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First Great Western accused of planning 'secret' 11% rail fare hike on tickets bought at stations

By [This Is Money Reporter](#)

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First Great Western has been accused of 'daylight robbery' by a union that has claimed the rail company intends to secretly hike the price of advance rail tickets purchased at stations rather than online by 11 per cent from September 8.

The Transport Salaried Staffs Association said First Great Western's move was penalising elderly passengers who were more likely to buy tickets at the station rather than on online.

First Great Western, which runs services between London and the South West and South Wales, rejected the accusation saying the price of advance tickets was not set and depended on availability.



Ticket offices: The Transport Salaried Staffs Association accused First Great Western of making it more expensive for passengers to buy an advance ticket at the station rather than online

A First Great Western spokesman said that, like many other operators, they were currently running a promotion that gave customers an additional 10 per cent discount on advance fares when booking from their own website.

But Manuel Cortes, the union's general secretary, said this was yet another move to close ticket offices by driving passengers online when trying to find cheaper fares.

He added: 'They are penalising all passengers who buy advance tickets at a station and that is particularly unfair on the middle aged and elderly who prefer to use their local booking office.'

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

A First Great Western spokesman said: 'Advance Purchase tickets are variably-priced fares, which change depending on 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.'



Rail fares: First Great Western is currently running a promotion that gives customers an additional 10 per cent discount on advance fares when booking from their own website

This comes just weeks after it was announced that rail fares are to rise by an average of 4.1 per cent from January next year. This is because train companies each year are allowed to increase prices by one point above the July Retail Price Index (RPI) inflation figure, which fell marginally to 3.1 per cent.

The worst affected routes, however, could see fares rise as much as 9.1 per cent.

The hikes will see the average season ticket rocket to £2,281 and thousands more join the ranks of those paying more than £5,000 a year just to get to work.

The latest rise means the average season ticket will eat up an incredible 12 per cent of the average income (£23,586) after tax, a This is Money investigation has found.

For someone working an eight-hour day, this amounts to around one hour of the working day spent paying off the cost of the journey to work.

The rise in fares is considerably higher than current average wage growth and is likely to put an even greater strain on commuters' budgets.

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[Santander's 123 Credit Card](#) allows for money to be claimed for train tickets bought at stations or online with any rail company, as well as for season tickets and London Underground tickets.

The small print

There are loopholes. There is a £300-a-month limit on which you can claim back money and those travelling in Northern Ireland are barred from claiming back on tickets booked online with NI Railways.

Purchases not eligible for cashback include TfL travelcards, passes and Oyster Card top ups made at newsagents, garages and off-licences. Eurotunnel Le Shuttle and train tickets bought through travel agents or tour operators are also excluded from the deal.

There is a £24 annual fee which is waived for the first year using a fairly complicated refund system. To qualify for this refund you must open or hold a 123 Current Account and set up a direct debit from the 123 Current Account to pay your 123 Credit Card within 30 days.

The annual fee charged for the first year will then be refunded to your 123 Credit Card account within 21 days from the later of either activating your card and/or setting up the direct debit from your 123 Current Account.

Cardholders will have to think carefully as to whether, on balance, the high annual fee cancels out savings made from cashback.

There is also a high APR of 22.8 per cent - so make sure you pay off your full balance every month to avoid interest.

Additional benefits

Cardholders also benefit from a lucrative cashback scheme on a range of household bills.

This includes 1 per cent cashback on all major supermarkets, 2 per cent at all major department stores including Debenhams, John Lewis, and Harvey Nichols, as well as 3 per cent on spends at all major petrol stations.

Santander is also offering a 30 per cent discount deal on home insurance with this card.

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- [PatrickdfO'Brien](#) , new york, United States, 29/8/2013 09:10

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It's probably to pay for their upcoming documentary on channel 5...

- [Betteryourself](#) , UK, 27/8/2013 20:30

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The over-60s can get a third off fares by buying a Senior Rail Card. Those between the ages of 18-25 get the same deal with an 18-25 Rail Card. Discounts are given if you have a Family Rail Card and are travelling with at least one child. What about people aged between 26 and 59 without kids? It's totally unfair!

- [John S](#) , Bromley, United Kingdom, 27/8/2013 20:13

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It's sad, but I no longer use the train. The Narborough station is just a few minutes walk away and where I get off - Coleshill is just 30 minutes train away. There is no changing at a major station making split train journeys a problem. However, the cost is 35% higher than taking the car so sadly, for me, who has to maintain a car anyway, it's a luxury to travel by train. Good old cross country trains - you only provide 3 carriages - going down to 2 during peak time (go figure)) and you're very very expensive!!!!

- [ShaoChan](#) , Leicester, 27/8/2013 20:10

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It's easy. Stop using the train. They can only put up prices if people are willing to pay.

- [bloodywellannoyed!](#) , Sheffield, 27/8/2013 19:02

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