

Campaign for Rail

Fares Consultation Response

The consultation began with 16 multiple choice questions on what should be considered, firstly on **Fares Structures** [e.g. basing fares on cost per mile travelled, whether to reflect levels of comfort or speed, whether to reflect demand (peak or off peak), whether booking in advance should be cheaper, whether fares should be linked to flexibility of travel, whether split ticketing should be possible, whether last minute deals should fill unsold seats, loyalty bonuses for regular travellers, discounts with railcards and finally, whether 'mixed ticketing' (e.g. peak outward, off peak for the return journey) should be more commonly available [as Virgin offers now on its website].

A text box allowed Campaign for Rail to comment on **Fares Structure**:

It is sometimes said that it is not possible to create a simple fares system based on mileage travelled. We do not agree. There are about 320 principal stations that can provide the core, to which add-ons to other local stations can be decided. These add-ons may reflect local adjustments as appropriate.

We would like to retain the flexibility to break a journey and would prefer a return to be valid for two months. Singles should never be more than 60% of the return fare. 'Permitted routes' and 'Restrictions' must be clearly flagged up as part of a new transparency of fare structuring.

There needs to be a recognition in the fares structure that the quality of the journey experience is reflected. It is right that journeys between Birmingham and London Euston should continue to be priced lower for LNR's less well appointed and 50 minutes slower trains than Virgin's.

Just as holidays are more expensive in August than November, there has to be a price differential between peak and off peak. However, this should not be a blunt instrument, with a common definition of time blocks and no recognition of contraflow travel. For example, there is no need for a Peak surcharge into Redditch in a morning. There should be uniformity in the application of peak restrictions, instead of TOCs which share a route having different rules. [Out of Birmingham, for example, to Wolverhampton or Coventry WM and LNR local trains charge more between 16.35 and 18.00, whereas Virgin, Cross Country and ATW do not.]

Advance fares cater for a market that would be mostly lost to rail if they were abolished. The leisure market needs the lowest prices and can be steered towards quieter times to travel in return for losing flexibility.

The next section was about **Buying a Ticket**. There were multiple choice questions about the cost of ticket varying according to how it is bought, favouring electronic means, Oyster-style cards that offer a price cap, and multimodal online accounts.

Campaign for Rail's comment on **Buying a Ticket**:

Online ticket sales must continue to be made easier and trust must be built that every option is being offered, and at the cheapest prices. Experience of using bar codes and QR codes is that sometimes these tickets are not checked [not checkable by some staff], so they are open to abuse. At stations, there is much to do to make ticket machine user friendly. Our members report unfavourably on the feeling of pressure from the queue at a ticket machine, so that the wrong ticket is bought in a hurry [such as a single when a return was wanted]. When this happens, there should be a simple way of reclaiming the excess cost.

For the foreseeable future, tickets should continue to be available from ticket offices or sold on board trains. The rail industry must accept that there is a significant number of passengers who do not have or cannot cope with modern technology. It would be unfair discrimination to restrict their use of rail by withdrawing card tickets or making the cheapest tickets only available online.

Finally, there was a text box headed, '**Any other comments**'.

The rail industry could lose in the public's perception if there is any suspicion that fares restructuring has the overall effect of raising the TOCs' incomes. If the cheaper fares are withdrawn to balance any reduction in very high priced Open fares, often perceived as mainly for those on expense accounts, the media will have a field day. Whatever the 'best seller' fare is called in future, it may become a little higher than its equivalent is now to balance some higher fares reducing, but the cheapest fare of now should continue at its current price. That would help win the much needed trust of passengers.

Finally, we hope the Department for Transport will accept the report in full and not cherry pick from it or delay the introduction of parts of it.

*Keith Flinders
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