these operators either consider family needs irrelevant to their business model, or assume they can continue ignoring the issue without commercial consequence. Either position is becoming increasingly untenable as demographic shifts and changing travel patterns reshape the industry landscape.

5. Areas for improvement

While systemic challenges persist, the scorecard reveals numerous opportunities for operators to make meaningful progress. The success of operators leading in the scorecard shows that family-friendly improvements often demand solid understanding of the issues, willingness to innovate, and commitment from senior decision-makers.

Quick wins: information, signs and staff training

Many operators could improve their scores through better use of existing facilities and clearer communication. Website improvements and clearer signage represent achievable goals for most operators, yet six operators out of the 18 that responded still did not have a dedicated webpage with clear information for families about the facilities available and how to access them.

West Midlands Railway's approach to external signage offers a template that other operators with multi-use space (i.e. Northern, ScotRail, TransPennine Express) could adopt immediately, while longer-term solutions are developed. West Midlands Railway's use of pushchair symbols on carriage exteriors helps families identify suitable boarding points for the multi-use space, reducing platform dwell time and boarding stress. Similar visual cues could be implemented in relevant parts of the network at minimal cost.

Staff training represents another area where rapid progress is possible. LNER's comprehensive family-focused modules demonstrate what systematic training can achieve. The inclusion of age-specific guidance - recognising that travelling with babies, toddlers, and school-age children presents different challenges - shows sophistication that other operators could emulate quickly.

Train operators' approach to breastfeeding differs hugely. On one hand, CrossCountry told us it has incorporated breastfeeding awareness into staff briefing materials and customer-facing training, while LNER's family lounges provide a comfortable and private area for breastfeeding. In stark contrast, Greater Anglia told us its accessible toilets on board trains can be used as a private space for breastfeeding. Toilets are neither hygienic, comfortable nor a dignified place to feed a baby and major public bodies such as [the NHS](#) advocate against feeding babies in toilets. Support for breastfeeding could easily be more consistent across the UK rail network.

Passenger Assist: untapped potential

The inconsistent availability and promotion of assistance for families represents a massive missed opportunity. Only four operators - Merseyrail, Eurostar, Southeastern, and Transport for Wales - appear to actively advertise assistance for parents travelling with children. The majority of operators said Passenger Assist, as a national scheme, is only available to people with a disability and, as currently defined, does not include provision for families.

Yet the Passenger Assist infrastructure exists across the network to extend this support immediately to parents travelling solo with young children under 5. Solo parents represent a particularly vulnerable group, often struggling with boarding, luggage management, and platform navigation while supervising children. The existing Passenger Assist framework could easily address these challenges within the existing infrastructure. The key barrier appears to be financial rather than technical, with concerns that opening the service to families would overwhelm resources. Yet this concern overlooks the fact that non-disabled parents/carers travelling together in a pair or group tend not to require Passenger Assistance for boarding, as there is another adult already there to help. Opening the service to parents travelling solo with

children under 5 would have an enormous benefit, while being specific enough to be manageable within the current framework. We strongly suggest the rail industry takes the initiative to trial widening the provision of Passenger Assist for parents travelling solo with children under 5.

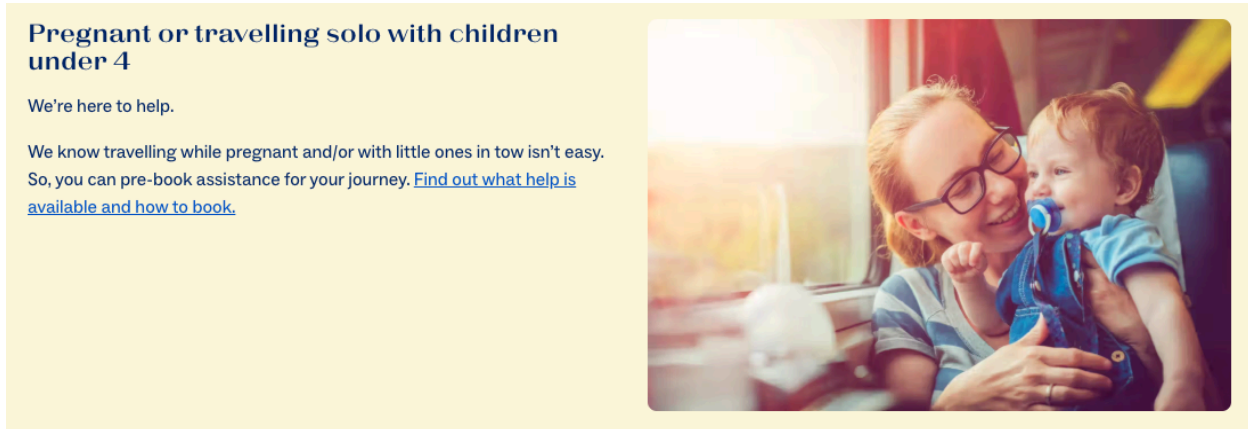


Image: screenshot of Eurostar website advertising pre-booked assistance for parents traveling solo with children under 4 (Credit: [Eurostar](#))

Disruption: supporting families during service failure

The development of family-specific disruption policies could transform the experience of families during service failures. Templates could be developed industry-wide, addressing common scenarios like extended delays, rail replacement buses, and the protocol for ordering taxis with car seats for children when used as alternative transport.

Key elements should include provisions for accessible alternative transport, priority rebooking for families with young children, prioritising access to trains, prioritising families for alternative transport, and clear communication about facilities available during delays, in addition to the more standard refreshment provision and increased information and updates. Merseyrail's approach to accessible alternative transport offers a model that other operators could adapt to their specific circumstances and service patterns.

Staff empowerment represents another crucial element. Frontline personnel need clear authority and guidance to support families during disruptions, including clear policies on ticket validity for station staff and conductors, access to family facilities, and clear policies that enable staff to help families access safe, appropriate alternative transport. The current ad hoc approach leaves both staff and families uncertain about available support during critical moments.

Future procurement: embedding family design

While new train orders represent long-term commitment, operators beginning procurement processes have the opportunity to embed family-friendly design from the outset. Our [Family](#)

[Friendly Pledge](#) provides a commitment that operators could adopt immediately, ensuring future fleets incorporate dedicated spaces for pushchairs regardless of current constraints.

The success of Merseyrail's co-design process, involving families directly in train specification and testing, offers a methodology that could be replicated across different service types. Rather than consulting families after designs are finalised, involving them in the specification process ensures family needs are integrated rather than retrofitted.

For operators several years away from new trains, refurbishment programmes offer interim opportunities for improvement. Even limited modifications - better signage, reconfigured seating arrangements, improved toilet facilities - can deliver meaningful benefits for families while more comprehensive solutions are developed.

6. Conclusion

The 2025 scorecard reveals a rail industry at a crossroads. While pioneers demonstrate that comprehensive family-friendly design is both achievable and commercially sensible, the majority of operators appear trapped in outdated thinking that treats families as an inconvenience rather than a core customer segment. With leisure travel now driving over half of all rail journeys, the misalignment between passenger demographics and service design has the potential to become economically unsustainable.

Three years of our scorecards have eliminated any excuse for inaction: the technology exists, successful models are in operation, and there is evidence in support of the business case. The operators making progress demonstrate that success requires commitment, creativity and innovation. Operators that continue to ignore family needs are not simply failing current passengers but missing a major commercial opportunity by disincentivising a growing passenger group. The question is no longer whether family-friendly rail travel is possible, but which operators will seize the opportunity and which will be left behind as passenger expectations and travel patterns continue to evolve.

7. Recommendations

We want the rail network to be designed with the needs of families in mind. We are asking train operating companies to sign up to five commitments, our Family Friendly Pledge:

1. Design trains with unfolded buggy spaces with seating for parents/carers nearby.

- Train operators should never order a new train or undertake a refurbishment without providing dedicated space for unfolded prams/pushchairs. These spaces must be separate and distinct from dedicated space for wheelchair users.
- On long distance services these spaces should be reservable and on metropolitan commuter routes where reservations do not exist, these spaces should be clearly marked as priority for prams/pushchairs.

2. Ensure clean and accessible toilets with baby changing facilities.

- Train operators should consider the needs of young children and parents when designing toilets on trains and at stations. At the bare minimum, all toilets should be clean, accessible with a pram/pushchair and have baby changing facilities.
- We strongly recommend that operating companies consider other features, such as a toddler toilet seat and a child seat with a restraint that allows parents to put young children somewhere other than the toilet floor whilst using the toilet themselves.

3. Improve staff training and assistance for families with young children.

- Operating companies should prominently include the needs of families in customer service training. Customer service training should encompass the specific needs of different ages of children (babies, toddlers, school-age children etc) and it should be made available to both new and existing staff.
- Passenger Assist services - both bookable and 'Turn Up And Go' services - should be extended to parents travelling alone with young children (under 5s), and advertised as such.

4. Improve communication and engagement for families with young children

- Train operators should have a dedicated page on their website with information for families, detailing the facilities and services available and how to access them.
- Train operators should provide live information on where best to stand on the platform through clear signposting of family-friendly spaces - on the outside of the train and on the platform - allowing for speedy boarding
- Train operators should have detailed policies and plans in place to cover a range of eventualities and provide different ways staff can support families during times of travel disruption.

5. Support breastfeeding on the UK rail network

- Train operators should sign up to the BfN Breastfeeding Friendly Scheme and display the BfN Breastfeeding Friendly logo in stations and on trains.

We also ask train operating companies to work with other UK rail industry bodies to:

1. Ensure step-free access to the platform and level boarding from platform to train.

- We support the Campaign for Level Boarding's target to achieve level boarding across the UK rail network by 2040.

Annex

- [Questionnaire and scoring matrix](#)
- [Family-friendly scorecard 2023](#)
- [Family-friendly scorecard 2022: how does each Train Operating Company fare?](#)
- [Family Friendly Pledge](#)
- [Family-friendly trains: A Best Practice Guide](#)

The information in this document has been obtained from sources believed reliable and in good faith but any potential interpretation of this report as making an allegation against a specific company or companies named would be misleading and incorrect. The authors accept no liability whatsoever for any direct or consequential loss arising from the use of this document or its contents.