

# Fares, queues, and smart cards

Millions of people now use London's smart card Oyster on the buses, Underground – and increasingly on National Rail services.

Freed from many of the hassles of repeatedly queuing for tickets, they are beginning to ask why the main line train operators are not offering them for everyday journeys by rail throughout Britain.

Big queues still blight many of London's main rail stations – and others throughout Britain

Research undertaken by the official rail watchdog Passenger Focus shows passengers believe a smart-card ticketing option with a "pay as you go" facility would help to beat the queues.

Passenger Focus chief executive Anthony Smith said: "Train operating companies need to provide alternative and flexible means of buying tickets and give passengers what they want.

"We also believe there is a real need to capitalise on the momentum of London's Oyster smart card and explore the potential for wider application of smart card technology across the UK's rail network."

Passenger Focus questioned passengers in 10 focus groups in London, Cardiff, Newcastle and Glasgow.

Passengers want to avoid buying separate tickets for each journey.

They broadly agreed that the benefits outweighed any perceived weaknesses but passengers also

believed there should be incentives for using new technology and safety nets for when things go wrong.

The big issue for many passengers this year has been the above-inflation rises in January, coupled with the knowledge that the Government is determined to carry on doing the same in future years.

If this is to be the approach then passengers can justly demand action on the blatant subsidies to the airlines and the hidden subsidies – including casualty costs, street lighting and social disruption costs – to the road lobby.

To coincide with the fare increases in January, Railfuture issued a press release pointing out that worse is to come as fares increase to meet the Government target of passengers bearing 75% of rail costs.

It called for real investment in much needed new capacity, more stations, reopened lines and a serious policy of electrification.

Referring to the fare rises, Passenger Focus's Anthony Smith said: "This is the reality of the Government's strategy for our railways.

"Passengers should brace themselves for fare rises from now until 2014 as their contribution to railway services nearly doubles from £5billion to £9billion each year.

"The industry has published average figures which mask rises on individual routes." In fact many

everyday fares went up by between 10 and 14%.

Friends of the Earth's Tony Bosworth, said: "The rise in rail fares is the latest sign of the Government's disastrous transport policy.

"We should be trying to get people out of their cars and on to public transport, not pricing them off trains.

"The response to growing rail passenger numbers is to raise prices, whereas the Government's response to growing air passenger numbers is to support big increases in airport capacity.

"Since Labour came to power the cost of motoring has fallen by 10% in real terms, while bus and train travel have become more expensive.

"It's little wonder that UK carbon dioxide emissions have risen."

Liberal Democrat Norman Baker said: "Ministers seem content to force up train fares as a way of limiting demand rather than providing the rail network which is needed for social, economic and, most of all, environmental reasons."

Brian Cooke, chairman of London TravelWatch, said: "The Department for Transport has a vested interest because of its profit-sharing deals with train companies.

"We need an independent body to check this out."

But it was pressure from the train operating companies which pushed up the cost of London's

Travelcard by 4%, although inflation was 2.7% in the "determining month" of July.

The price of Travelcards is decided jointly by the Association of Train Operating Companies and Transport for London.

By contrast, when it was able to act alone, TfL froze the price of all single journeys on trams, the Docklands Light Railway and the Tube and dropped the price of Oyster bus tickets.

At least pensioners and disabled people throughout Britain will benefit from April from the new national bus pass. In a fairer world, this would also include rail travel.

## Axe hovers over travel centres

Travel centres are under threat all over the country, writes Chris Burden. Oxford and Guildford have gone. An axe hovers over Reading.

To help Railfuture organise a response and campaign, we need to know where your rail travel centre is, who operates it, and what its current opening hours are.

Tell us also if you know of any threats to it, such as serious reductions in opening hours or outright closure proposals, and if any group is actively campaigning to keep it.

Let your Railfuture Passenger Committee know: c/o Chris Burden, 24 Cromwell Road, Caversham, Reading RG4 5EB. email: f-chris-f@clara.net

Railway operating officer George Docking knew a thing or two about trains.

He played an important part in helping Britain to win the Second World War when he was LNER movements officer at Cambridge.

He made sure the trains got through to all the crucial airfields and ports in East Anglia.

He also had two favourite sayings: "Too many trains by half" and "You cannot connect at both ends of a branch line."

Mr Docking was trained by the Great Eastern Railway which at the time had the most frequent passenger service in the country, yet kept plenty of track free for freight.

As Mr Docking would say: Trains connected. Hence fewer trains were needed.

Dr Beeching, of course, ignored connectivity and today, with the Department for Transport bent on extending its fragmentation policy to smash cross-country services, and the Regulator poised to drive freight off rail by imposing charges on goods

## Wellington's connectivity rediscovered

train paths, whether used or not, it is well to recall the network economics practised by real railwaymen.

In 2003 economist David Miller produced *Railway.com* which used a computing rule – Metcalfe's Law – to show that railway expansion increased traffic because the more places that are connected, the greater the number of people who want to travel between them.

Miller was apparently unaware that AM Wellington, an American engineer, had already described the same law in his *Economic Theory of the Location of Railways* as long ago as 1887. Wellington's book ran to 16 editions between 1887 and 1927, is readily available second hand and has recently been re-published in America.

In 1963, J de V Graaf in *Theoretical Welfare Economics* showed how telephone networks, computers, telephones, railways, airlines, shipping, FAX all benefited from the same law. They share the

characteristics of multi-direction flows between origins and destinations, leading to a network effect that approximates to the square of the number of points served. In 1998 Professor David Wiggins of Oxford updated Wellington's 1887 analysis with an essay written with Mayer Hillman on *Railways Settlement and Access*.

The essay is published in Anthony Barnett and Roger Scrutton's book *Town and Country* (Jonathan Cape, London).

In 2000 Dr Paul Mees in his book *A Very Public Solution* (University of Melbourne Press) compared Toronto in Canada, which has a planned integrated public transport system, with Melbourne in Australia that does not. He stressed the continuing importance of connectivity.

*Railway.com* is available from IEA, 2 Lord North Street, Westminster, London, SW1P 3LB. £12.50 including postage.



This is just one example of how the railways have been carved up – in Sheringham, Norfolk. The National Rail station is at the top of the picture and the volunteer-run North Norfolk Railway station is below, separated by a road which once had a level crossing. One of the consequences of the removal of the crossing is the large numbers of cars parked on the right. Now Network Rail has agreed to reinstate the level crossing to allow the two parts of the railway to be linked for "occasional use". Eventually it could be part of the Norfolk orbital railway scheme.