

'Persecution of commuters' brings record rail takings

Ministers have been told to end the “persecution of commuters” after new figures showed that rail companies earned record revenue from fares last year while passenger numbers soared.



Revenue from rail passengers rose to a record £1.96 billion in the final three months of last year, while the number of journeys increased to 385 million Photo: ALAMY

By Sam Marsden

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Campaigners called for action to reduce the soaring cost of train travel, which went up for season ticket holders by an average of 4.2 per cent this year.

In the final three months of 2012, passenger revenue in Britain rose to £1.96 billion, an increase of 8.3 per cent on the same period a year earlier and the highest quarterly figure on record.

More than half of this income came from travellers in London and the South-East, where commuters who rely on rail services to get to work have been hit particularly hard by fare rises.

Train operators earned 21.5p for each mile a passenger travelled on the railways in the three-month period.

At the same time trains became more over-crowded, with 385 million passenger journeys made

between October and December last year, an increase of 14 million on 2011, official figures from the Office of Rail Regulation showed.

The biggest increase came on the busiest routes, with London and the South-East seeing a 5.1 per cent hike to hit 262 million journeys.

There were also 32.6 million journeys on long-distance services, up 1.8 per cent, and 90.4 million on regional operators, a 1.1 per cent increase.

Rail passengers travelled a total of 9.1 billion miles in Britain in the final quarter of 2012, up 2.8 per cent on the previous year.

The quarterly revenue figure, which does not include Government grants, is almost certain to exceed £2 billion this year taking into account this year's fare rises.

Some rail passengers have faced increases of nearly 6 per cent because of the Government's decision to allow train operators to push up the cost on some routes by more, as long as other tickets increase by less than the average.

Many commuters have seen the cost of their season tickets rise by more than 50 per cent over the past decade, while average pay has gone up by 21 per cent.

Stephen Joseph, chief executive of the Campaign for Better Transport, said: "On the face of it, our railways are thriving.

"But that can't last if we continue to force people off the trains through overcrowding and inflation-busting fares.

"Next week's budget is the ideal time for George Osborne to invest in our railways and help those who rely on them."

Manuel Cortes, leader of the TSSA rail union, added: "With rail passengers paying record amounts to travel, it is now high time for ministers to scrap annual inflation-plus fare increases.

"The last quarterly figure of £1.96 billion in fares does not include January's average 4.2% increase. When this is added, we will see passengers paying out over £2 billion a quarter to travel on the most expensive network in Europe.

"And Ministers still want to punish them with more annual rises above the cost of living. It really is now time to stop the persecution of commuters."

The Association of Train Operating Companies said: "The last time train travel was this popular was

almost 90 years ago, when the rail network was around twice the size.

"Significant investment and an industry focused on attracting more passengers have turned around decades of decline to deliver better stations, more trains and faster services."

The Office of Rail Regulation said it was reviewing Network Rail's business plan for 2014 to 2019 to ensure it was in the best interests of customers and tax payers.

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