

TICKET CHECKS ON TRAINS

“These trains are **always** late”. “You **never** see a conductor on this service”. These were the perennial moans of fellow passengers and at times I tended to agree with them. In 2002, I decided to find out for myself by recording details of every rail journey that I took.

I noted the date, train operating company, departure and arrival stations, scheduled and actual departure and arrival times, the delay to the arrival time and whether my ticket was checked on the train, at a station gateline or not at all, and stored these on an Excel spreadsheet. The original idea was to do this for about a year but, 14 years on, the spreadsheet is still growing with about 5,000 journeys recorded.

The time has come to analyse the ticket check results and find out how true those initial claims of fellow passengers were. Fortunately, I had rudimentary knowledge of Visual Basic to write some programs to interrogate the ticket check data.

The ticket checking statistics can be summarised as follows:-

- The percentage of on-board ticket checks has remained at approximately the same level over the 14 year period.
- A lower percentage of on-board ticket checks have been made on journeys to and from Birmingham since London Midland took over from Central Trains. For instance, on-board checks on the Stourbridge Line fell from 43.9% in Central Trains days to 29.2% when London Midland took over, rising to 32.9% when the Class 172 units took over from the Class 150's.
- On-board ticket checks on the Wolverhampton - Birmingham International corridor are well below 50% for all train operators with Virgin Trains only managing to check tickets on 6% of journeys to and from Birmingham International.
- The highest percentage of on-board checks (76.7%) in the Centro area is on the Stourbridge Town shuttle.
- CrossCountry Trains have an excellent record for on-board checks on their long distance trains with figures over 90%, achieving 95.7% on journeys to Bristol Temple Meads. This compares with Virgin Trains services to Euston which only achieved 60.8% from Wolverhampton and 56.2% from New Street.
- Greater Anglia (86.7%), Scotrail (83.3%) and TransPennine Express (81.2%) also score well for on-board checks. This compares with London Midland who managed 42.86%.
- The percentage not checked at all on the Stourbridge line dropped significantly after 2009 with the introduction of gatelines at Snow Hill and Moor Street.
- Gateline checks at New Street have dropped significantly since 2012.

Unfortunately, it would be impossible to detail all of my findings as they would fully occupy the next three editions of WMRU. Full statistics are available on the website (www.campaignforrail.org.uk) under the News and Comment tab. Fare evasion is a problem in the West Midlands. It would seem that more still needs to be done by the Train Operating Companies to counteract this.