

# Watch out for ticket cheats

The Government's promise that the price of regulated fares will fall in January has been accompanied by speculation that train operators will try to maximise their revenue by pushing up off-peak fares in underhand ways.

The fares may not rise very much, but by "tinkering" with the times of the validity of tickets, some regular users (those that tend to go on the same train) will face large rises.

"The ticket structures systems' vulnerability to abuse of this sort is the thing that gets most passengers' goat," said one rail campaigner.

"Many people are being told by their employers that 'the company can't afford a pay rise' this year.

"But when they know the retail price index is falling, they are hit with fares increases of 145%."

The Campaign for Better Transport also blamed the Government for backdoor rail fare rises – by East Midlands Trains and First Great Western – which came in during September.

CBT said that train companies were increasing fares so they could pay back billions of pounds promised in premium payments to the Government.

CBT called on the Government to revisit its policy of reducing its

contribution to rail and making passengers pay more.

CBT's Cat Hobbs said: "The Government wants train fares to keep going up – but it's happy for train companies to take the blame.

"Train companies are squeezing passengers in order to pay back billions of pounds to the Government. These fare rises are unfair and unsustainable."

Ashwin Kumar, Passenger Focus director, commented: "This is yet another example of a train operating company rolling out a back door fare rise by tinkering with ticket restrictions.

"Passengers will be aghast that a train company can double the cost of these fares in one fell swoop. The industry and Government must produce a fare system which is affordable and transparent if it is to keep passengers on the train."

EMT took advantage of Travelcard restrictions and FGW introduced new off-peak restrictions.

Many railway managers believe fares are now generally too high and Railfuture has proved with research that a financially viable way of reducing fares for passengers and increasing revenue for the train companies, is to introduce a national railcard.

## Railwatch

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## Wales

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### ■ ■ Ferries to Ireland

Stena has reinstated an evening crossing for passengers from Dublin Port to Holyhead. This is to provide for day trips from North Wales but the arrival back in Holyhead is very late in the evening. Stena is only using its high speed ship for one return trip from Holyhead to Dun Laoghaire and these are the only sailings using the Irish Port.

### ■ ■ Closure threat lifted

*TransportXtra* recently published an article 'Business leaders ruffle feathers in Welsh transport planning' which is based on a report by a ministerial advisory group set up in 2006 by the then transport minister Andrew Davies. The group advised closing some rural branch lines and withdrawing the concessionary pass schemes. These were rejected by the present Deputy First and Transport Minister Ieuan Wyn Jones

### ■ ■ Anger over fares injustice

The 20% plus fare increases for some off-peak travel by First Great Western have not been welcomed by the South Wales transport consortia and Passenger Focus. It will now be impossible to have a day trip to London from South Wales using a saver ticket. Again long-distance travellers are subsidising London commuters whose fares will decrease

### ■ ■ Ticket to ride the bus and train

Arriva Trains Wales is promoting the inter-availability of tickets between its train and bus services between Aberystwyth and Machynlleth.

### ■ ■ Catching up with Europe

Arriva Trains Wales drivers have completed the first stage of training to use the European Rail Traffic Management System, using unit 158829. Units 158821/7/9 are now at LNWR Crewe being fitted with the latest version of the ERTMS equipment. Network Rail is using 97301-4 on ERMTS trials on the Cambrian line from Shrewsbury to Pwllheli and Aberystwyth. The locomotives are serviced at Barrow Hill as the new depot at Shrewsbury Coleham has not been opened.

### ■ ■ Planning for the future

The Draft Welsh Transport Plan was published in July for consultation, which lasts until October. It includes aims to improve the provision of, and access to, rail services, including improvements for disabled people and vulnerable users, by 2014. It also wants the problem of low platforms at rural stations to be dealt with, greater investment in stations generally, better rolling stock and better provision for bikes on trains.

Rail users in Mid Wales congratulated the Welsh Assembly Government for its suggestion in the plan that an hourly service between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury be introduced "by 2011".

"As everyone who uses the line knows, rail is very popular with the current services often bursting at the seams," said Gareth Marston, chairman of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth rail users.

"More services are needed to cater for this and suppressed demand".

