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## Rail costs higher north of Border



**Damien Henderson**  
Transport Correspondent

**RAIL travel in Scotland requires twice the level of government subsidy than the UK as a whole due to the low number of passengers on most trains, Britain's rail regulator has found.**

The cost to taxpayers of transporting a passenger one kilometre (0.62 miles) in Scotland is 15.5p, compared to a UK average of 7.5p, pushing the total bill for running the rail network up to £725 million a year.

The Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), which published the industry figures yesterday, blamed the higher costs on low loading levels, with trains carrying an average of 84 people in Scotland – the lowest in the UK – compared to 143 on an average train in the rail region of Wessex.

The analysis comes as the Scottish Government prepares to finalise plans to lower the cost of operating the railways from 2014, when the ScotRail passenger franchise, currently operated by First, is due to be renewed.

A consultation published last November provoked a storm of opposition as it suggested hiking up fares and slowing down some services.

According to the analysis by the ORR, the total cost of running Scotland's railways is £1.2 billion a year, with fares from passengers contributing £416m towards that and government subsidies totalling £613m.

A spokesman for Transport Scotland welcomed the report saying it showed that the rail industry was working together to achieve greater value for money for passengers and taxpayers.

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**Sandy Henderson, Dunblane**

And your point is? The geography tells the story. England has ten times more people in a country only 65% larger. That population is also more evenly distributed ( 2 thirds of Scots live within 80 miles of the centre of Glasgow ) More of Scotland is mountainous with small settlements, making railways both expensive to build in the first place and costly to maintain relative to the rail traffic that would use them. Not that buses get of Scot free, as more than half the cost of running the buses is met by the tax payer. If it was not for traffic congestion and pollution, the private car would win hands down.

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