ORR Fare Enforcement Frontline, Support & Senior Staff Research

Report

Savanta:

Contents

Introduction

Background

Several recent cases of passengers being prosecuted by train operators have been highlighted in the media, raising concerns about the fairness of rail fare enforcement practices. In response to these concerns, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) is conducting an independent, Secretary of State-commissioned review of train operators' revenue protection practices. This review is a critical step towards ensuring fair and equitable treatment of passengers while maintaining effective revenue protection within the rail industry.

The review will:

- Review and assess operators' revenue protection enforcement practices, including the use of prosecutions.

- Examine whether ticket conditions are clear and effectively communicated and ensure that systems correctly apply the right conditions for a journey, including at the point of sale.

- Where appropriate, make recommendations to the industry and government for the benefit of passengers, operators, and taxpayers.

The ORR's report will ultimately seek to make recommendations for any areas that require change and improvement.

Objectives

As part of the review, ORR is consulting with staff involved in revenue protection across a range of TOCs (Train Operating Companies) in the UK. This includes both staff on the frontline (e.g., revenue protection officers/managers, ticket inspectors/examiners, train conductors/guards and station staff), and at the level of senior management in charge of revenue protection policies. The goal is to hear their views and opinions on the policies and procedures they work with and the realities of applying these in their roles, and to identify best practices and areas for improvement in revenue protection strategies.

The research aims to establish:

- What revenue protection enforcement policies are being implemented/enforced
- How the policies are communicated to both staff and passengers
- How they are being applied (e.g., consistency, any discretions)
- Challenges and obstacles faced by staff in implementing these policies
- Passenger reactions to the enforcement of the revenue protection policies
- The quality of training and support provided to staff responsible for implementing revenue protection policies
- Rail staff views on areas of improvement in revenue protection policies or how they are implemented/enforced
- Among senior management:
    - What factors or incentives influence the design of those revenue protection policies
    - The principal causes of passengers traveling with invalid tickets, e.g., are some ticket types or passenger types more likely to cause or experience ticketing issues
    - The use of third-party suppliers in revenue protection activity.

Savanta was commissioned to conduct this research.

Methodology

Given the nature of the audience, Savanta used a qualitative research approach, specifically depth interviews and focus groups:

- **30-45-minute in-depth video call interviews with frontline or support staff**

    o 56 interviews total, with revenue protection staff from 20 GB TOCs.
    o The key role types covered by the research are:
      - on-board staff (guard, train manager, etc.)
      - gate line staff
      - station management
      - station ticket office/information desk staff
      - revenue protection staff (on-board trains, in stations, back-office function)
      - revenue protection managers.

- **A series of five 90-minute in-depth video call focus groups and six depth interviews with senior revenue protection staff**

    o Participants included managers and directors from a range of TOCs that have dedicated revenue protection teams.

Executive summary

Revenue protection purpose and approach

TOCs implement various revenue protection measures to safeguard their income and maintain financial stability. TOCs and their staff say that they strive to maintain a fair and effective fare collection system, thereby securing financial stability and promoting public trust in the transportation network.

TOCs aim to create a fair and equitable system by training staff to use their discretion and judgment in handling each case uniquely. This approach underscores the importance of educating passengers about correct ticketing procedures to prevent inadvertent fare evasion. Staff say that revenue protection is not solely focused on strict measures but also emphasises education and prevention. The balance between enforcement and customer service is critical. In practice, while staff aim to maintain this balance, challenges such as potential inconsistencies in the application of fair discretion, staffing challenges and a perception of inconsistent support from other agencies (e.g., transport police) can impact the effectiveness of these efforts.

Revenue protection efforts across TOCs aim to avoid overly aggressive measures that could lead to passenger complaints and negative perceptions. Instead, the focus is on fostering a positive experience through support and assistance, which can help reduce unintentional fare evasion and improve compliance. TOCs report that data-driven decisions are used to deploy resources effectively, targeting fare evasion hotspots and peak times to maximise the impact of enforcement efforts. However, frontline staff indicate that such strategies may require persistent and consistent application to be fully effective.

Complaints and customer feedback are also valuable as they help to identify gaps and correct any errors. Senior managers (from all TOCs) often review complaints to ensure staff followed the correct procedures and to provide additional training if necessary. There are also various levels of oversight in place to review staff decisions and provide multiple layers of discretion to ensure appropriateness.

Passenger types committing fare evasion

Fare evasion is a multifaceted issue with different types of offenders. Some individuals intentionally avoid paying fares, while others, such as regular commuters, occasional travellers, and tourists, might unknowingly underpay due to a lack of awareness regarding fare rules. Several factors are reported to contribute to fare evasion across these passenger groups:

- **Economic factors:** Many passengers justify fare evasion due to financial hardships and high travel costs.
- **Complexity of ticketing systems:** The wide range of ticket options and fare types can confuse passengers, leading to incorrect ticket purchases or exploitation of system gaps.
- **Technological gaps:** There is a disparity in the availability of technology among different TOCs, as well as issues with integration and compatibility.
- **Inconsistent enforcement:** Different rules and enforcement practices among TOCs create confusion and opportunities for fare evasion.
- **Behavioural factors:** Some passengers view fare evasion as a victimless crime or feel justified due to perceived injustices or dissatisfaction with the service.
- **Opportunistic and calculated behaviour:** Opportunistic evaders exploit enforcement gaps, while calculated evaders use sophisticated methods to avoid paying fares.
- **Passenger vulnerability:** Vulnerable passengers, including those with disabilities or financial challenges, may struggle with fare compliance and require additional support.

- **Inability to purchase tickets:** Issues with closed ticket offices, Ticket Vending Machine (TVM) failures, or accessibility problems can prevent passengers from buying tickets before boarding.

Addressing the diverse nature of fare evasion requires tailored approaches specific to each group.

Revenue protection processes and systems

TOCs employ various processes and systems to manage revenue protection efforts. These include manual ticket checks by staff, automated ticket barriers, and mobile ticketing applications. The current technology and equipment used for revenue protection include handheld devices for ticket inspections, automated barriers, and digital applications and equipment for issuing penalty fares. Despite these measures, there is a need for improvement in terms of standardisation and integration across TOCs to ensure consistency and efficiency. For instance, some TOCs successfully use real-time data tools for detecting fare evasion hotspots, while others rely on work-intensive manual processes, leading to missed opportunities and inefficiencies.

Revenue protection staff and their role

Revenue protection staff play a crucial role in enforcing ticketing rules and regulations. Their responsibilities include conducting ticket inspections on trains and at stations, assisting passengers with understanding fare rules, and issuing penalties to those who evade fares. Additionally, they are trained to provide customer service and support, ensuring a positive passenger experience by understanding customer needs and assisting passengers as required. The presence of revenue protection staff on trains and at stations is reported to serve as a deterrent to fare evasion. Several staff members mention that their presence reassures fare-paying passengers and dissuades potential fare evaders.

An important aspect of revenue protection is distinguishing between intentional fare evaders and those who make honest mistakes. This distinction influences how penalties are applied and the level of discretion exercised by staff. Staff often need to navigate complex situations where determining intent can be challenging, leading to calls for more standardised decision-making frameworks. Consistency in enforcement practices and job satisfaction also vary among staff, influenced by the level of training and support they receive from their management teams.

Staff targets, incentives and monitoring

Discussions indicated that there is generally no direct pressure on officers to issue penalty fares, focusing instead on broader adherence to company policies and operational integrity. Across various roles and companies, there is a clear indication that formal incentives or targets related to fare notices are not commonly implemented. Both senior and frontline staff generally support this absence, believing it ensures fairness and helps avoid undue pressure on employees.

Practices regarding targets and incentives vary among TOCs. Most TOCs set departmental rather than individual targets. Among the TOCs participating in the research, only one uses incentives tied to revenue protection activities.

While some TOCs have recognition programs such as reward and recognition schemes for outstanding work, others have faced challenges in implementing such programs. There is a strong influence from unions regarding the implementation of performance metrics and incentives. For instance, setting direct performance targets like a specific number of penalty fare

notices could put staff in harm's way and is therefore avoided. Instead, expectations are set without formal targets, to ensure staff can perform their duties safely and adequately.

Training and guidance

Comprehensive training programs are essential for equipping staff to handle fare evasion effectively. Provided training covers customer service, conflict resolution, and knowledge of the legal frameworks related to fare enforcement. According to senior management from across the TOCs, training aims to ensure staff are well-equipped to handle fare evasion and provide a high level of customer support. Continuous professional development ensures that staff are up-to-date with best practices and industry standards. For most TOCs, refresher courses and scenario-based training further enhance staff readiness for real-world encounters. In some TOCs, dedicated training teams provide regular updates and skills development sessions, highlighting the varying levels of training quality and frequency across operators.

Although most TOCs invest significant effort in providing comprehensive training, they face several challenges. These include maintaining consistency, adapting to new technologies, handling conflicts, and ensuring continuous improvement. From a frontline staff perspective, additional issues in revenue protection training include inadequate initial training, lack of refresher courses, limitations of online training, inconsistencies across TOCs, and the complexity of regulations.

Outsourcing of revenue protection

Some TOCs opt to outsource their revenue protection functions to external companies. While outsourcing can be cost-effective and provide flexibility, it also presents challenges. Among the TOCs that outsource revenue protection functions, there is a focus on aligning outsourced staff with TOC policies through continuous supervision and feedback loops. Regular catchups and monitoring of performance data are used to ensure alignment with expected standards, policies and procedures. Regular contract performance reviews and ad-hoc meetings are conducted to address any issues that arise. Outsourced staff should undergo the same level of training as in-house staff, which includes customer service training, handling ticket machines, legal procedures (penalty fares), use of handheld devices, and conflict management.

The main challenge when outsourcing is ensuring consistency between in-house and outsourced teams. While in-house teams may have strong alignment with the company's values and policies, outsourced teams might have different training and operational standards. This can make it difficult to ensure the same level of training as in-house staff and as such depth of knowledge or experience, which can impact their effectiveness in handling complex situations or making decisions and exercising discretion.

Recommendations

Based on the findings within the report, we have outlined the following <u>key</u> recommendations from staff and senior management (in rough order of priority) to enhance revenue protection strategies across the rail network. It is worth noting that most of these practices are already in place at some of the TOCs. Staff and management recommend making these practices universal and consistently applied across the entire rail network.

Recommendations	Actions or policy proposed
Standardisation of technology	- Transition from manual processes to automated systems for more efficient data handling and to minimise missed opportunities to catch repeat offenders. - Implement integrated, effective technology that facilitates seamless ticket validation, penalty fare issuance, and tracking of fare evasion incidents across TOCs. - Standardise technological tools and systems (e.g. handheld ticket machines, revenue inspection devices, mobile apps, e-ticket or railcard scanners, data analysis tools) used across TOCs to ensure compatibility and minimise inefficiencies caused by fragmentation.
Customer service and fair treatment	Ensure that staff across all TOCs consistently: - Use discretion to handle genuine mistakes with understanding and provide education on correct ticketing procedures. - Focus on creating a positive passenger experience by offering support and assistance, which can help reduce instances of unintentional fare evasion.
Data-driven decision making	- Put more focus on utilising data analysis to inform decisions on where to deploy frontline staff and to identify fare evasion patterns. - Improve cooperation among TOCs and third-party data providers to track persistent fare evaders who use multiple lines, ensuring a coordinated approach.
Support for vulnerable passengers	- Ensure that vulnerable passengers consistently receive appropriate support and fair treatment across all services. - Train all staff to recognise and address the needs of passengers with disabilities, language barriers, or financial hardships.
Consistency in enforcement	- Provide clear guidelines on when and how to use each enforcement option to ensure consistency and fairness across all TOCs, recognising the ongoing need for improvement. - Ensure that a range of enforcement tools are available and are consistently applied, including unpaid fare notices (UFNs), penalty fares, reissuance of tickets, travel irregularity reports, warnings, and prosecution, while improving their application.
Staff training and empowerment	Enhance the provision of training for revenue protection staff on the use of all technological tools and systems, including troubleshooting common issues.

	- Foster ongoing support mechanisms to help staff stay proficient in using new tools and technologies as they are introduced.
Feedback and continuous improvement	- Establish and improve mechanisms to collect feedback from staff and passengers, using this information to refine and enhance systems and processes. - Implement a process for continuous improvement across the board based on feedback to adapt strategies to emerging challenges and trends in fare evasion.
Collaboration with legal authorities	- Strengthen collaboration with legal authorities, such as the British Transport Police (BTP), to ensure effective prosecution of severe or repeat fare evasion cases. - Regularly review and update legal frameworks to remain aligned with modern practices and challenges.
Performance monitoring and incentives	- To maintain staff motivation and job satisfaction, seek to implement non-monetary reward programmes that avoid promoting aggressive enforcement but reward performance. - Encourage regular monitoring and feedback across all TOCs to ensure consistent performance and adherence to policies.

Thank you

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