

PE2120/C: Permanently remove peak fare pricing from ScotRail services

ASLEF written submission, 15 January 2025

Introduction

Scotland's railways represent a vital part of national infrastructure. An efficient railway system that is attractive, accessible, and affordable for the Scottish people is vital if Scotland is to grow its economy, tackle inequality, and meet its climate targets.

In the absence of a Scottish Government published vision for Scotland's railways, [ASLEF alongside the other rail unions presented the report 'A Vision for Scotland's Railways'](#) prior to ScotRail returning to public ownership.

A fundamental argument we set out in our report was that if Scotland is to deliver a world class service that tackles inequality and meets its climate targets then Scotland must make rail travel more affordable.

Investing in rail services and infrastructure (including on reducing fares) will not only help increase passenger numbers it would also help grow the economy. Evidence from a Railway Industry Association report published in 2021, showed how for every £1 spent on rail travel £2.50 is generated for the wider economy. Trains move goods, transport people for work and leisure, and boost economic activity across Scotland, creating and sustaining jobs as a result.

The Scottish Government has a duty to meet its own climate targets, help grow the economy and protect the citizens of this country when it can. Scrapping peak fares is a clear step in the right direction on all those fronts.

Why peak fares should be scrapped

ASLEF were delighted when the Government accepted our recommendation to scrap peak fares. Equally, we were extremely disappointed when the Government restored peak fares. This short-sighted and retrograde step is out of step with their own stated social, economic, and environmental policies.

ASLEF believes that notwithstanding the peak fares issue, rail fares are already too high and are prohibitive for many working people who must travel to their place of work.

Peak fares are effectively a tax on workers, and we believe that charging workers extra who have to travel on trains classified as peak fares is unfair and unjust.

Train fares must be made more affordable to encourage people back on to trains. Scrapping peak fares was a step in the right direction to help make rail fares more affordable for more people.

Scrapping peak fares for that short time was significantly beneficial for workers travelling by train. We conducted some research into the impact of restoring peak fares on workers in the Transport Minister's own constituency. We found that a

worker who travelled at peak times on a return from Edinburgh from Linlithgow five days a week over the course of a 4 week will now pay an additional £62 per month and an extra £166 per month if travelling from Linlithgow to Glasgow. These levels of increased fares are being replicated across the country.

Restoring peak fares has badly impacted the personal finances of workers who have no option but to travel by train at peak times. We are also concerned that the decision to restore peak fares may also be impacting local high street economies, with the cost of trains significantly reducing the disposable income of rail travellers that can be spent locally and in the town centres where they work.

Our concern about the economic impact is compounded by the fact that the Scottish Government did not conduct either an economic impact analysis for the personal finances of rail travellers or how the pilot, and then the restoration of peak fares, may impact local economies and communities

We are pleased that rail travel is seeing passenger numbers increasing towards pre-pandemic levels. One of the factors that has recently seen ticket sales also increasing is because the numbers of revenue collectors has increased exponentially to ensure that revenue is fully optimised.

However, we are concerned that passenger numbers are being impacted at peak times by the cost of tickets and that workers who have to travel at 'peak times' are being unfairly and unjustly charged and that these people who have to travel are lower paid who are seeing their income disproportionately impacted.

There is also a fundamental environmental imperative to shift people from road to rail travel. The Scottish Government recognises that transport is the biggest emitter of CO2 emissions, and that road travel is the biggest polluter within different modes of transport. If Scotland is to meet its own climate targets, indeed if it is even remotely serious about successfully meeting those targets, then it must make rail travel more affordable and accessible for people in Scotland to help shift people from road to rail.

The Scottish Government's own national transport strategy has committed to reducing car kilometres by 20% by 2030. Set against this policy context it is imperative to shift mindsets and behaviours when it comes to modes of travel. This must mean making rail fares cheaper and more affordable overall and it must mean scrapping peak fares permanently.

Why was the Scottish Government wrong to restore peak fares?

For all the reasons set out above the Scottish Government was fundamentally wrong to restore peak fares. Encouraging, and achieving, a growth in rail travel will help the Scottish Government meet its own stated environmental, economic, and social policies.

The number of people using the trains was increasing during the pilot. However, consistent growth in rail travel did need a longer time period for the pilot, arguably it needs a definitive decision by the government to scrap peak fares and invest in affordable fares for rail travel so that car travellers have the confidence to ditch their car and change their traveling behaviour. We believe that the Scottish Government did not give the policy enough of a chance to succeed and was too quick and hasty

in stopping the pilot and restoring peak fares. It was a short-sighted decision that flew in the face of achieving many of their own policies.

Restoring peak fares has had a significant impact on people who use the trains at peak times, predominantly workers. It is of great concern to us that the government disregarded this impact and took no account of the individual savings made by rail travellers and how this additional income benefited them and their wider local economies. It is staggering that no economic analysis of individual savings/more disposable income for travellers and the impact/benefit for local economies was undertaken by the government.

We urge the Scottish Government to rectify their mistake and invest in scrapping peak fares and reducing fares overall and make them affordable and accessible.