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Anger as rail firm First Great Western plans 11% rise in advance fares



Rise: First Great Western is to increase the price of many advance tickets by 11.11 per cent

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DICK MURRAY, TRANSPORT CORRESPONDENT

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First Great Western is to increase the price of many advance tickets by 11.11 per cent from next month, the Evening Standard can reveal today.

The "advanced purchase" tickets are often the cheapest way to travel and must be purchased up to 12 weeks in advance and can only be used for a particular train and date.

But they are not covered by the regulations which limit commuter fare rises, allowing train companies to charge what they like.

The rise comes on top of average fare increases of 4.4 per cent in January this year and they will go up again by a similar amount next January.

Critics condemned the increase as "little more than daylight robbery" and raised concerns that other train companies across the UK would also increase the price of advance tickets.

A FGW spokesman said the fares already offer "significant discounts of more than 60 per cent on standard walk-up fares" and that won't change. A FGW document said the increase would come into force from Sunday 8 September.

The September 2013 Fares Briefing overview of key FGW fare changes states: "Advance fares (open, excluding sleeper fares) increases by 11.11 per cent (subject to rounding to nearest 10p)."

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The increases will only apply to those tickets purchased at FGW's 276 ticket offices from Paddington to Cornwall and not to those purchased online — sparking accusations it was "yet another" move to close ticket offices to save money.

Manuel Cortes, leader of the TSSA transport union, said: "This is little more than daylight robbery — it is blatant profiteering at the passengers' expense."

"Private rail franchises are a licence to print money and First Group is exploiting that licence to the very limit."

Mr Cortes added: "This is yet another move to close ticket offices by driving passengers online when trying to find the cheaper fares. They are penalising all passengers who buy advanced tickets at a station and this is particularly unfair on the middle-aged and elderly who prefer to use their local booking office."

He is writing to Tim O'Toole, First Group chief executive, demanding to know if the rises will also apply at the company's four other franchises; First Capital Connect, TransPennine Express, First Hull Direct and ScotRail.

The FGW spokesman said: "Advance Purchase tickets are variably-priced fares which change depending how busy a particular train is. There is no single set price for an AP ticket."

"These fares already offer significant discounts of more than 60 per cent on standard walk-up fares and this will not change in September."

"Like many other operators, we are currently running a promotion that gives customers an additional 10 per cent discount on these fares when booking from our own website."

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