

Bike and train: more and better

Rosalie Nijenhuis, project manager Space for Bikes, NS Railinfrabeheer
Postbus 2146, 3500 GC Utrecht, The Netherlands
RGA.Nijenhuis@Railinfrabeheer.nl

More and better. Those are the key words when it comes to the combination of bike and train. This morning I aim to tell you more about the subject. But first let me introduce myself.

My name is Rosalie Nijenhuis, and I am a project manager at NS Railinfrabeheer. Railinfrabeheer will be part of the Netherlands railways concern until the end of this year, but even today is working on behalf of and for the account of central government. Our core task is to ensure that transport companies are able to make optimum use of the railway network and the stations.

Over the next few years, Railinfrabeheer aims to spend 460 million guilders on bicycle sheds at railway stations. Why? To answer that question, let us go back a little in time.

When Netherlands Railways was made independent in 1995, the government took on responsibility for bicycle facilities at stations. The government considers sufficient bicycle facilities an essential precondition for a smoothly functioning station, equal in importance to the tracks and platforms. The government is therefore investing in bicycles, via NS Railinfrabeheer.

The background is that the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management aims to promote the combination of bike and train as an environmentally-friendly alternative to the car. But that means changes. Quite rightly, the public imposes certain conditions. Studies have shown that more people will use the train if there are more and better bicycle facilities. This is because passengers wish to be able to travel comfortably from door to door. If they have to spend a long time looking for a safe place to park their bicycle, or have to walk a long distance to do so, they will opt for the car instead. The same applies if in rainy weather, bicycle saddles become wet, or if there is no space in the dry, to put on waterproof clothing.

At present, in the Netherlands, stations offer 143,000 free bicycle “parking spaces”, 112,000 spaces in guarded sheds and 16,000 bicycle safes. Given the considerable growth in the number of passengers over the next ten years, it will be necessary to increase these numbers anyway, quite apart from the ambitions for increasing the combined use of bike and train. We therefore will be providing those additional spaces.

At the same time, we will be matching the bicycle sheds more to the quality requirements of the passengers. In other words, we are working towards both more and better.

First of all, in collaboration with a whole range of interest groups, central government developed standards which must be met by new bicycle sheds in new stations. These standards were formalised in December 1997. An inventory was then carried out of the bicycle parking facilities at existing

stations. This inventory showed that 460 million guilders would be necessary, for modernising existing bicycle sheds according to the new standards.

But were these funds available? Absolutely not.

Until 1998, the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management had reserved almost no money for the period through to 2010 (only 5 million guilders a year). This left a shortfall of 410 million guilders. Following the approval of a motion in the Lower House, the required funds were found, to carry out the bicycle shed programme. In 1999, in collaboration with NS Stations and Railned, Railinfrabeheer submitted an action plan for the modernisation of 380 locations, to the Minister. This action plan was supported by NS Passengers, the Union of Netherlands Municipalities, the Cyclists' Union and the Passengers' Association ROVER.

As a result, simultaneously with the expansion programme, all bicycle sheds will be improved according to the new standards.

You may well ask what those new standards demand. Let me give you the main outlines.

- Free facilities will be roofed at a height of at least 2.10 m, so that the bicycles remain dry, and the owners do not bang their heads.
- Bicycle racks will be given a wider centre-to-centre separation, so that mountain bikes and racing bikes can also be easily parked. The racks must also comply with the requirements imposed by Fietsparkeur, the inspection mark for theft protection. After all, it must be possible to safely attach the bicycle to the rack.
- Guarded sheds are often fitted with stack racks. These racks, with bicycles on two levels, were installed to save space. However, only men use the upper level, and – preferably – not wearing their best clothing. In other words, the stack rack is far from ideal. The new programme will offer an alternative, so bicycles need not be lifted. This system will also be usable by women, in their best clothes. Here, too, the centre-to-centre separation will be increased from 33 to 37.5 cm.
- The last, but not least important standard relates to walking distances between the bike sheds and the station entrance. The current standard for free sheds is a maximum of 50 metres, and for guarded sheds 250 metres. Given the huge numbers, it is not always practical to comply with these standards – there is simply not enough space. In such cases, the spirit of the standard is applied – namely placement as close as possible to the station entrance.

The most important thing now is that the plans and standards do not remain only on paper. And we are currently well on the way to transforming them into reality. Let me summarise.

- We have now started on the urban planning for 150 locations. At each of these locations, bicycles will be counted, already taking account of a 20% increase in numbers. The plans will then be discussed with the local authorities.
- At the same time, following a European tendering process, we have developed a new design for the roofing of the free bicycle sheds.

- The design process for the stack rack is not yet completed.
- The building licensing procedures are already complete in a number of locations. At present, in Deurne in Brabant, we are in the process of building the first shed which fully complies with the new standards.

We are right on schedule with the conversion programme according to the standards. As we talk here, we are already creating space for bicycles, at railway stations. This year alone, 61 of the 380 stations will be converted. Following conversion, they come under the management of NS Stations. I would like to refer to the contribution of Martin Vermeul, where you can find more about those management activities.