

Campaign for Better Transport: “The peak/off peak fares system is unfair, outdated and counterproductive”

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Campaign for Better Transport is calling for more to be done to stop the “peak fare rip off” which leaves passengers facing a lottery on the cost of their commute. The message comes as the highest annual fare rise in a decade hits commuters.

Rail fares went up by 5.9% on 5 March. This is the annual fare rise which this year was postponed until March and was capped below RPI at 5.9%. This still represents the highest fare rise in a decade (fares rose at 6% in 2012).

Research carried out by the sustainable transport charity has revealed that the difference between peak and off-peak fares varies widely across the country, with some commuters paying just 5% more to travel on a peak train, while others face a 130% premium on the cost of the equivalent off peak ticket.

With no standard discount for off-peak fares, or even a standard ‘peak time’ across the network, Campaign for Better Transport is calling on the Government and train operators to reform the peak fares system to

create consistency across the network and ensure passengers with less travel flexibility are not unfairly penalised.

The transport charity is also calling for a 20% discount on peak fares on Mondays and Fridays to encourage more people to travel at the start and end of the week when passenger numbers are lower.

Norman Baker, from Campaign for Better Transport, said: "The peak/off peak fares system is unfair, outdated and counterproductive and passengers are bearing the brunt, and the costs, of a broken system. Passengers shouldn't have to face a lottery when buying their train ticket. The Government must sort out the peak fares mess to provide consistency across the network and restore passenger confidence in the railways."

Analysis by Campaign for Better Transport shows that the difference between peak and off-peak fares on some popular commuter routes can range from as little as 5% (Grays, Essex - London), to more than 130% more (Brighton - London), with no obvious correlation between the levels of discounts and factors such as operator, region or distance.

The premium for a peak fare can vary wildly even with the same train operator. Travelling between Leeds and Selby on a Northern train costs 9% more during peak hours, whilst travelling between Rochdale and Manchester with the same operator costs 25% more.

Mr Baker added: "The current system means that, on routes with a high 'peak premium', commuters who are unable to work flexibly are penalised for needing to travel earlier, and has the unfortunate result that some trains, particularly the first off-peak trains, are hopelessly overcrowded, while others, like the last peak ones, are practically empty. This needs to change."

Photo credit: Rail Delivery Group