

# guestcolumn



## The outrage of the train

First-class rail carriages are an anachronism, says **Annie Makoff**. So why can't we use them to make travel easier for disabled passengers?

I decided, while boarding the 08.23 train to work one morning, to push my way through the crowds and take advantage of the first-class seating.

I have an artificial leg and, quite frankly, I needed the seat. But it wasn't a ticket inspector who challenged me but a first-class passenger.

"No you fucking don't," he declared, barely taking his eyes from his laptop. "You don't have the right ticket."

Taken aback, I asked him how he knew.

He looked at me with what seemed like expert eyes. "I know you haven't. I can tell." He turned back to his laptop. It crossed my mind to explain that because I had an artificial leg, I was unable to stand for long periods of time.

But this, I decided, would sound as if I was pleading for sympathy. And to state such a personal fact to the entire carriage was humiliating. Instead I said, "I'd really like to sit down."

"I couldn't give a toss,

darling," he replied, at which point I realised that the fight was hopeless and I moved away. If only I'd had some gum to stick on his designer jacket...

Now, I'm sure he was a very busy man. I'm also sure, by the reaction of others, that his attitude was in the minority. But the experience got me thinking. Why do we still have first-class carriages? It's bad enough that trains are usually delayed or even

**“Why should wealth determine the comfort of a journey?”**

cancelled and tickets are overpriced. But for those of us who aren't as able-bodied as the vast majority of Brits, why should wealth determine the comfort of a journey?

It doesn't have to be this way. Sectioning off first-class areas on the buses or the tube would be ridiculous – so why do it on mainline train services?



JAMIE TROUNCE

Yes, we now oblige train companies to accommodate wheelchair-users in first-class areas, at no extra cost. This is one of the public service "reasonable adjustments" made by the rail industry in the wake of the Disability Discrimination Act.

But let's go a step further. Let's convert first-class carriages into "priority areas" for those with mobility problems as well as others who may need them (the elderly, pregnant women, etc).

Edward Funnell, director of communications for the

Association of Train Operating Companies, does not agree. "We do have priority seats in our standard carriages, which people are aware of," he says. "But there is only so much we can do. We have to cater for society as a whole."

He believes that people will generally offer their seats to those less able to stand. But how often does this happen, especially in the rush hour? And for those with less-visible disabilities, relying on the goodwill of fellow passengers for a seat just isn't good enough.

### → Have your say

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