

Can You Ride a Train, Bus, Plane, or Boat on Shabbat?

Many people assume it's forbidden to ride public transportation on Shabbat. But when we go back to the actual halacha — not social norms or popular assumptions — we see a different picture.

This summary presents the main points of the halachic teshuva based strictly on Torah and halacha, without adding new prohibitions or customs.

◆ Is It Melachah?

Riding passively in a vehicle is not one of the 39 melachot of Shabbat. The idea that electricity is automatically considered “fire” is incorrect. The 39 melachot are based on specific actions done in the desert, and electricity is not among them. Just because electricity can produce sparks doesn't make it fire. And sparks that sometimes happen when plugging something in are not wanted — and therefore not forbidden.

If you're not performing any melachah yourself — you're not driving, not turning anything on — the act of traveling itself is not prohibited.

◆ What About Techum Shabbat?

Techum Shabbat limits how far a person can walk outside their location — usually 2,000 amot (roughly 1 km).

- If someone boards before Shabbat begins, they get 2,000 amot from the point where they disembark. If they arrive inside a city, they can walk the entire city.
- If someone boards after Shabbat already began, their place is fixed where they were when Shabbat started, and they may only move 4 amot unless they remain above ground level. If they land in a City, they can walk the entire city.

But practically speaking, modern transportation is always above 10 tefachim (about 1 meter) — which means techum restrictions don't apply during the ride.

You only need to consider it once you get off the vehicle.

And in most real-life cases, people arrive inside a city, which gives them full range to move. Even if the airport or port is outside the city, there's usually a connecting bus or train. As long as you stay on the vehicle and only get off once you're in the city, you keep your mobility.

◆ What If the Company Is Jewish-Owned?

Some worry that riding on transportation owned by Jews is a problem. But this is a misunderstanding.

You're not asking them to do anything for you. The company is running a route that would happen anyway. You're just one of many passengers. This is not considered causing someone else to violate Shabbat, and it's not "placing a stumbling block" (*lifnei iver*) before someone — because you're not the one hiring or instructing the driver.

◆ **Mar'it Ayin and “Spirit of Shabbat”**

Some say it “looks bad” or “feels wrong.” But halacha doesn’t follow feelings.

There is no mar’it ayin (appearance of wrongdoing) when the action isn’t similar to a violation. And there’s no prohibition just because some people are mistaken about the halacha. That’s not mar’it ayin — that’s a social issue, and the answer is education, not adding prohibitions.

Shabbat is about ceasing melachah — not suffering or stagnation. The idea that you must sit still and be uncomfortable is not part of halacha.

◆ **Carrying Items**

One important caution:

If you're carrying items like tickets, luggage, or bags, make sure you're not carrying them in a place without an eruv.

- If you’re arriving inside a city with an eruv — no problem.
- If not, leave the item on the vehicle and retrieve it after Shabbat.
- You may also ask a non-Jew to help in most situations, or with a Shinui.

Use your judgment and avoid carrying where it’s not permitted.

✅ Bottom Line

If you:

- Boarded before Shabbat, or stayed above 10 tefachim while traveling,
- Did not ask anyone to violate Shabbat for you,
- Did not perform any melachah yourself,
- And avoided carrying where it's forbidden —

Then riding transportation on Shabbat, like a bus, train, plane, or ship, is not a halachic problem.

This is not a leniency. It is the straightforward halacha.