



Pet owners have responded positively to the possibility of allowing pets on board high-speed trains. — IC

# A fur-st class for pets on high-speed trains? It's an idea under discussion

Lu Feiran

**M**ost pet owners want to take their beloved animals with them wherever they go — and that includes train trips.

The customer service center of China Railway is conducting a survey to gauge public opinion on the issue of allowing pets on trains.

The 15 questions ask respondents if they have pets, and if so, what kind. They ask whether they would like their pets to be allowed on trains. They ask non-pet owners how they would feel about sharing passenger space with animals.

Well, we are supposed to be a pet-friendly society.

Currently, pets can travel in baggage cars on some trains, but it's not easy to find a train that provides the service. Only slow train services that tag baggage can accept pets, and in this high-speed era, there aren't so many

slow trains anymore.

Safety is one issue. Baggage cars can be uncomfortable, stressful and even hazardous for pets, with their high temperatures and lack of fresh air.

The idea of allowing pets in passenger sections is welcomed by pet owners.

"Every year for the Spring Festival holiday, I have to leave my cat home alone for a week when I go back to my hometown," said Louisa Huang, a data analyst in Shanghai whose hometown is in Hubei Province.

"I don't trust pet shops to care for my cat, and I don't want to let strangers in my home when I'm away. It would be much better if I could take her home with me in the future."

Before a final decision is made, there are many factors to consider.

For one, what kinds of pets should be allowed on board?

Currently, aggressive or venomous animals — like bees and scorpions — are not accepted for baggage car

consignment. It's widely believed that only small-breed cats and dogs will be accepted as onboard passengers if pets are allowed on trains. Large animals would certainly encroach on the space of other passengers.

Then there's the issue of passengers without pets. Some people may be allergic to animal fur or feathers in the confined space of high-speed train cars. And the issue of animal poo also has to be considered.

What if pets stress out on board and owners lose control of them?

Furthermore, taking pets on board means that animals will stay with owners at railway stations and platforms. What kind of regulation is needed to ensure that the pets will be well managed in crowded spaces often full of children and seniors?

In Europe and North America, there is some precedent for allowing pets on trains.

The Pacific Surfliner Train in

California welcomes dogs and cats up to 20 pounds (9 kilograms) of combined weight of pet and carrier at a cost of US\$29. But each train accepts only five animals, so passengers need to book early.

Animals must be no younger than eight weeks old, and they have to remain in a pet carrier lodged under the seat throughout the trip.

European railway operators are a bit more lenient toward pets. Small dogs and pets in carriers may be taken on board most railways, and larger dogs usually have to be kept on a leash and require an additional ticket. A muzzle is often recommended. Passengers are required to take the EU pet passport with them.

These examples show that, yes, pets can enjoy a train ride with their owners, but that doesn't mean the idea will get a full green light in China. There are still issues to address, but the public survey is a good start.