

Rail fares in chaos

Few people would choose to make a journey by car on our increasingly anarchic road system if they could do the same journey cost-effectively by train.

Many fares are just too high – often twice the price of fares in other developed countries.

But another big factor hindering many motorists from making the switch is the confusing fares structure.

Even seasoned rail travellers often find the confusing variation in ticket prices and conditions too much to cope with.

The mistaken belief among many rail company marketing staff that train travellers want “airline-style” also seems to have led to complex airline style ticketing too.

Railfuture has launched our third report in the *Easy Rail Travel* series in an effort to bring some sense into the rail fares structure.

The rail fares system can only be described as chaotic. Each operating company has made



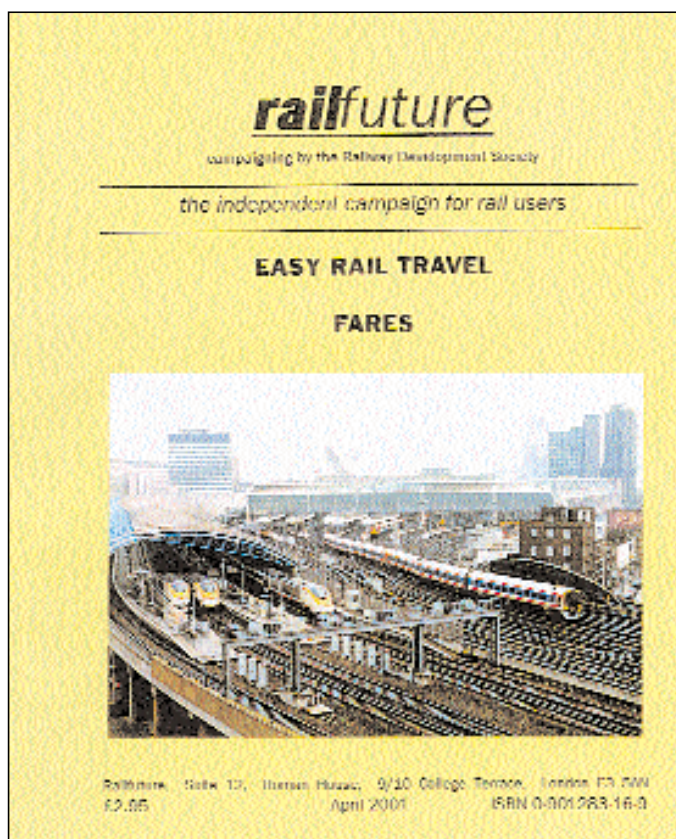
Swiss railcard giving 50% fares reductions. There is also a German version. Why don't we have one in Britain?

changes to the pattern inherited from BR which individually may have had some justification.

Easy Rail author David Croot points out that collectively these changes have led to a situation where there are a vast number of fares in different parts of the country, each with its own conditions and restrictions.

Railfuture seeks to have the system put into good order. If the commercial teams of the various operators follow a common pattern as far as possible, not only will the public benefit, but revenue will increase.

The current policy appears to be that, apart from certain fares that are “protected”, each operator will set its own. Railfuture believes that the concept of protection should be extended to include a comprehensive system

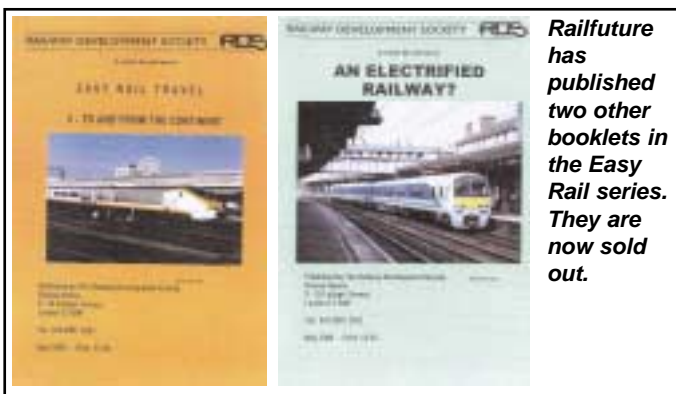


The new 28-page Easy Rail Travel Fares booklet is available at the introductory price of £3 including post and packing.

Orders and enquiries to Phil Morris (Railfuture Sales), 113b Pembroke Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 3EU.

Fax 0117 973 4274

Email queries: rdsbooksales@lineone.net



of discounted fares available nationwide that will ensure a fair deal for all passengers.

Operators would be free to:

- Set fares cheaper than a national system
- Offer a national system of discounted fares with less onerous restrictions
- Offer their own discounted fares.

However, there should be a

national system that offers value-for-money in all cases. This would be a fallback for the passenger if there is no local initiative relevant to their needs.

The Rail Passengers Council has produced a 50-page booklet in an attempt to give passengers guidance in choosing the best ticket from the bewildering 90 different types.

Passengers can also get information about special fares from the *Railwatch* website. You can also

get a regular email update on the latest fare offers, thanks to an initiative by Rob Cope, backed by *Railwatch* and *A to B* magazine.

Send an email with a blank message to: Railbargain-subscribe@egroups.com

The real need however is for the Government to take action to allow fares to be cut.

The Green Party wants bus and rail fares subsidised to encourage greater use of public transport.

But Transport 2000 has warned that there is a real risk of big increases in unregulated fares unless safeguards are put into the new franchises.

“Britain already has some of the highest standard rail fares in the world,” says Transport 2000.

“We want to see the new Government instruct the SRA to draw up new tougher rules on fares as part of a wholesale review.”

Before the election, Transport Minister Lord Macdonald promised to offer fuel duty rebate to long-distance coaches which offer half-price fares to pensioners and disabled people.

We need a similar scheme to lower rail fares for those groups, particularly as rail passengers pay their full network-access costs while road coaches do not.

Travel by rail is generally speaking quicker and more environmentally friendly than travel by coach. It is certainly more comfortable and convenient.

Many road coaches do not offer a proper full-day timetable.

Giving a more generous discount with existing railcards or introducing a new 50% off railcard are ways of doing that.

First Great Eastern is promoting its low-cost turn-up-and-go tickets with the slogan: We are the cheapest link. Good buy.

That is a good target for the rest of the rail industry to aim for.

At present, the Government continues to spend 19 times more money on motoring than on public transport.

And there is still no proper appraisal of rail schemes to measure the enormous contribution they can make to tackling the problems caused by road traffic.

Even the multi-modal appraisals are looking like an elaborate con trick as more road schemes are given the go ahead and rail schemes are shunted into the sidings.