

LNER launches pioneering pilot to further simplify fares

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LNER has launched a new Simpler Fares pilot scheme for selected journeys along the East Coast route, further enhancing its customer experience.

The train operator says the trial offers a clearer choice of tickets and aims to make buying them even easier. It will include journeys between London King's Cross and Newcastle, London and Berwick-upon-Tweed and London and Edinburgh, for travel with LNER.

This next step of Simpler Fares builds on the roll out of Single Leg Pricing across most of the LNER route, providing customers with flexibility to mix and match their fares and reducing the number of different products on the market for customers to understand.

LNER says Simpler Fares comprises two significant changes. Firstly, fares will be made simpler. The pilot will see the removal of complicated ticket types and replacement with three straightforward options on the trial routes. The changes also mean journeys will be priced more closely to demand, helping to smooth demand for services over the course of the day, all aimed at making rail travel even more attractive.

LNER will introduce a new type of semi-flexible ticket. For the pilot markets, the new fare structure will go on sale on 16 January 2024 for travel from 5 February 2024:

- Advance (Fixed) – the best value fare, booked in advance for a fixed journey with a guaranteed reserved seat for travel with LNER.
- ‘70min Flex’ (Semi-Flexible) – a new type of ticket offering customers the flexibility to travel on other LNER services, which can be 70 minutes before or after their original booked journey.
- Anytime (Fully-Flexible) – this ticket can be used at any time of day.

Off-Peak and Super Off-Peak fares, which now only represent 11 per cent of journeys included in the pilot, will be removed from 5 February 2024.

LNER will be seeking feedback from customers. Research shows that if fares were made simpler, more flexible and fairer, more people would travel by rail. Data from the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), which represents train operators, found that 35 per cent of people for whom rail is an option are put off travelling by train because they find it difficult to find the right fare.

David Horne, Managing Director at LNER, said: “LNER remains at the forefront of rail reform. Simplifying fares is vital in making rail travel more attractive. Customers tell us they find fares confusing.

“This exciting new pilot is the next step in our plans to overhaul complicated and outdated ticketing options and we look forward to hearing feedback from our customers. We believe that making fares simpler, smarter, and fairer, while introducing value for money and modern flexibility, will encourage more people to choose to travel by rail, the most sustainable travel choice.”

The pilot will run for two years and LNER will continue to collaborate with industry partners to understand how it is working for customers, also ensuring a wide range of affordable tickets are available.

Rail Minister, Huw Merriman, said: “We are delivering on our commitment to reform the railways, working with operators to provide passengers with simpler and more flexible tickets that better suit their needs.”

Stewart Fox-Mills, Fares, Ticketing and Retail Programme Director at GBRTT said: “It is great to see this next step in the simplification of rail fares. This pilot will move the dial towards simpler and better fares for customers. The cross-industry Fares, Ticketing and Retail Programme is bringing the railway together to coordinate introducing simpler fares packages, building on the great work LNER is delivering.”

Photo credit: LNER