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Dear Jacqueline

Compulsory reservations, with or without an allocated seat

The introduction by some train companies of compulsory reservations, with or without an allocated seat, has created new challenges for passengers – not least in understanding what is going on. We wish to raise four points:

1. Crystal clear explanations are needed when **no** fares show against a particular train because it has reached its Covid-safe capacity. Some websites (including National Rail Enquiries) gives no explanation and we have noted three different phrases: sold out, no availability, not available on retail sites. Might “train full” better emphasise the reason? Perhaps in conjunction with “standard class full” where First Class seats remain available”? Whatever words are used, consistency across sites would help passengers. See images A, B, and C.
2. As well as the words ‘train full’, ‘sold out’ or whatever, there should be one click link to a succinct explanation that this particular train has reached its Covid-safe capacity and therefore tickets cannot be bought for it.
3. Sold out trains should continue to show – alongside suitable alternatives where they exist – to help passengers understand that there is a train at that time, but it is full. Image D shows the message “no tickets are available” when there were Basingstoke to Birmingham options via London.
4. Messaging must be accurate and consistent between the retail and non-retail parts of train company websites, as well as within the retailing parts of a site. Images E, F, G and H show that this is not always the case. Train companies operating compulsory reservations must be absolutely clear:
 - whether the reservation is on the basis of an allocated seat or simply the right to get on
 - how passengers make a reservation if they have already bought a flexible ticket, including a season ticket
 - how passengers can change a reservation if they need to catch a different train, assuming their ticket type allows itAlso, train companies need to be accurate within their retailing pages about the arrangements other operators have in place – see image I.

Please would RDG work with its members to improve the accuracy, consistency and clarity on train company websites – including within the ticket retailing pages?

I look forward to hearing from you, and if there is anything we can do to help please ask.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Guy Dangerfield', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Guy Dangerfield
Head of Strategy

Encl.

Appendix

Image A

Train times & tickets

[Edit journey / add return](#)
[Passengers & railcards](#)
[Print](#)
[Save](#)

Bournemouth [BMH] to Birmingham New Street [BHM]

1st First class From £130.00 **Buy cheapest for £ 74.90**

"Set up journey alerts" [Other cheap fares](#)

Outward **Fri 11 Sep**

[Earlier trains](#) **Long journey? Why not upgrade to First Class from £55.10** Single from **£74.90**

Based on 1 adult

Dep. From	Dur. Chg.	Arr. To	Status
Departs at 08:22 Bournemouth [BMH]	4h 23m 2 change(s) view details	Arrives 12:45 Birmingham New Street [BHM]	✓
Buy from Avanti West Coast			
Departs at 09:45 Bournemouth [BMH]	3h 03m 0 change(s) view details	Arrives 12:48 Birmingham New Street [BHM]	⚠
Buy from Select train operator			
Departs at 10:22 Bournemouth [BMH]	4h 23m 2 change(s) view details	Arrives 14:45 Birmingham New Street [BHM]	✓

CHEAPEST FARE
£74.90 **Buy Now**
Off-Peak [Other tickets](#)

[Other services you can travel on](#)

Image B

[Home](#)
[My account](#)
[Help](#)
[Sign-up for an account](#)

[Single](#)
[One adult](#)
[No railcards or promos](#)
[Direct trains only](#)
[Go via layout](#)

Bournemouth Birmingham New Street
 Outbound **Fri 11 Sep, 08:00**
[+ Return](#)
[Search](#)

1. Journey details | 2. **Train times** | 3. Choose seats | 4. Getting tickets | 5. Payment | 6. Confirmation

Single from Bournemouth to Birmingham New Street

CrossCountry: Please book your space before you travel. If you are making a journey with CrossCountry, we strongly advise that you book a place on the train as availability is limited due to social distancing. If you don't book a place you may not...

Select Outbound
Friday 11 Sep 2020
Bournemouth (BMH) to Birmingham New Street (BHM)

[Earlier](#)
[Later](#)

	BMH 08:22	BMH 09:45	BMH 10:22	BMH 11:47
	↓	↓	↓	↓
	BHM 12:45	BHM 12:48	BHM 14:45	BHM 14:48
	4h 23m 2 changes	3h 3m 0 change	4h 23m 2 changes	3h 1m 0 change
Cheapest Standard Single	£74.90	Sold out	£74.90	Sold out
Cheapest 1st Class Single		Sold		Sold

[+ Add a Return](#)

Image C

LNER LONDON NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

Your journey Journey Preferences Delivery Details Payment Confirmation

LONDON TERMINALS to Newcastle > 1 Adult [Edit journey](#)

Go Cheaper **£71.00** Total [View](#) Go Classier **£117.50** Total [View](#) Go Faster **£71.00** Total [View](#) ☐ Direct Trains Only ☐ Show LNER only [Filters](#)

Outward Journey [Try our Fare-Finder](#)

< 10 Sep **Fri 11 Sep** 12 Sep >

	Fixed tickets Travel on a specific train		Flexible tickets Flexibility to travel when you need				
	Advance Single	Advance Single (1st Cla...)	Super Off-Peak Single	Anytime Single	Off-Peak Single (1st Cl...	Anytime Single (1st Cla...	Anytime Single (1st Cla...
Earlier trains ^ Depart > Arrive LNER 16:00 > 18:50 2h 50m 0 changes View all fares	£71.00	£117.50 Only 3 left	£74.30	£165.00	£200.50	£254.00	£255.50
LNER 16:30 > 19:41 3h 11m 0 changes View all fares	No availability	No availability	No availability	No availability	£200.50	£254.00	£255.50
LNER 17:00 > 19:51 2h 51m	£71.00	£151.00 Only 3 left	£74.30	£165.00	£200.50	£254.00	£255.50

Image D

Example of no trains showing when no tickets are available. We advocate the alternatives, where there are any, showing instead – in this case options via London.

cross country Home My account Help Sign-up for an account Sign in

Where would you like to go?

Single One adult No railcards or promos

Basingstoke Birmingham New Street Outbound: Fri 11 Sep, 08:00 + Return Search

☐ Direct trains only ☐ Go via / avoid

No tickets are available, please refine your search

Images E and F

The Avanti West Coast website says reservations are strongly recommended, but the retailing pages of the same website say that reservations are mandatory even for previously 'walk up'



Travel at quieter times

We're encouraging customers to **book travel for quieter periods**. Currently, our busiest times are between 9.30am-2pm, and 4pm-6pm and all day on Friday. To help you understand when services are becoming too busy, we'll highlight popular trains when you book a ticket on our website. **You can also view busy trends here**. Please take this into account and choose a quieter service where possible.

Book ahead

To help manage social distancing on our trains, we've significantly reduced the seating capacity. Therefore, we strongly recommend you **book your tickets ahead and make a seat reservation**. If you don't have a reservation for your preferred train, there's no guarantee you'll be able to board. Bookings can be made up to five minutes before your scheduled departure on our website or app.



Make a seat reservation

All Advance tickets will come with a reservation. If you're booking a flexible ticket (Off-Peak or Anytime) in advance, please request a reservation with it.

The screenshot shows the 'Travel options' section of the Avanti West Coast website. It features a 'Seating reservation' panel with a train icon and text stating that reservations are mandatory for the chosen ticket. Below this are three dropdown menus for 'Direction', 'Position', and 'Coach type', all set to 'No preference'. To the right of these are two toggle switches for 'Table seat' and 'Near toilet', both currently turned off. A blue informational box at the bottom of the panel states: 'Not all seating requests can be guaranteed but we will try our best to honour them all.' On the right side of the page, a dark box displays the 'Total price' as '£40.80' with a prominent orange 'Continue' button. Below this, a summary of the journey is shown: 'Fri 11 Sep, 16:10', 'Birmingham New Street to London Euston', '1h 24m • 0 change', and '1 Adult, 0 Child'. At the bottom right, there is a badge for '84% CUSTOMER SATISFACTION' and a note about the NRPS survey.

Images G and H

The GWR website says that you can reserve a **space** but you will not get an allocated seat, whereas the retailing pages refer to **seat** reservations.

[Buy tickets](#)[Plan journey](#)[Travel updates](#)[Destinations and events](#)[Help and support](#)

Stay safe

Wear a face covering and bring hand sanitiser with you.


Buy in advance

Buy your tickets online or on the GWR app before you travel. Or, go paperless with a **mobile e-ticket** or our **touch smartcard**.

This will reduce contact with other people and help with social distancing at stations. If you travel between Reading and London Paddington, use Contactless pay as you go (though we will still accept cash at our ticket offices and ticket machines).

Make a reservation

We're limiting the number of spaces available on our trains. So, reserve a space where you can. We'll confirm the service you're on but won't give you a seat number. This will enable customers to spread themselves out once on board.

1. Tickets 

2. Extras

3. Delivery


4. Review

5. Payment

Seats and Extras

Journey 1

Outward seats

 London Paddington to Bristol Temple Meads

Seat reservation is mandatory for this journey. Please reserve a seat

We'll always do our best to find the best seat for you.

Reserve a seat

Image I

The GWR website advises passengers to book a space on CrossCountry trains, seemingly unaware that CrossCountry has 'gone mandatory'.

The screenshot shows the GWR website interface with a 'Route details' modal open. The modal contains the following information:

- Warning:** London Paddington station has a one way system in operation at busy times.
- CrossCountry:** Please book your space before you travel. If you are making a journey with CrossCountry, we strongly advise that you book a place on the train as availability is limited due to social distancing. If you don't book a place you may not be able to travel on your preferred service.
- More details** (link)
- Duration:** 1h 43m
- Changes:** 1
- On board facilities:** Reservation compulsory, First Class, Standard Class, Trolley service.
- Route:** London Paddington (09:48) to Bristol Parkway (11:03) via Great Western Railway towards Swansea (1h 15m).
- Buttons:** Print screen, Close.

In the background, the website shows a journey from London Terminals to Bristol Parkway, with a table of ticket prices and an 'Order Summary' section.

Dep	Arr	Chg	Dur
09:32	11:07	0	1h 35m
09:48	11:31	1	1h 43m

Single tickets (1 Adult)

Ticket Type	Price
Off-Peak Single	£51.50
Anytime Day Single	£112.10

Order Summary

Please select your Outward journey to continue

Total: £0 (All passengers)

Continue

Need help?

The most popular questions people ask when they're buying from us

View help