

ORR Urges Reform of Rail Fare Enforcement: At a Glance



Why we did the review

The Secretary of State for Transport asked the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to carry out an independent review of train operating companies' (TOCs) revenue protection practices. It followed concerns about disproportionate action against passengers for minor or unintentional ticketing errors.

The areas we looked at:

- Retail systems and information provided to passengers when buying tickets
- Clarity of ticketing terms and conditions
- Fare enforcement practices and how these are explained to passengers
- Distinguishing between genuine mistakes and deliberate evasion

Our key findings

Passengers

- Ticket terms and conditions are often unclear and complex
- Enforcement practices vary significantly between train operators
- Some passengers face disproportionate consequences for minor errors
- Information about revenue protection can be scattered and sometimes written in unclear or legalistic language

Industry

- Fare enforcement approaches lack consistency across operators
- There's no industry standard for when prosecution is appropriate
- The use of prosecutions has increased
- There's no public reporting and very little transparency on revenue protection activities
- Operators are missing opportunities for a more joined up, coordinated approach to tackling deliberate fare evasion.

What passengers told us about their experiences

"Out of context, it's like what is the permitted train? You know, what's the permitted line? I think it's very abstract and sort of feels like you're trying to trip people up."

London & Southeast rail user, frequent and shorter journeys, age range 19-35

"Unsure what they [National Rail Conditions of Travel] are – do they cover things like behaviour from passengers? Maybe when trains are late, what compensation you can get for delays?"

Passenger from the North West, longer & infrequent journeys, 51-65 years

Main recommendations

1. Make buying the right ticket simpler and easier

Give passengers clearer information about conditions or restrictions when they are buying a ticket; for example, permitted routes, time restrictions or the use of railcards. This will help reduce confusion and unintentional mistakes.

2. Strengthen consistency in how passengers are treated when ticket issues arise

Passengers should be treated fairly and consistently when they are found without a valid ticket, with industry focusing on targeting intentional fare evasion, as opposed to genuine mistakes, and responding proportionately.

3. Introduce greater consistency and fairness in the use of prosecutions

Establish a consistent test for prosecution across all operators, ensuring cases only proceed when clearly justified and in the public interest.

4. Make information on revenue protection easy to access and understand

Information should clearly set out passengers' rights and how penalties, prosecutions, out-of-court settlements and appeals work.

5. Greater coordination, oversight and transparency of revenue protection activity

Establish an appropriate forum or body tasked with identifying and promoting best practice across all aspects of revenue protection policy and enforcement. Create standard metrics to support oversight and transparency and help the industry deal with fare evasion more effectively.

Next steps

The Secretary of State for Transport will now consider the recommendations. We will provide further support as required.