

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

2nd Meeting, 2024 (Session 6), Wednesday 7
February 2024

PE1930: Ensure customers are always given
information on the cheapest possible fare in
new Scotrail contract

Petitioner George Eckton

**Petition
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that a requirement of future rail contracts is for customers to be given information on the cheapest possible fare as a matter of course and recognize the vital role of the existing ticket office estate in delivering on this aim.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1930>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [17 May 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government and Scotrail.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from Scotrail, Transport Scotland and the Petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.

6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 52 signatures have been received on this petition.
8. Members may also be aware that the Minister for Transport indicated during Portfolio Questions on 18 January 2024 that the Fair Fares Review would be published by early February 2024. The Official Report of proceedings is available on the [Scottish Parliament website](#).

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1930: Ensure customers are always given information on cheapest possible fare in new Scotrail contract

Petitioner

George Eckton

Date lodged

28 March 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that a requirement of future rail contracts is for customers to be given information on the cheapest possible fare as a matter of course and recognize the vital role of the existing ticket office estate in delivering on this aim.

Previous action

I raised a previous petition on this issue which was closed on 3 September 2020.

<http://external.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/clearscotrailfares>

Background information

The current system of pricing for rail fares is complex. As such it is difficult for the customer, especially in a digital purchase environment, to be assured that they are getting the best fares. The proposed reduction in ticket office opening hours will do little to improve the delivery of face to face advice to passengers to reduce the rail fare system complexity and ensure best value.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1930 on 17 May 2023

The Convener: PE1930, which was lodged by George Eckton, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that a requirement of future rail contracts is for customers to be given information on the cheapest possible fare as a matter of course and to recognise the vital role of the existing ticket office estate in delivering on that aim.

We previously considered the petition on 23 November, when we agreed to write to the Scottish Government and Scottish Rail Holdings Ltd. Unfortunately, a response from Scottish Rail Holdings has not been forthcoming, but we have received a response from Transport Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government, and members have a copy of that.

In its response, Transport Scotland highlights that the interaction of devolved and reserved matters

“will form part of the Scottish Government’s Consumer Duty scoping work”,

and that the Government is considering whether Scottish Rail Holdings will be covered by the consumer duty legislation.

Transport Scotland has also provided details of the on-going work to enhance smart ticketing across the public transport network, which includes the establishment of the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board. The response also indicates that the fair fares review might shortly be concluding, if it has not already, to be followed by the launch of a public consultation on a draft vision for public transport.

We have also received a brief submission from the petitioner in which he welcomes the consideration of Scottish Rail Holdings being covered by the consumer duty legislation, while highlighting concerns about advertising of fares and the potential for the digital exclusion of certain groups or individuals.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

Alexander Stewart: It is important that we get further information from the Scottish Government in relation to a number of issues. One is the advice that has been received from the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board on how things are progressing; another is the anticipated timetable for the public consultation on the draft vision for public transport; and a third is, as you have said, convener, the action that is being taken to address issues of digital exclusion in the purchasing of rail tickets. It would be useful to have information on those issues to hand when we ascertain how we can take forward the petition.

David Torrance: I support everything that my colleague has said. Could we also write to ScotRail to seek information on its evaluation of the options for upgrading the infrastructure to support the use of contactless bank cards on the rail network?

The Convener: I am happy with that. Are colleagues content to proceed on that basis?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

ScotRail submission of 15 June 2023

PE1930/I: Ensure customers are always given information on cheapest possible fare in new Scotrail contract

I note the resolution of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee to write to ScotRail following your meeting on 17 May 2023. Thank you for reaching out to us for our views on the options to upgrade the infrastructure which would support the use of contactless bankcards on the rail network.

ScotRail do not have any current plans to upgrade the retail infrastructure to support the use of bankcards as travel tokens on the rail network in Scotland. This is primarily due to the significant funding that would be required to upgrade all automatic ticket gatelines and platform validators. Ultimately, the upgrades would require significant additional government funding over and above our current public subsidy and this is not considered a practical use of limited public resources at this time.

We do, however, support the end goal that would be achieved by the implementation of a 'tap on, tap off' system such as proposed, namely the ease of use for passengers and the automatic calculation of the cheapest fare for the product used to ensure rail is as practical and affordable as possible.

To this end, ScotRail are actively pursuing the introduction of a pilot scheme that would meet the same outcomes, but using barcode technology that is compatible with the existing infrastructure across the network. An Account Based Travel scheme using barcode technology would support the type of Pay-As-You-Go proposition that contactless bankcards would offer.

In practical terms, this would see customers downloading an app to their mobile device, registering an account, and linking a payment card to that account. When travelling, the app would generate a barcode which would allow the customer to access the rail network through the

gatelines and present the barcode ticket to ScotRail staff whilst travelling. The use of the app would require location services to be enabled, and this will allow ScotRail to use GPS to identify the trip being made and calculate the appropriate fare in the back office; debiting the customer's payment card. The scheme would apply daily and weekly capping to ensure maximum customer value.

We believe our proposed pilot scheme, and the subsequent rollout if successful, is a logical and positive progression following our introduction of barcode mTickets that can be purchased through the ScotRail app. These mTickets have proved hugely popular with customers and account for a rapidly growing segment of our ticket sales. This is an exciting customer proposition which will deliver a simpler travel and purchase experience for customers through a method they are already familiar with using, without the need for investment in the retail infrastructure.

Transport Scotland submission of 21 June 2023

PE1930/J: Ensure customers are always given information on cheapest possible fare in new Scotrail contract

Thank you for your letter of 19 May requesting information on a number of areas relating to future rail contracts.

Transport Scotland officials have provided an update on the following areas, attached as Appendix A to this letter:

advice it has received from the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board the anticipated timetable for the public consultation on the Draft Vision for Public Transport referred to in [the previous response to the Committee dated 25 January 2023](#)

what action the Scottish Government is taking to address issues of digital exclusion when purchasing rail tickets

I hope this information is helpful.

Appendix A

1. Advice it has received from the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board

The National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board (NSTAB) is not yet established, and as such no advice has been issued. Secondary legislation on the establishment of NSTAB came into force in May 2023, and therefore we are now in a position to appoint members to the board. We anticipate the board to be operational by the end of 2023. The secondary legislation states that the board must publish any advice it provides to the Scottish Ministers, and any recommendations it makes to the Scottish Ministers, in such manner as it considers appropriate.

2. The anticipated timetable for the public consultation on the Draft Vision for Public Transport referred to in the previous response to the Committee dated 25 January 2023

The First Minister's Policy Prospectus, "Equality, Opportunity, Community: New leadership – A fresh start", published on 18 April 2023, sets out our commitment to make our public transport system more accessible, available, and affordable, with the costs of transport more fairly shared across government, business, and society. In launching his Policy Prospectus, the First Minister confirmed that as part of the Fair Fares Review, a Pathfinder Pilot scheme will be introduced for six months from October 2023 to remove peak rail fares from ScotRail services. This will make rail a more attractive proposition for travellers and support modal shift from car. It will also provide us with an opportunity to test new fares structures in response to the changes in travel patterns that have emerged since the onset of the Covid pandemic.

It is vital that the Fair Fares Review is informed by the most robust and up-to-date evidence therefore the Fair Fares Review's conclusions will now be published at the end of 2023 in order to

take into account emerging findings from this Pathfinder Pilot. The Review advice will recommend a package of measures which can be considered for implementation from 2024-25 and onwards. These will provide opportunities to address the wider issues for the cost and availability of public transport services across all modes of public transport.

We will commence our public engagement on the Fair Fares Review and our Vision for the Future of Public Transport later this summer and this will help inform the findings of the review.

3. What action the Scottish Government is taking to address issues of digital exclusion when purchasing rail tickets

The Scottish Government is not currently planning to remove paper rail tickets. Paper tickets have recently been updated and now incorporate a QR code which can be scanned to validate the ticket. In April 2023, smart uptake was 32.9% (Smartcard 5.8%, m-tickets 27.1%) and so still a majority of users are using paper ticketing. As such, the removal of paper tickets would not be appropriate.

Super Off Peak Day Returns are only available as mobile “m-tickets” or on the smartcard, and Flexipass tickets are only available on the smartcard. Smartcards can be obtained free of charge online or via a paper form.

As technology and customer expectations evolve, any development of smart ticketing would be designed to enhance the passenger experience and supplement existing means of ticketing and payment. At the required time, an Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken to understand the impact of any new ticketing systems so passengers without access to digital technology are not disadvantaged and continue to be supported.

In terms of purchasing tickets without digital access, ticket offices and ticket vending machines (TVMs) continue to be vital. 39% of stations have a ticket office and 58% of stations have TVMs. At stations without these facilities passengers can purchase a ticket on the train. Opening hours for ticket offices in Scotland have

largely remained unchanged in more than 30 years, with all key information captured in Schedule 17 of the Ticket and Settling Agreement which applies to all Train Operating Companies within the United Kingdom.

ScotRail conducted a comprehensive review of ticket offices using the relevant guidance on changes to ticket office operating hours, using data from 2019 which represented a period not impacted by the COVID pandemic (and the associated fall in customer numbers). Transport Focus ran a consultation (on behalf of ScotRail) in early 2022 to offer passengers and stakeholders the opportunity to comment on proposed ticket office opening hours. ScotRail accepted the recommendations that Transport Focus presented, and a briefing was presented to the previous Minister for Transport offering options to implement the proposals, this is still under review.

Petitioner submission of 22 June 2023

PE1930/K: Ensure customers are always given information on cheapest possible fare in new Scotrail contract

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the submissions.

On the [ScotRail submission](#) - it's disappointing to hear only talk of a pilot to support the Pay-As-You-Go proposition, and no sense of detail that this scheme is likely to be forthcoming quicker or enable dynamic purchasing. By this I mean the allocation of ticket prices where someone travels at peak for one leg and off peak for the return yet still needs to pay the higher price or, as per the original premise and example of this petition, travels across the SPT boundary for example and unknowingly pays a higher fare for their journey as they were are unaware of the split ticketing savings that would be available. There is no sense that consumer transparency will be enabled from this proposed pilot and it's lacking in any detail of content or timing at present.

On the [Transport Scotland submission](#), it's again disappointing to see an overt recognition of the continuing digital exclusion from the lowest fares for those who don't have the digital confidence and/or skills to access digital tickets to lower their costs. The example given of Super Off Peak Day Returns tickets only being available digitally is disappointing given the Scottish Household Survey figures on continuing digital exclusion for certain groups within society, and is an added example of people having to pay a digital premium to access publicly funded services. Surely that isn't right or a good answer to answering how you are addressing digital exclusion by excluding those without access or skills from accessing the lowest price? It's a further example alongside [Club 50](#) ticket where passengers only save 10% booking over the phone/in person, but receive a 20% discount online. This just seems the latest example of digital exclusion and detriment not being taken seriously, selling paper tickets is still great, but why are the cheapest tickets effectively subject to a non-access premium, especially for those that have barriers to accessing digital platforms, meaning they have to pay more for a similar journey?

It's welcome news that that Scottish Rail Holdings will now to be subject to the consumer duty alongside other public bodies. In theory, this should be another string to the bow of Consumer Scotland in enforcing inclusive practices for customers of public services as well as hopefully strengthening efforts to ensure ScotRail deploy fair advertising, clear and equitable pricing on all ticket types and continue to provide accessible sales of all tickets, albeit the availability of Super Off Peak Day Returns suggests there is still work to be done in mainstreaming these ambitions.

Such actions should all benefit all, but especially consumers with vulnerabilities or known barriers to accessing services. The protection offered by the Consumer Scotland Act 2020 demands that designated public bodies must have regard to the impact of strategic decisions, such as method of sales of all ticket types, on Scottish consumers and with a desirability to reducing harm faced by them. It will be of great interest to see how Consumer Scotland plan to measure compliance with this new duty for ScotRail in this circumstance.

Petitioner submission of 18 January 2024

PE1930/L: Ensure customers are always given information on cheapest possible fare in new Scotrail contact

I would like to draw the Committee's attention to research carried out by the consumer group, Which?, that found that [train station ticket machines can charge more than double the price of booking online.](#)

Although the research didn't include stations in Scotland, it does highlight the issue of digital exclusion if you rely on ticket machines for purchasing, and the need for advice to be available from ticket offices in Scotland to ensure customers are offered the best fares when the off-peak fares trial ends in the summer.