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15 September 2020

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 <u>no</u> 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 <u>is</u> 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 it

Also, 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

Guy Dangerfield Head of Strategy

Encl.

Appendix

Image A

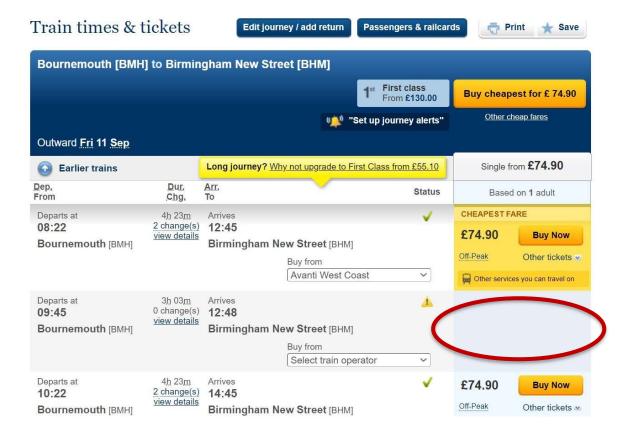


Image B

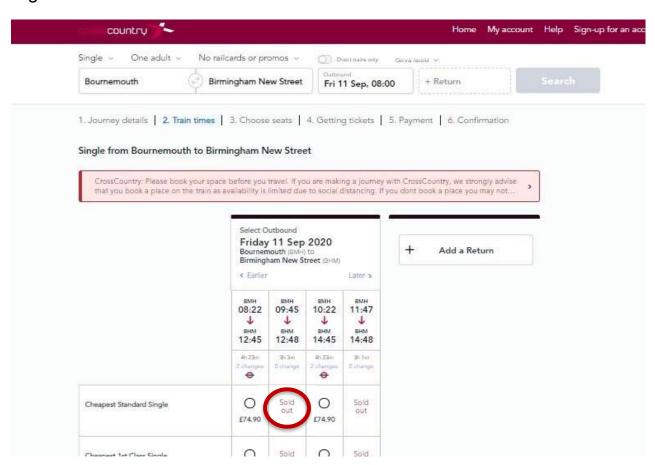


Image C

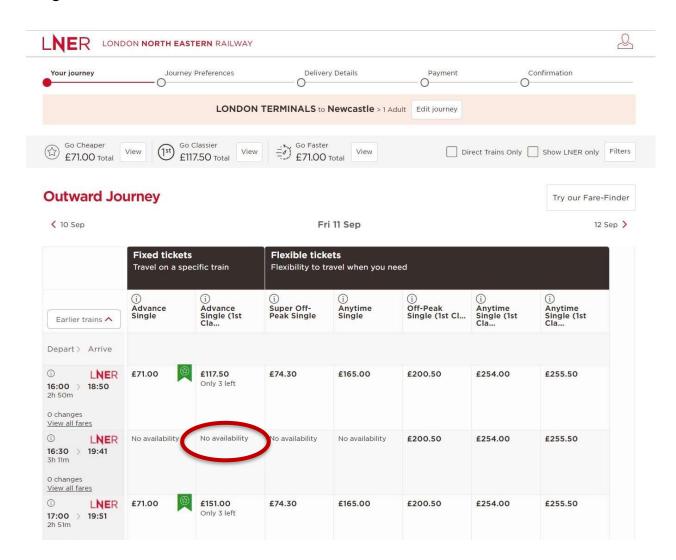
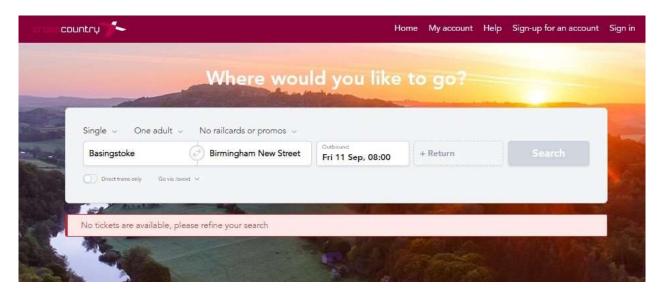


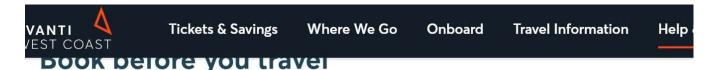
Image D

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.



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

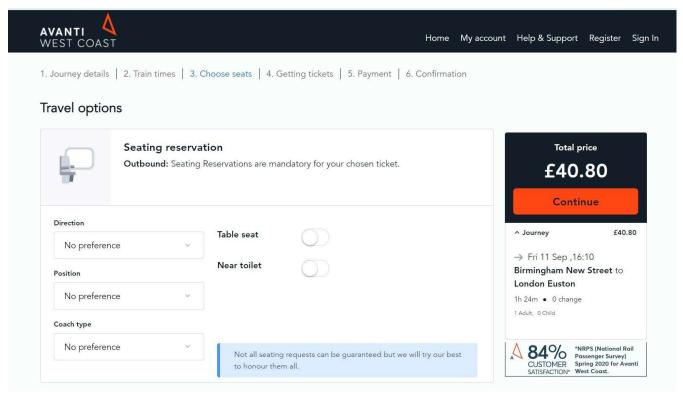
We're encouraging customers to book travel for quieter periods. Currently, our busiest times are between 9.30am-2pm, and 4pm-6pm and all day on Friday. To help you understand when services are becoming too busy, we'll highlight popular trains when you book a ticket on our website. You can also view busy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

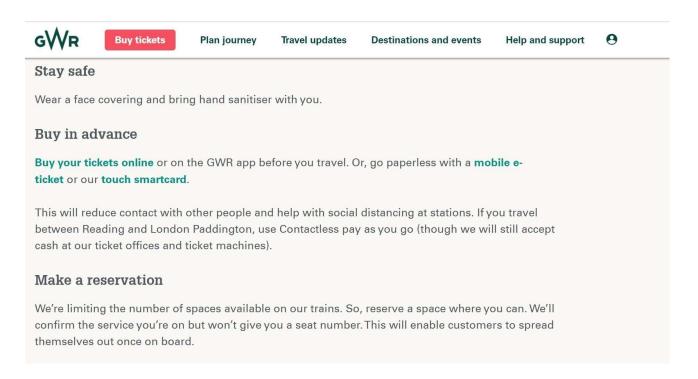
Make a seat reservation

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.



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.



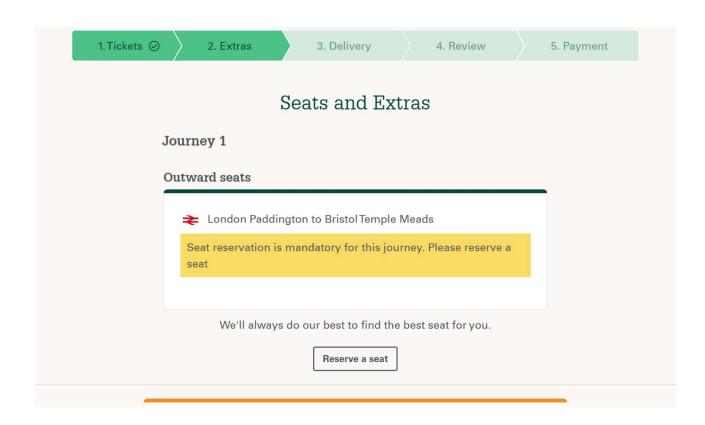


Image I

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

