**Are you celebrating ‘smallest rail fare rise in six years’?**

Last Friday the Rail Delivery Group announced that fares will rise by an average of 1.1 per cent from January. That includes unregulated fares like off-peak leisure and advance purchase tickets (set by the train companies), and regulated fares (set by government) which can’t rise by more than one per cent. The Rail Delivery is making a big song and dance about this being the ‘smallest annual increase for six years’.

Are you celebrating?

Over the last five years, fares have risen nearly three times faster than average wages. We have the highest commuter fares in Europe. Passengers in the UK are spending more than twice as much of their salary on rail fares to get to work than passengers using largely publicly owned railways in France, Germany, Italy and Spain.

Unregulated fares make up just over half of all train tickets and since privatisation these have increased by a massive 33 percent, while regulated fares have increased by 24 per cent (ORR 2015). We’re paying sky high prices because our privatised railway costs and extra £1bn to run every year. Money leaks out in shareholder dividends and profits, for example, and fragmentation also adds more costs. For these high fares we have the privilege of travelling on often overcrowded and late trains, which are some of the oldest in Europe. We’re paying more, but getting less.

The Rail Delivery Group think we’re getting good value for money. But according to Transport Focus, only 45 per cent of those surveyed feel they get value for money for the price of their ticket. Not everyone has the flexibility to book a train ticket three months in advance to get a ‘cheaper’ fare, and not everyone has time to search online for the best deal. With some ticket offices closing as well, passengers may not be able to get the advice they need to get the best value ticket. Buying a ticket is overly complicated because there are so many players with competing interests under privatisation.

Public ownership of rail could deliver cheaper fares. If the lines up for renewal this parliament were taken back into public ownership, that could save around [£1.5bn](https://www.tuc.org.uk/industrial-issues/transport-policy/towards-public-ownership-rail) – which could fund a 10 per cent cut in season tickets.

Now that would be something to celebrate!

Beth Farhat

Northern TUC Regional Secretary