



Rail Fares Index



Quality Report

Release date: May 2019

Contents



Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Historical background	7
Relevance	10
Accuracy and reliability	11
Timeliness and punctuality	12
Accessibility and clarity	13
Coherence and comparability	14

Introduction

This is a report on the quality of the Rail Fares Index statistical release and data portal tables. It helps users to understand the quality of our statistics, and also ensures ORR is compliant with principle 4 of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics¹.

The quality report covers the following areas:

- **Methodology** – detail on the various data sources and methodology used to compile the statistics;
- **Historic background** – a background to each statistic and details of changes throughout the time series;
- **Relevance of the data** – the users of the statistics, and our engagement;
- **Accuracy and reliability** – the accuracy of each statistic;
- **Timeliness and punctuality** – our timescales for the production, quality assurance and publication of each statistic;
- **Accessibility and clarity** – the format of our statistics and where they can be found;
- **Coherence and comparability** – comparisons to similar statistics published elsewhere.

The Rail Fares Index is an annual release and provides a measure of the change in prices charged by train operating companies to rail passengers, which are normally introduced in January of each year.

ORR publishes quality reports on other ORR statistics which can be found on the [statistical release](#) page.

¹ Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality. Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices. The Code of Practice can be accessed here <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

Methodology

The data contained within this release are sourced from LENNON, Rail Delivery Group (RDG) (formerly ATOC) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and stored in a secure data warehouse maintained by ORR. The statistics are subject to an extensive quality assurance process, including a suite of validation checks to ensure the information meets the required specification and is in line with previous trends.

These statistics are then prepared for publication. The process includes quality assuring the tables and charts produced and providing supporting commentary regarding the key trends, methodology and quality measures. These reports are subject to peer review.

The final stage of the quality assurance process is a sign off by the statistics Head of Profession confirming the statistics meets the quality standards and are fit for onward use.

Weights

The expenditure weights (%) used to calculate the average change in rail fares are the proportions of market share in terms of revenue for the calendar year preceding the publication of the statistics (e.g. the January 2015 index weightings are based on expenditure during 2014).

To calculate the index weights, an extract is taken from the rail industry's ticketing & revenue database (LENNON) for the calendar year, detailing the revenue taken for each available fare on every flow (origin-destination pair). Each year, this dataset contains in excess of 10 million records.

The revenue weights from each of these available flows are aggregated to create weights for each sector, class of travel, ticket type and regulated/unregulated fare (these categorisations are defined in the section Definitions). These are then used to calculate the weighted average price change.

Prices

To calculate the index itself, the price of each of these fares is taken from a combination of LENNON and the National Fares Manual (NFM) so that we have a price for January in the current year (Janx) and a price from January in the previous year (Janx-1). Not all flows/fares have prices for Janx and Janx-1 because:

- 1) The flow and/or fare were introduced in the calendar year so there is no price for Jan_{x-1}
- 2) The flow and/or fare were discontinued in the calendar year so there is no price for Jan_x

Currently, if either 1) or 2) apply, then that particular record is omitted from the index calculation (i.e. only those flows that have a price in both Jan_x and Jan_{x-1} are included). Each record within the final dataset is assigned to the following;

- a sector based on the train operating company (TOC) running the service;
- a class based on whether it is first class or standard class travel;
- a ticket type based on the specific product code and description; and
- a regulated or unregulated fare based on the regulated fares basket.

Definitions

The sectors are defined as follows:

- **London and South East:** c2c, Chiltern, Govia Thameslink Railway, Greater Anglia, London Overground, Southeastern, South Western Railway, TfL Rail.
- **Long distance:** Cross Country, East Midlands Trains, Hull Trains, Grand Central, Great Western Railway, London North Eastern Railway, Virgin Trains West Coast.
- **Regional:** TfW Rail, Caledonian Sleeper, West Midlands Trains, Merseyrail, Northern, Scotrail, Transpennine Express.

These differ from sectors in the passenger rail usage statistics as these disaggregate some operators across multiple sectors (e.g. Great Western Railway operate services in all three sectors in the passenger rail usage statistics).

The classes are broken down into:

- **First Class;** and
- **Standard Class.**

The ticket types are broken down into the following categories:

- **Anytime:** can be purchased right up to departure but can be used on any train without restrictions on time or day;
- **Advance:** restricted fares that can be purchased up to twelve weeks before travel but are train-specific;
- **Off Peak:** restricted fares for travel during periods when train services are generally less busy. They can be bought right up till departure but carry restrictions on days/times of travel;
- **Super Off Peak:** cheaper than off-peak fares but subject to similar restrictions (previously known as Super Saver tickets);
- **Seasons:** All season tickets lasting one week or longer; and
- **Other:** Promotional fares and those not assigned to the above categories.

The regulated/unregulated fares are broken down into:

- **Regulated:** Saver returns, standard returns, season tickets and standard singles/returns within London Travelcard zones; and
- **Unregulated:** First class travel, advanced tickets, tickets which include a non-rail element, and some saver and weekly season tickets.

The indices are produced by calculating the price change between Jan_x and Jan_{x-1} weighted by earnings.

Historical background

The rail fares indices provide a measure of the change in prices charged by train operating companies (TOCs) to rail passengers for the following categories:

- Average change in price of rail fares by ticket type; and
- Average change in price of rail fares by regulated and unregulated tickets²;

The average change in price of rail fares by ticket type shows statistics back to January 2004 and is disaggregated by sector (London & South East, Long Distance and Regional (includes Scotland)) and ticket type (Advance, Anytime, Off Peak, Season, Super Off Peak and Other).

The average change in price of rail fares by regulated and unregulated tickets shows statistics back to January 1995 and is disaggregated by sector, class (1st Class and Standard Class), and regulated/unregulated fare.

Both statistics are calculated from transaction data held in the Latest Earnings Nationally Networked Over Night (LENNON) system, the rail industry's ticketing and revenue database.

The indices include franchised and open access operators operating on the mainline rail network with the exception of Heathrow Express and Heathrow Connect as they are not included in LENNON. Eurostar fares are also not included.

The index shows the change in prices from one January to the next as, generally, new fare prices are introduced at the beginning of January. The average change in fares is presented alongside the January all items Retail Price Index (RPI). The all items RPI measures the changes in the cost of a representative 'basket' of goods and services bought by consumers within the UK. Presenting these measures alongside one another illustrates how the average change in rail fares compares with the average change in the cost of goods and services. More information on the RPI and other measures of inflation is available on the Office for National Statistics website³.

² Regulated fares include season tickets for most commuter journeys and Off-Peak fares on most journeys between major cities. Unregulated fares are those which operators are free to determine according to market forces and willingness to pay.

³ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/economy/consumer-price-indices/index.html>

The RPI is also used to calculate the change in fares in 'real terms'⁴.

In 2014, ORR undertook a review of the rail fares index, which was carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Methodology Advisory Service. They made a number of recommendations which were implemented in time for the 2014 index calculation. A summary of the changes we made are below. The full report can be found on the ORR website:

<http://orr.gov.uk/statistics/user-engagement> In 2014 and 2015, ORR calculated the fares index based on a sample of fares rather than a population of matched prices (i.e. exact same fare present in both the current and previous years). The previous methodology generated an annual dataset of between 1.6m and 3.5m records. The production of the index from this annual dataset was resource intensive and time consuming. ONS recommended that we switch to probability sampling.

This was implemented in 2014, using a sample size in excess of 97,000, approximately 3% of the population dataset.

In 2016, ORR reverted back to using the population dataset. This change was made because ORR now has access to a data download from RDG that provides a more complete and robust reference file of fares than was used previously. This has reduced the number of erroneous records in the final dataset and ORR felt that the subsequent reduction in the QA burden warranted re-introduction of the population dataset for calculating the index.

Advance fares

Following a 2014 review into the rail fares index by the ONS Methodology Advisory Service, the indices for advance fares are calculated using a different methodology to other types of fares. The reason for this is that there is a greater product turnover in advance fares than for other fare types which means that calculating a consistent matched price index can be difficult. ONS recommended that rather than calculate the change in advance fares through the matched price method, ORR should calculate an overall average price covering all advance ticket sales for each origin destination pair. This has been implemented in the index from 2014 onwards.

Price change thresholds

Between 2004 and 2013, price changes between -40% and +60% were included within the final index calculations. Due to the size of the dataset, it was not possible to check the validity of all price changes and the flows with the largest weightings were checked and validated.

⁴ Corrected for the effect of inflation

ONS recommended that switching to a sample would enable ORR to quality assure a greater number of fares so all fares outside the price change limits of -20% and +20% have been checked for their validity from 2014 onwards. In addition, those that remain outside of these limits are excluded from the final index calculation as these are deemed to be erroneous.

Excluded revenue

Prior to 2014, only the revenue from those flows that had a matched price in the current and previous year was included as weighting in the index calculation. From 2014, expenditure on those flows that have been excluded at the various stages of compiling the index (e.g. no price record in Jan 2013 and/or Jan 2014, price change exceeding the allowable thresholds) has been reintroduced to compile the aggregated sector/national/ticket category indices. This means that revenue included as weighting has increased from between 85% and 90% prior to 2014, to in excess of 95%.

Relevance

The degree to which the statistical product meets the user needs in both coverage and content.

Statistics on the changes in rail fares provides passengers and policy makers with important information on the cost of travel by rail both within the industry and in comparison to the wider cost of living.

More detailed information on users of ORR statistics and meeting the needs of users is available on our [user engagement webpage](#).

Accuracy and reliability

The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.

The rail fares index is calculated from transaction data held in the LENNON database, the rail industry's ticketing and revenue database. The index has been constructed so that, as far as possible, it covers the cost of travel only. This is done by excluding fares that include 'extras' so as not to distort the index, such as the following:

- Additional services such as multi modal tickets for urban areas, bus and car parking tickets, entrance fees to attractions etc
- Short-term temporary fares/promotions;
- Passengers 'switching' ticket types following the introduction/deletion of certain tickets are not taken into account immediately; and
- Flows for which we were unable to find price information for either of the two reference years, for example a ticket type that is introduced after the first reference date.

London Travelcard purchases are included in the index because such tickets are important in the earnings of train operators and purchases by rail passengers. In addition, TOCs influence price changes associated with these tickets.

Timeliness and punctuality

Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.

The statistics contained within the Rail Fares Index are published annually on the ORR data portal approximately 15 weeks after the new fares for the year take effect during the first week in January.

The publication schedule available on the ORR website outlines the publication dates for National Statistics quarterly and annual statistical releases and other statistics up to 12 months in advance. <http://orr.gov.uk/statistics/release-schedule>.

These publication dates are determined by availability of the information and are the earliest possible dates which we can publish the information.

More detailed information on timeliness and effectiveness of the statistical output is available on our [user engagement webpage](#).

Accessibility and clarity

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.

All data tables can be accessed on the [Data Portal](#) free of charge.

The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.

ORR is fully compliant with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2008 and principle 4 of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

The Rail Fares Index is calculated from transaction data held in the LENNON database are not disaggregated by TOC as it is commercially sensitive information. The statistics are stored in a data warehouse (ORRbit). Only selected members of staff in ORR have access to the data warehouse and access is password protected. The data provision and storage processes have been independently assessed by external consultants Amour Group to ensure they are secure. Internal and external IT vendors also conduct periodic assessments of our systems

ORR has systems and processes in place to safeguard personal identities/details and commercially restricted information. The statistics are internally validated by two teams before it is granted a 'publication' status and viewable on the data portal. Connections to remotely hosted databases are within a secure network and penetration testing has confirmed that the data portal is secure against external attacks.

ORR wants the rail industry to be more open and transparent. We have established a transparency programme to drive our ambitious vision for the industry, and govern a number of projects to support our aims and objectives.

Future transparency projects include improving the data portal as a means of disseminating data and encouraging the industry to publish delay minutes data by cause.

More information is available on our [user engagement webpage](#).

Coherence and comparability

Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.

Since 2013, ORR has included revenue per passenger journey by sector alongside the rail fares index. This information is calculated from the passenger revenue and passenger journeys tables, available in the passenger rail usage section of the ORR data portal. The rail fares indices measure price change from one January to the next, so in order to make the information comparable, the equivalent index for revenue per journey has been calculated using Q4 data, which covers January to March.

It is also important to understand the differences between the rail fares indices and revenue per passenger journey when making comparisons between the two measures. Given the exclusions above, in general we would expect revenue per passenger journey to grow at a slower rate than a matched price index although this is not always the case. For example, there are instances when revenue from particular products are recorded in the most recent quarter, but not recorded in the equivalent quarter last year, or vice versa. Therefore any comparisons between the two should be treated with caution.

The revenue per journey metric reflects changes in customer behaviour and reflects when passengers switch to cheaper tickets. The fares index does not capture this phenomenon, other than in the expenditure weighting for those products in the following year.

Furthermore, revenue per journey reflects changes in usage as well as the cost of fares and can be affected by different growth rates on different parts of the network as some sectors have a higher rate per journey than others.

Comparability to European statistics

The difference in the structure of internal rail markets in European countries means that finance statistics are difficult to compare across member states. The statistical office of the European Union, Eurostat, collects no financial statistics on the rail market. Limited financial information is collected by the Independent Regulators' Group (IRG-Rail) for their Market Monitoring Report, including information on passenger and freight revenues although data are not supplied by all European countries. More information on IRG-Rail is available on their website

www.irg-rail.eu



© Crown copyright 2019

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3 or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at orr.gov.uk

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at orr.gov.uk