

Rail minister asked for strategy on GBR fare reform

November 5, 2021



Rail minister, Chris Heaton-Harris MP, has been asked to set out plans for the government's upcoming fare reform.

The Built Environment Committee asked for the details, saying this would ensure that Great British Railways (GBR) has clear objectives in this area and can implement the new system. The committee believes this would help secure early wins, build public trust and encourage passengers to use rail services.

In a letter to Chris Heaton-Harris MP, the committee said:

- The government needs to ensure contactless payment technology is available at all stations across the national rail network, not just those in the South East, before the launch of GBR in 2023. It should also make the ticket infrastructure upgrades which are needed across the network.
- For commuters, single-leg pricing and contactless fare structures may generate more demand. For long-distance travellers, dynamic pricing may help to spread demand. The new flexible season tickets are not satisfactory and should be improved by the end of the year to attract more passengers.
- The new system under GBR should not stifle competition. There should be a diverse range of ticketing retailers who compete on fair commercial terms.
- The delayed regulated rail fare increases for 2022 should be urgently announced by the Government. The Government should be unambiguous about when it will replace RPI with CPI as the inflation measure used to calculate fare rises, so that there are less sharp rises for passengers.
- Anomalies in the ticketing system, such as split ticketing which undermines passenger trust and different off-peak windows which cause confusion, should also be addressed.

Chair of the House of Lords Built Environment Committee, Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE CMG, said: “To encourage passengers to return to the railways after the pandemic and meet the important commitments set at COP26 this week, it will be essential to improve the consumer experience for rail passengers and simplify fares. The launch of Great British Railways in 2023 provides a unique opportunity to clarify fares and reduce confusion.

“On ticket types, one size doesn’t fit all. Two different approaches are needed: one for long-distance travel and another for regular short-distance commutes, often in urban areas. Journeys should be supported with technology, such as contactless or QR codes, to reflect customer expectations in the modern world.

“Early wins for GBR could include reform of ticket types, digitalisation and improving the underwhelming new flexible season tickets currently on offer.”

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