

Rail fares

The recent fare increases have been unwelcome. Rail pricing in the UK stretches the idea that you should pay a lot more for popular routes at popular times and a lot less for the off peak hours and journeys. I have no problem with the general idea that pricing needs to try to fill more seats, and to encourage sensible time shifting for those who have some flexibility over when they travel. What I do not like is to take it out on commuters who have to meet normal business hours for their jobs and who have little or no flexibility over when they get on a train.

The wide range of fares for the same route often combines ultra low fares that make little addition to train revenue net of costs with extremely expensive penalty fares at other times of day. Season tickets are now very expensive over longer commuting distances. It could be time to think again about how the railway can sell more seats, collect more overall revenue, but go a bit easier on the reliable captive passengers who need to commute to work.

There is an advantage in people using trains at peaks for commuting. The road system is totally overloaded at peak times. Trains offer easier and better ways for many to get straight into the centre of a city or large town where more of the jobs are based. Greater adoption of digital signalling and intelligent on board train information systems could make a substantial boost to peak hour capacity without needing extra track. The present artificial scarcity of train seats into our main cities is used as an excuse for high prices for season tickets.