

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 11 December 2024
19th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

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

Introduction

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>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 7 February 2024.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Transport.
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 written submissions from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, 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 gave its initial position on this petition on 19 April 2022.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 56 signatures have been received on this petition.
8. The Committee may wish to note that [Transport Scotland published the 'Smart, Digital, Integrated Ticketing and Payments – Delivery Strategy 2024' on 21 August.](#) This strategy proposes a series of short, medium, and long-term activities over the next 10 years to progress the modernisation of both integrated smart ticketing and payment, and the provision of digital travel data across Scotland, with a consistent approach.
9. The Committee may also wish to note that [ScotRail has announced that it will implement changes to some ticket office opening hours,](#) with the changes

expected to be implemented in 2025. [In response to a parliamentary question on the changes, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport stated that she had “considered ScotRail’s proposals carefully and am content with them”.](#)

Action

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

Clerks to the Committee
December 2024

Annexe A: Summary of petition

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 7 February 2024

The Convener: We are back. Our next continued petition is PE1930, which was lodged by George Eckton. It calls on the 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 recognise the vital role of the existing ticket office estate in delivering on this aim.

We last considered the petition quite some time ago: 17 May 2023. At that point, we agreed to write to the Scottish Government and ScotRail. The response from ScotRail notes that, although it has no current plans to upgrade the retail infrastructure to support the use of bank cards for tap-on-tap-off rail journeys—which is how you get around the London Underground—it is actively pursuing a pilot scheme for a mobile phone app to achieve a similar outcome. That is the modern way of getting around the London underground—as long as you have a signal.

Transport Scotland responded to tell us that it anticipated the national smart ticketing advisory board to be operational by the end of 2023, and I understand from the clerks that the board commenced operation in November. The Scottish Government has also confirmed it has no plans to remove paper rail tickets, noting that paper tickets now include a QR code that can be scanned to validate the ticket.

The Government's response also makes reference to the much-anticipated fair fares review, which had been expected by the end of 2023 but has yet to be published. Members may be aware that the Minister for Transport indicated on 18 January 2024 that the review would likely be published at the beginning of this month.

We have also received two submissions from the petitioner sharing his disappointment at the lack of detail or urgency in addressing the issues raised by the petition. Mr Eckton also wanted to draw our attention to the recent research that found that train station ticket machines can charge more than double the price of booking the ticket online. It is worth noting that that research did not include stations located in Scotland. That comes as a relief—certainly to me.

Do members have any comments or suggestions as to how we might proceed?

David Torrance: I wonder whether the committee would consider keeping the petition open and writing to the Minister for Transport once the fair fares review has been published, to seek details on any recommendations relate to the ask of the petition.

The Convener: That is the very obvious course of action, given that the publication of the review is imminent. Are members content to do that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C: Written submissions

Petitioner written submission, 15 March 2024

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

I submitted a Freedom of Information request to ScotRail last month asking them to advise on why [the split-save Trainline feature](#) (widely advertised on bus stops across Glasgow) can't be made available, via ScotRail platforms, to the Scottish and wider passenger audience as I understand they buy the same carrier software from Trainline as [detailed in Trainline's 2023 annual report](#).

Currently, in a Scottish context, there is no flagging to passengers of split-save savings. Even with the current extension of the off-peak trial, there are savings to be made, for example when crossing the SPT boundary, and no information available for wider UK travel booked through ScotRail platforms presumably in terms of such savings. Given it is public money that is paying for the ScotRail/Trainline software, surely we should seek the best value for passengers by using all the features of the software?

ScotRail's response to my FOI request was to advise they are working with their delivery partner, Trainline, to introduce split ticketing to the ScotRail website and app. Once ScotRail are comfortable that the offering gives the customer what they need, and can be delivered at a cost that represents best value to taxpayers, they will introduce it on the ScotRail digital retail platforms. If there are [100 million passenger journeys each year](#) and only 1 or 2% of those generated [the average £13 per trip saving using the split-save](#), returning to passengers £13-26m which they have been overcharged for the same journey would seem not only fair but best value?

I think any action that introduces split-save features goes a long way to fulfilling the inclusion asks of my petition regarding awareness of savings to digital consumers/passengers. This would also fulfil their obligations around the Scottish legislative consumer duty, which requires that a relevant public authority must, when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, have regard to the impact of those decisions on consumers in Scotland, and the desirability of reducing harm to them.

I've also heard a suggestion that ScotRail are behind schedule with the release of e-tickets to other apps in this digital purchase space, forcing people to queue at a ticket machine to collect tickets rather than receiving tickets via the app. Again, this highlights the continued need for advice via ticket offices and ability to deliver best value and most accessible purchases through all retail channels. I would hope, if correct, any delay in e-ticket release, is not to channel shift passengers to use ScotRail's own app instead, which offers e-tickets/m-tickets but not split tickets at present. As a public body subject to wider duties, you would hope all would be accessible, consumer focussed, and enabling competition to give the passenger best value.

Cabinet Secretary for Transport written submission, 22 March 2024

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

I note the Committee's interest in the progress of the Fair Fares Review (FFR) given the Committee's consideration of [PE1930: Ensure customers are always given information on cheapest possible fare in new Scotrail contract](#).

I am pleased to inform you that the Fair Fares Review has now been published on the Transport Scotland website ([Fair Fares Review | Transport Scotland](#)).

The Review has identified a number of themes emerging in the course of identifying problems and issues and considering opportunities for change and constraints. It highlights the challenges facing public transport and presents short, medium, and long-term actions to be progressed in order to make our public transport system more accessible, available, and affordable. Overall, the Review establishes a framework which will be built upon as we progress with wider work to deliver on our vision for the Future of Public Transport.

There are a number of recommendations identified within the Review that relate specifically to fares and ticketing and to improving efficiency and integration which will be of interest to the Committee, specifically in regards to PE1930. We will continue to progress these recommendations and actions detailed within the Review following publication.

Yours sincerely,

FIONA HYSLOP
Cabinet Secretary for Transport

Cabinet Secretary for Transport written submission, 13 May 2024

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

Thank you for your letter of 18 April 2024, regarding the petition: PE1930 and enquiring about an update on Smart & Integrated Ticketing Strategy Delivery Plan and ScotRail fares system.

In terms of the Smart & Integrated Ticketing Strategy Delivery Plan, please note that the Scottish Government is currently refreshing this document, which will outline its strategy and programme of work for enhancing smart, integrated ticketing and payments, and digital travel data over the next 5-10 years. The strategy will set out the timescales for delivering the actions over the short, medium and long term and will align to the forthcoming National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board's work programme.

The strategy is being developed through a collaborative process with stakeholders and the public, following a public survey last year. It is also taking into account the significant progress and technological development of smart ticketing since the

previous publication in 2018, reflecting the public's increasing desire for, and increasing use of, contactless and digital payments and ticketing.

Following the Fair Fares Review and Climate Change Package announcements of the Scottish Government's intention to develop a new national integrated ticketing system for public transport, the strategy will now progress through the final engagement and approval process to be published in the coming months.

[I have written to the Committee separately with an update regarding the publication on Fair Fares Review.](#)

Independently from this, ScotRail, in public ownership, is in the early stages of trialling an Account Based Travel scheme (or Pay As You Go) with a closed group, with the intention of launching that wider, if it proves successful. It is anticipated that a successful trial will lead to a rollout in early summer, covering the Strathclyde area and across to Edinburgh, initially.

In terms of the progress made to simplify fares, ScotRail has advised me that its digital supplier (Trainline) has now developed split ticketing functionality and ScotRail is currently finalising details and arrangements to introduce that functionality to the ScotRail website and app. ScotRail expects that this functionality is introduced over the summer of this year.

ScotRail has also advised that in relation to the availability of cheapest fares in more general terms, it carries out regular reviews to assess if and when it can expand product availability through different channels and fulfilment methods, balancing the need to make discounted products widely available against the need to protect revenue and as such, the public purse. It is important to note that some discounted products have eligibility criteria that cannot always be assessed through self-service channels, for example making 'Kids for a Quid' tickets available through self-service channels comes with the risk that these tickets could be purchased fraudulently.

It is also important to note that concessionary fares on public transport, including rail, which is the responsibility of local authorities, who have discretionary powers under the Transport Act 1985 to provide and fund local concessionary travel schemes for residents, need to be considered in the same context. Local authorities subsidise any rail concession schemes and require ScotRail to retail only via 'face-to-face' channels such as stations and on-train, due to the risk of fraud involved.

More widely, under the public ownership arrangements, Scottish Ministers have set out their expectations for rail fares and ticketing. This includes an obligation for Scottish Rail Holdings (SRH), who manages and oversees ScotRail's services on behalf of Scottish Ministers and ScotRail to develop and implement a Fares & Ticketing Strategy, which, as part of a number of requirements, looks to remove and prevent future fares anomalies.

The current ScotRail Peak Fares Removal Pilot will inform the work to develop the ScotRail's Fares and Ticketing Strategy. Complementing the outcomes of the pilot, ScotRail is committed to developing and providing products shaped by customer insights, including how fares and ticketing can be improved to remove barriers to travel.

My officials at Transport Scotland will continue collaborating with ScotRail and SRH as they develop the Fares and Ticketing Strategy over the coming year. At the end of this year, Parliament will also receive an update on progress towards delivering this rail policy as part of a wider annual policy update.

Yours sincerely,

FIONA HYSLOP
Cabinet Secretary for Transport

Petitioner written submission, 14 November 2024

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

This submission seeks to outline some key objectives for the Scottish Government and Scottish Rail Holdings, particularly in light of recent proposals to close/significantly reduce ScotRail's ticket offices, and highlights how these closures could impact fare transparency and access to the lowest fares.

Background on Current Limitations

As noted by both ScotRail representatives and personal experiences, there are significant limitations in the split-ticketing options currently available through ScotRail's system. Many customers, even when using ScotRail's ticketing platform, may not receive the lowest possible fare due to a limited range of split-ticket combinations. This is especially relevant given recent feedback from sources like MoneySavingExpert, which highlighted Trainline's service as similarly costly, indicating that no alternative provider consistently offers the lowest fares. Trainline is ScotRail digital retailer provider for split-ticketing functionality.

While ScotRail offers some split-ticketing, feedback has shown that customers could benefit from a more extensive multi-split system. For example, competitive third-party services offer multiple split options across a single journey, potentially offering greater savings. However, ScotRail's current setup may limit customers to fewer, and therefore less cost-effective, options. Given their consumer duty under the Consumer Scotland Act 2020 this seems less than optimal for Scottish consumers.

An enhanced split-ticketing system that supports multiple splits per journey would not only improve customer satisfaction but align ScotRail with broader value-for-money expectations. Additionally, providing clear guidance to customers on how to manually apply these splits could mitigate some of these limitations in the interim.

1. Impact of Ticket Office Closures on Access to Affordable Fares

The planned closure/reduction in hours of ticket offices could make it harder for customers to access accurate fare information, especially those who rely on in-person assistance to find the best value. Ticket office staff are essential in helping customers navigate split-ticketing options, which can offer considerable savings. Without ticket office support, customers may need to rely solely on ScotRail's online

platform, which currently lacks a comprehensive system for identifying all cost-saving ticket combinations.

2. Challenges of Online Fare Transparency

With fewer ticket offices, more passengers will be directed to ScotRail's digital systems, which are not yet able to provide the lowest fare for every journey. Many customers may miss out on the best options due to limitations in the online split-ticketing tool, which often doesn't show every possible combination. For those less familiar with digital ticketing, this transition from in-person to online could mean paying higher fares, reducing the accessibility of public transport, and not meeting their consumer duty.

3. Urgency for Enhanced Digital Fare Solutions as In-Person Support Declines

If ticket offices are sadly phased out, ScotRail's digital services must fill this gap by offering a comprehensive fare-finding tool. To maintain fare transparency, the digital system should:

- Automatically identify and display all potential split-ticket options that could save passengers money.
- Clearly communicate these savings, particularly for routes where manual split-ticket input may be required for the best deal.

4. Recommendations

- **Invest in Digital System Upgrades:** Develop a more advanced split-ticketing feature online that replicates the guidance provided by ticket office staff, ensuring customers can independently secure the lowest fares. At present, ScotRail admits that it only splits the journey once rather than multiple times to provide the best value. I am happy to provide email from ScotRail if substantiation is needed.
- **Customer Education:** Introduce an awareness campaign on how to use split-ticketing features online and the limitations of ScotRail's system, particularly for those moving from in-person to online fare searches.
- **Ensuring Fair Access to Fare Information:** Guarantee that any fare savings available through ScotRail staff are also accessible through digital systems, so that customers are not disadvantaged by the closure of ticket offices.

In conclusion, as ticket offices close or reduce opening hours, it is crucial that ScotRail's digital services advance to meet customer needs for accessible and transparent fare information. Addressing these gaps aligns with the aims of petition PE1930 and promotes fair access to affordable travel, at present I don't think ScotRail has objectively meet these outcomes/aims of my petition.