

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

Petitioner written submission, 2 December 2024

We are writing in response to Transport Scotland's written submission regarding the petition to permanently remove peak fare pricing from ScotRail services. While we understand the financial and logistical constraints outlined in the submission, we would like to offer further insight into why the permanent abolition of peak fares remains an essential policy for the benefit of Scotland's commuters and the wider goals of sustainability.

The temporary removal of peak fares during the pilot period demonstrated positive outcomes, including a 7% increase in rail usage, a key indicator that supports the broader cultural shift we seek toward public transport. Importantly, this also resulted in fewer car journeys, contributing to reduced emissions. However, as noted, the full impact of long-term fare reform cannot be accurately assessed in a short trial. The behavioural changes required to significantly reduce car dependency will take time, and the benefits of an affordable, accessible rail system will be felt most when fare reductions are made permanent.

While we acknowledge the fiscal challenges faced by the Scottish Government, we believe that the cost of inaction may ultimately be higher. Continued reliance on private car journeys, particularly during peak hours, exacerbates both environmental issues and social inequities. Low-income commuters and essential workers who are disproportionately affected by peak fare pricing are burdened with inflated travel costs, making essential journeys unaffordable. These individuals have limited alternatives but to travel during peak hours, yet they are penalised for doing so.

Moreover, the impact of the climate crisis demands urgent action. The Scottish Government's commitment to achieving net-zero goals is incompatible with a transport system that continues to encourage car use, especially when public transport could serve as a viable alternative. By removing peak fares permanently, Scotland would be leading by example, not only addressing social inequality but also significantly contributing to its environmental objectives.

We also wish to specifically address the assertion that "the peak fare is the 'full-price' of the journey, with off-peak providing a discount". We believe that this pricing structure has been in place for so long that it no longer accurately reflects the current reality. Over time, the distinction between "peak" and "off-peak" fares has become entrenched in the public's understanding of the rail system, and the concept of a 'premium' peak fare no longer holds the same weight or incentive for commuters. The argument for encouraging passengers to travel at quieter times through higher fares has become outdated, particularly when we consider the broader aim of making public transport more accessible and equitable for all.

We also believe that the potential economic costs of permanently removing peak fares, particularly the need for greater public subsidy, can be mitigated in a variety of ways. While it is true that peak fares generate a significant portion of ScotRail's revenue, it is equally crucial to consider the broader economic benefits that would

stem from increased rail usage, such as reduced congestion, lower emissions, and a more equitable and sustainable transport system.

Furthermore, the 20% reduction in Season ticket prices and other ticketing changes, while appreciated, are not sufficient to create the long-term shift in transport usage that Scotland requires. The pilot's success shows that eliminating peak fares, coupled with investment in infrastructure, could create a far more sustainable transport system. We urge the Scottish Government to consider how best to achieve this balance, making long-term fare reform a central pillar of Scotland's green and equitable future.

We urge the Scottish Government to reassess the permanent removal of peak fares as part of its broader efforts to reduce the cost of living, combat climate change, and improve public transport access for all. While fiscal realities must be taken into account, the health and sustainability of Scotland's transport system require bold, future-focused policies that prioritise people over short-term financial constraints.

Thank you for considering our comments. We look forward to further discussions on how best to create a transport system that is affordable, accessible, and environmentally sustainable for everyone in Scotland.