

03 June 2024

To whom it may concern,

We write to you regarding the problem of late release of "Sail & Rail" tickets¹ for people travelling from Britain to Ireland² when the relevant train tickets are released for sale.

Opportunity Green, Transport Action Network, Campaign for Better Transport, Aviation Environment Federation and Transport and Environment UK are calling on Transport for Wales, Avanti West Coast, Irish Ferries and Stena Line to work together to resolve this urgent issue. We are also sending a copy to the Irish government and the UK Department of Transport, to await the next government, to encourage their attention to this issue.

While the delayed release of Sail & Rail tickets may seem like a small problem, it is, to the contrary, a driver of continued demand for highly polluting air travel. Effective policy change is therefore imperative to encourage lower emissions travel on one of the busiest air routes in Europe.

Aviation is one of the fastest-growing sources of the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions driving global climate change. In fact, it is currently the most carbon intensive activity an individual can do. According to the UK Climate Change Committee's [Sixth Carbon Budget](#), aviation emissions accounted for 7% of the UK's total GHG emissions in 2018, a shocking 124% above 1990 levels, with demand levels only increasing. Aviation is on track to make up [more than half](#) of the UK's 1.5°C carbon budget by 2050.

The travel route between Ireland and Britain is hugely popular. In terms of air travel demand, Ireland and the United Kingdom consistently place on [the list of top twenty country pairs for international travel](#) by seat numbers.³ Unsurprisingly, this equates to a significant number of flights per day (in 2022 there were between [117 – 153 flights a day between the UK and Ireland](#), already close to a return to pre-pandemic levels of 1044 a week) and an enormous daily emissions contribution. Emissions from a single return flight from London to Dublin are ~174.8 Kg CO2. [Sail & Rail emissions are at least 73% less](#) than this. This is without considering the non-CO2 impacts of aviation, which could double the climate impact of each flight. In addition, ferries can be electrified and will need to do so soon in order to meet the UK's net

¹ "Sail & Rail" tickets are combined tickets that include both the rail and the ferry between Ireland & the UK. They are sold at standard price bands depending on the distance traveled which makes the travel approximately four times cheaper, depending on when booked.

² This doesn't apply to people traveling from Ireland who can purchase open rail tickets when they purchase their Sail & Rail ticket directly from Irish Ferries & Stena Line. But this option is only available if your journey originates in Ireland.

³ This source is regularly updated to account for monthly data revision. The authors of this letter cannot accept responsibility for changes to information on the linked webpage.

zero commitments. This will bring even greater savings, further supporting the need to ensure it is easy for travelers to book tickets.

As noted by the UK Climate Change Committee in their [latest update to Parliament](#): "Demand management is the most effective way of reducing aviation CO2 and non-CO2 emissions. The Government has a range of options to manage demand, such as digital technologies, addressing private flying and providing lower-cost domestic rail travel. The Government should develop a suite of policy and technology options to address aviation demand."

Providing effective Sail & Rail alternatives to air travel is a great way to reduce aviation demand and bring about immediate emissions reductions. Transport for Wales, Avanti West Coast, Irish Ferries and Stena Line could enable many more people to travel by Sail & Rail by simply working together to release Sail & Rail tickets as soon as the relevant train tickets become available.

By way of example, prior to 2020 when the train fares were released for the London to Holyhead route, the Sail & Rail tickets were also released at the same time. It was understandable with the pandemic and rail strikes that this dual-release of tickets would be disrupted but now in June 2024, it's time to reinstate the dual-release of tickets. Currently, as of 3rd June April 2024, train tickets are bookable from London to Holyhead for any date up to the 23rd August 2024. Separately, ferry tickets are bookable from Holyhead to Dublin for dates well beyond even 23rd August. However, a Sail & Rail ticket from London to Dublin can only be booked up to 15th July.⁴ And any dates after this display "no fares available" but no indication that those fares will be released at a later date. This matters because booking the two tickets separately makes it significantly more expensive, so it is much more likely that people will choose to fly over taking the train/ferry. In addition, as it is international travel, many people will want to book significantly in advance.

Opportunity Green has asked Transport for Wales, Avanti West Coast, Irish Ferries and Stena Line, respectively, multiple times, why the Sail & Rail tickets are released only five weeks in advance (and sometimes much less than that) of the travel date.⁵ We have never received a concrete answer, each company has stated that they are waiting for the other companies to release tickets.

We appreciate that this might seem like a small thing, but it could significantly deter people from choosing the more climate-friendly option of travel. We know that [consumers are](#)

⁴ Routes chosen as examples, different starting and ending destinations as Sail & Rail tickets are similarly restricted from sale.

⁵ See for example this twitter thread: [Aoife O'Leary on X: "@AvantiWestCoast Can you help me with why I can book a train from London to Holyhead on December 20th but not a sail and rail please? Thank you" / X \(twitter.com\)](#) though most conversations were over the phone to the customer service lines.

[increasingly considering their climate impact](#) when they choose to fly, and this small change in ticket release will enable even more people to avoid those unnecessary flights.

Therefore, today, the co-signatories are calling on each of your four companies to work together to resolve this issue. We stand willing, ready and able to work with the companies and the governments to ensure that Sail & Rail tickets are easily purchasable by everyone traveling from Great Britain to Ireland.

Regards,

Opportunity Green

**OPPORTUNITY
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Transport Action Network



Campaign for Better Transport



Aviation Environment Federation



Transport & Environment UK

