

Passengers' requirements of rail fares based on a survey of over 2,000 passengers across Great Britain

Research summary

In March 2006 Passenger Focus commissioned an independent research agency to carry out 14 discussion groups amongst rail users and non-users in Great Britain. The focus groups explored:

- passenger awareness and views on the range of tickets available
- what constitutes value for money
- awareness of and attitudes towards Saver tickets
- how far in advance passengers wanted to be able to book tickets.

A follow on survey was carried out in May 2006 involving 7,500 questionnaires being distributed to rail passengers across Great Britain. 2,122 passengers returned correctly completed questionnaires related to commuting (719 responses), business (643) or leisure (760) journeys. A full report and summary are available from the discussion groups and the summary of facts below relate to the results of the quantitative survey, for which a full report is also available on request.

Key facts

Cost of ticket

- three out of five commuter and business passengers disagree that 'tickets are generally fairly priced' compared to a half of leisure passengers
- four in five leisure travellers and seven out of ten business passengers agree that they 'would travel more on trains if the fares were a bit cheaper'
- seven out of ten leisure passengers have 'decided not to travel by train because of the cost of a ticket' at some point in the past, with more than two in five of these passengers (44%) choosing to travel by car instead and 16% not making the journey that they wanted to.

Ticket purchase

- over two in five business passengers indicate that they do not look around for the best priced ticket (43%) and a third of leisure passengers also do not (32%)
- business passengers were particularly likely to leave it until the last moment before buying their ticket. Two in five business passengers buying their ticket on the day of travel had known about the journey for a week or more. The equivalent figure for leisure passengers was 23%
- over three in five business passengers and a half of leisure passengers did not know if their ticket would have been cheaper if they had bought it in advance. Furthermore two in five business passengers disagree with the statement that 'I am confident of being able to find

the best value ticket for my journeys'; three out of ten commuter and leisure passengers also disagree

- the majority of passengers trust ticket office staff at train stations to provide them with the best value for money tickets for their train journey ranging from 87% of commuters to 82% of business passengers. The second best trusted source of tickets is staff on the train for commuters (66%) and leisure (68%) passengers and the Internet (68%) for business passengers
- ticket machines and travel agents were trusted by less than half of all passengers. Telephone purchase of tickets was trusted by less than a half of commuters (45%) and leisure travellers (46%) but by just over a half of business travellers (54%)
- an identical proportion of leisure and business passengers generally prefer to buy tickets in advance (45%) not only because tickets will be cheaper (80% of leisure passengers and 66% of business passengers) but because 'don't have to queue' (64%) and can 'reserve a seat' (56% of leisure passengers and 59% of business passengers).

Advance booking

- four out of five leisure passengers and seven out of ten business passengers 'don't mind booking early in order to get cheaper fares'
- for those passengers who prefer to book in advance, 42% of leisure passengers and 37% of business passengers believe that you can only book up to a month in advance and one in ten leisure passengers believes that you can only book up to a week in advance
- 56% of leisure and 53% of business passengers would like to be able to book tickets from between a week and three months in advance which is broadly in line with current availability. However a quarter of business passengers (26%) and 23% of leisure passengers would like to be able to book for longer than four months in advance of travel.

Commuters

- whilst 82% of commuters who already hold a season ticket agreed that season tickets offer better value for money than daily tickets, only 56% of commuters who buy single tickets agreed with this statement. Two in five passengers didn't know how many weeks of 'free' travel are offered by an annual season ticket. One in 20 correctly identified that it is '11 plus weeks' and 44% of commuters believed the level of discount was a month or less. This illustrates a lack of awareness of one of the main advantages of season tickets
- a substantial proportion of commuters did not use season tickets, instead relying on daily tickets. The main reason for not purchasing a season ticket was 'irregular travel patterns' cited by 59% in this group, this was followed by 'not value for money' (19%) and 'haven't got money to pay in advance' (14%) and 'can't afford one' (11%)
- slightly under a fifth of commuters currently travelling without season tickets would be very likely to buy one if they had the options to do so, interest free over a 12 month period
- the introduction of books of ten tickets that could be bought in advance was very popular with 83% of commuters without a season ticket interested in buying these

Saver ticket

- although the majority of passengers (64% leisure and 73% business passengers) claim to be aware of a train ticket called a Saver, nearly half (45% of leisure and 47% of business passengers) are not aware that it 'does not need to be booked in advance'

- seven out of ten leisure passengers (69%) and 63% of business passengers are not aware that the government regulates certain fares
 - more passengers are opposed to the ending of government regulation in favour of train companies setting prices than are in support of this. One in three leisure passengers and two in five business passengers are opposed to deregulation.
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Summary papers of the qualitative and quantitative fares research are available on the Passenger Focus website: www.passengerfocus.org.uk