

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 10 September 2025  
13th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

## PE2120: Permanently remove peak fare pricing from ScotRail services

### Introduction

**Petitioner** Tam Wilson on behalf of the Scottish Trade Union Congress

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to permanently abolish peak fare pricing on all ScotRail operated rail routes.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2120>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 11 December 2024.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to Transport Focus, the RMT, ASLEF, TSSA, and Unite trade unions, and Transform Scotland.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from ASLEF, Transport Focus, Unite the Union and Transform Scotland, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 14 November 2024.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 742 signatures have been received on this petition.

### Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**September 2025**

## **Annexe A: Summary of petition**

### **PE2120: Permanently remove peak fare pricing from ScotRail services**

#### **Petitioner**

Tam Wilson on behalf of the Scottish Trade Union Congress

#### **Date Lodged**

1 October 2024

#### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to permanently abolish peak fare pricing on all ScotRail operated rail routes.

#### **Background information**

The recent trial abolishing peak fare pricing was a positive step towards making public transport more accessible and affordable. However, the short-term nature of the trial was insufficient to create lasting behavioural change or fully address the potential benefits of long-term fare reform. A permanent removal of peak fares would allow for a more sustained cultural shift, encouraging greater public transport usage and contributing to the broader goals of reducing car dependency, lowering carbon emissions, and promoting social equity across Scotland.

We urge the Scottish Government to recognise the economic, social and environmental benefits of permanently scrapping peak fare pricing on Scottish railways. The removal of peak fares would support fair and equal access to transportation, reduce financial pressure on commuters, and help achieve Scotland's climate change goals by making public transport a more attractive option.

## **Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2120 on 11 December 2024**

**The Convener:** Our final new petition, PE2120, which was lodged by Tam Wilson on behalf of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to permanently abolish peak fare pricing on all ScotRail-operated rail routes.

Members will be aware that a pilot for the removal of peak-time fares ran between October 2023 and September 2024. Transport Scotland's analysis of the pilot showed that, although there was a limited increase in the number of passengers, the pilot did not achieve its aims of encouraging significant modal shift from car to rail.

The evaluation also said that the pilot produced benefits of between £1 and £1.25 for every £1 spent, which compares favourably with some major transport investment projects that are being pursued by the Scottish Government.

In its response to the petition, Transport Scotland stated that the rail system relies heavily on the revenue generated during peak hours, and that abolishing peak fares would require diverting a significant amount of public funds—something between £25 million and £40 million annually—which the Scottish Government says is simply unaffordable in the current fiscal climate.

The response goes on to highlight the discounts that ScotRail has introduced to its season and flexipass tickets, and includes Scottish Government commitments to develop proposals for a new rail fare offering and investment in Scotland's railway.

The petition touches on an area of current party-political and public debate. In that context, we have received a submission from the petitioner in which he acknowledges the fiscal challenges faced by the Scottish Government but says that he believes that the cost of inaction on the matter might be higher in terms of exacerbating environmental issues and social inequalities. He urges the Government to reassess the permanent removal of peak fares as part of its broader efforts to reduce the cost of living, combat climate change and improve public transport access for all.

It is perhaps worth noting, for the benefit of anyone who might be following the progress of the petition, that the Parliament agreed to a non-binding motion that called on the Scottish Government to reverse its decision to reintroduce peak fares on Scotland's railway, and agreed that making public transport more accessible, affordable and reliable is key to supporting more people to use it.

In so far as the petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to do something, the Scottish Parliament has, through the non-binding motion, progressed, in its own way, that very request for action. In the light of everything that we are hearing and the on-going debate, do colleagues have any suggestions for action?

**David Torrance:** I wonder whether the committee would like to write to Transport Focus and Transform Scotland, and to the trade unions—the National Union of Rail,

Maritime and Transport Workers, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, the Transport Salaried Staffs Association and Unite the union—to seek their views on the action that the petition calls for.

**The Convener:** Mr Torrance, you have taken us by surprise with that list of recommendations.

**David Torrance:** You thought that I was going to close it. [Laughter.]

**The Convener:** Mr Torrance has produced a list of suggestions as to what we might do. Are colleagues content to proceed on that basis?

**Members *indicated agreement.***

**The Convener:** That brings to an end the public consideration of our business this morning. We look forward to seeing those of you who are avid followers of our detailed consideration of public petitions on 22 January 2025.

## **Annexe C: Written submissions**

### **ASLEF written submission, 15 January 2025**

#### **PE2120/C: Permanently remove peak fare pricing from ScotRail services**

##### **Introduction**

Scotland's railways represent a vital part of national infrastructure. An efficient railway system that is attractive, accessible, and affordable for the Scottish people is vital if Scotland is to grow its economy, tackle inequality, and meet its climate targets.

In the absence of a Scottish Government published vision for Scotland's railways, [ASLEF alongside the other rail unions presented the report 'A Vision for Scotland's Railways'](#) prior to ScotRail returning to public ownership.

A fundamental argument we set out in our report was that if Scotland is to deliver a world class service that tackles inequality and meets its climate targets then Scotland must make rail travel more affordable.

Investing in rail services and infrastructure (including on reducing fares) will not only help increase passenger numbers it would also help grow the economy. Evidence from a Railway Industry Association report published in 2021, showed how for every £1 spent on rail travel £2.50 is generated for the wider economy. Trains move goods, transport people for work and leisure, and boost economic activity across Scotland, creating and sustaining jobs as a result.

The Scottish Government has a duty to meet its own climate targets, help grow the economy and protect the citizens of this country when it can. Scrapping peak fares is a clear step in the right direction on all those fronts.

##### **Why peak fares should be scrapped**

ASLEF were delighted when the Government accepted our recommendation to scrap peak fares. Equally, we were extremely disappointed when the Government restored peak fares. This short-sighted and retrograde step is out of step with their own stated social, economic, and environmental policies.

ASLEF believes that notwithstanding the peak fares issue, rail fares are already too high and are prohibitive for many working people who must travel to their place of work.

Peak fares are effectively a tax on workers, and we believe that charging workers extra who have to travel on trains classified as peak fares is unfair and unjust.

Train fares must be made more affordable to encourage people back on to trains. Scrapping peak fares was a step in the right direction to help make rail fares more affordable for more people.

Scrapping peak fares for that short time was significantly beneficial for workers travelling by train. We conducted some research into the impact of restoring peak fares on workers in the Transport Minister's own constituency. We found that a worker who travelled at peak times on a return from Edinburgh from Linlithgow five days a week over the course of a 4 week will now pay an additional £62 per month and an extra £166 per month if travelling from Linlithgow to Glasgow. These levels of increased fares are being replicated across the country.

Restoring peak fares has badly impacted the personal finances of workers who have no option but to travel by train at peak times. We are also concerned that the decision to restore peak fares may also be impacting local high street economies, with the cost of trains significantly reducing the disposable income of rail travellers that can be spent locally and in the town centres where they work.

Our concern about the economic impact is compounded by the fact that the Scottish Government did not conduct either an economic impact analysis for the personal finances of rail travellers or how the pilot, and then the restoration of peak fares, may impact local economies and communities

We are pleased that rail travel is seeing passenger numbers increasing towards pre-pandemic levels. One of the factors that has recently seen ticket sales also increasing is because the numbers of revenue collectors has increased exponentially to ensure that revenue is fully optimised.

However, we are concerned that passenger numbers are being impacted at peak times by the cost of tickets and that workers who have to travel at 'peak times' are being unfairly and unjustly charged and that these people who have to travel are lower paid who are seeing their income disproportionately impacted.

There is also a fundamental environmental imperative to shift people from road to rail travel. The Scottish Government recognises that transport is the biggest emitter of CO2 emissions, and that road travel is the biggest polluter within different modes of transport. If Scotland is to meet its own climate targets, indeed if it is even remotely serious about successfully meeting those targets, then it must make rail travel more affordable and accessible for people in Scotland to help shift people from road to rail.

The Scottish Government's own national transport strategy has committed to reducing car kilometres by 20% by 2030. Set against this policy context it is imperative to shift mindsets and behaviours when it comes to modes of travel. This must mean making rail fares cheaper and more affordable overall and it must mean scrapping peak fares permanently.

### **Why was the Scottish Government wrong to restore peak fares?**

For all the reasons set out above the Scottish Government was fundamentally wrong to restore peak fares. Encouraging, and achieving, a growth in rail travel will help the Scottish Government meet its own stated environmental, economic, and social policies.

The number of people using the trains was increasing during the pilot. However, consistent growth in rail travel did need a longer time period for the pilot, arguably it needs a definitive decision by the government to scrap peak fares and invest in affordable fares for rail travel so that car travellers have the confidence to ditch their car and change their traveling behaviour. We believe that the Scottish Government did not give the policy enough of a chance to succeed and was too quick and hasty in stopping the pilot and restoring peak fares. It was a short-sighted decision that flew in the face of achieving many of their own policies.

Restoring peak fares has had a significant impact on people who use the trains at peak times, predominantly workers. It is of great concern to us that the government disregarded this impact and took no account of the individual savings made by rail travellers and how this additional income benefited them and their wider local economies. It is staggering that no economic analysis of individual savings/more disposable income for travellers and the impact/benefit for local economies was undertaken by the government.

We urge the Scottish Government to rectify their mistake and invest in scrapping peak fares and reducing fares overall and make them affordable and accessible.

## **Transport Focus written submission, 16 January 2025**

### **PE2120/D: Permanently remove peak fare pricing from ScotRail services**

Transport Focus welcomed the introduction of a fares pilot for the removal of ScotRail peak-time fares that began in October 2023 and ended in September 2024.

We note that the Final Evaluation Report found that the fares pilot has been somewhat successful in meeting the objectives of increasing awareness of rail and improving access but has had minimal impacts on overall car travel and has tended to benefit those on higher incomes within the Central Belt.

To permanently remove peak fare pricing from ScotRail services it is estimated that the annual costs would be in the range of £25 million to £30 million with a (less likely) downside scenario of up to £40 million.

In 2018 Transport Focus published a report looking at the views and aspirations of non-users (those who had not travelled by train in the last 12 months) and infrequent users (those who travel every six months or less)<sup>1</sup>. The report looked at the characteristics of those who use trains more frequently and compared this with those who had not travelled by rail in the last 12 months.

Unsurprisingly, many of the barriers to using rail are also linked to cost and convenience. This has also remained consistent across various pieces of research and over time, with the top five reasons for not using rail:

- Cost (31 per cent of respondents)
- Too much hassle/takes too much organising (18 per cent)

- Total time taken for the door-to-door-journey (18 per cent)
- Total time taken for the rail journey (15 per cent)
- Car is more convenient (10 per cent)

*(note: respondents were able to select more than one reason)*

There are clearly some people for whom rail travel is not a realistic option. If services do not go where people want to travel or at the time they need to go, then there is little ScotRail can do. Likewise, there will be people who simply will not switch from their current mode of travel, usually their car. Transport Focus's research found that, for one-fifth of people, there was nothing that would persuade them to use rail. However, that still leaves the remaining four-fifths as a potential market.

The common overriding theme throughout all the research is that the main barriers to travel surround cost and convenience. Similarly, the main things that could overcome these barriers are to do with the price of the ticket and the quality and level of service provided (frequency, reliability, comfort). It is equally clear, however, that it is not just the actual cost or convenience that can act as a barrier – perceptions also matter.

Negative perceptions create their own barrier to rail travel. There is a relationship between the things that existing users want to see improved and the barriers identified by non-users. Transport Focus's research sets out the top five priorities for improvement identified by passengers:

- Price of ticket offers value for money
- Improved reliability/punctuality
- Sufficiently frequent trains
- Getting a seat on the train
- Accurate and timely information

What this suggests is that Scottish Government can broaden the appeal for those currently not using their services by continuing to focus on the improvements identified by their current passengers.

This requires continued investment to improve capacity and frequency, a focus on driving up levels of punctuality and much more attention on how disruption is managed.

This raises the issue of trade-offs to fund the removal of peak fares. What are the implications for the priorities identified above, reliability, frequency, capacity and the quality of rail services?

The Fair Fares Review (2024) acknowledged financial pressures faced by individuals and households following the emergence of the cost-of-living crisis, further impacting on the demand for public transport. These financial pressures are particularly



pronounced for people living in poverty for whom public transport fares account for a greater proportion of their disposable income.

The Poverty Alliance Report that supported the Fair Fares Review noted –

“Participants agreed that those living on a low income were unlikely to use trains at all as they were too expensive, even with off-peak fares.”

Pathfinder pilots as part of the Fair Fares Review should focus on public transport interventions that work for people living on low incomes, meeting the vision of the National Transport Strategy (2) of reducing inequalities.

People have different incomes and our public transport system cannot exclude people from mobility by making it unaffordable. Actions should be targeted to deliver the Strategy towards those needing most help, including those living in poverty.

## **Unite the Union written submission, 16 January 2025**

### **PE2120/E: Permanently remove peak fare pricing from ScotRail services**

#### **Introduction**

Unite has previously made clear its backing for the permanent removal of peak fares prices from Scotrail services. We agree with the STUC that the trial, abolishing peak fare prices, was a positive step, however we believe the trial was not long enough to incur a sustained shift in behaviours.

We also believe that the benefits of permanent removal could have long-term positive financial, environmental and social consequences for the Scottish economy which cannot be measured sufficiently in the short period over which the pilot was run. Furthermore, supporting this petition aligns with Unite’s commitments to campaign for publicly owned, accessible and affordable transport and we believe it also aligns with the Scottish Government’s commitments on reducing Scotland’s carbon output.

Unite acknowledges that Scotland's railways represent a vital part of its national infrastructure and that offering an efficient, accessible and affordable railway system for the Scottish people is vital if Scotland is to grow its economy, tackle inequality and meet its climate targets.

In the absence of a Scottish Government published vision for Scotland’s railways, Unite alongside the other rail unions presented the report ‘A Vision for Scotland’s Railways’ prior to ScotRail returning to public ownership. A copy of this report was submitted alongside [the submission from our sister union ASLEF](#).

A fundamental argument set out in that report was that if Scotland is to deliver a world class service that tackles inequality and meets its climate targets, then Scotland must make rail travel more affordable.

Investing in rail services and infrastructure (including on reducing fares) will not only help increase passenger numbers it would also help grow the economy. Evidence from a Railway Industry Association report published in 2021, showed how for every

£1 spent on rail travel £2.50 is generated for the wider economy. Trains move goods, transport people for work and leisure, and boost economic activity across Scotland, creating and sustaining jobs as a result.

### **Why peak fares should be scrapped**

Unite, along with ASLEF and other unions were delighted when the Government accepted the recommendation to scrap peak fares and were therefore extremely disappointed when the Government made the decision to reverse this. Unite believes that this was a mistake and that far from encouraging users to take more journeys by train this will in fact have the opposite effect.

Rail fares in the UK are some of the highest in Europe and it is a mode of transport that should be expanded in order to help Scotland's goals of net zero.

Unite is firm on the assumption that peak fares are effectively a tax on workers, and we believe that charging workers extra who have to travel on trains classified as peak fares is unfair and unjust. Instead of limiting economic choices, Scotland as a forward looking country, should be opening up the economy and expanding job opportunities by making train travel between conurbations affordable to encourage the movement of people and improving their prospects.

Scrapping peak fares for that short time was significantly beneficial for workers travelling by train. Our sister union ASLEF conducted research into the impact of restoring peak fares on workers in the Transport Minister's own constituency. The research found that a worker who travelled at peak times on a return from Edinburgh from Linlithgow five days a week over the course of a 4 week period will now pay an additional £62 per month and an extra £166 per month if travelling from Linlithgow to Glasgow. These levels of increased fares are being replicated across the country.

Restoring peak fares has had a detrimental impact on the finances of workers who have no option but to travel by train at peak times. We are also concerned that the decision to restore peak fares may also be impacting local high street economies, with the cost of trains significantly reducing the disposable income of rail travellers that can be spent locally and in the town centres where they work.

Unite is astounded that the Scottish Government did not conduct either an economic impact analysis for the personal finances of rail travellers or how the pilot, and then the restoration of peak fares, may impact local economies and communities. Passengers are certainly an important element of the equation, however communities on train routes are also likely to be impacted.

We are pleased that rail travel is seeing passenger numbers increasing towards pre-pandemic levels. One of the factors that has recently seen ticket sales also increasing is because the numbers of revenue collectors has increased exponentially to ensure that revenue is fully optimised.

There is also a fundamental environmental imperative to shift people from road to rail travel. The Scottish Government recognises that transport is the biggest emitter of CO2 emissions and that road travel is the biggest polluter within different modes of transport. If Scotland is to meet its own climate targets, indeed if it is even remotely

serious about successfully meeting those targets, then it must make rail travel more affordable and accessible for people in Scotland to help shift people from road to rail.

The Scottish Government's own national transport strategy has committed to reducing car kilometres by 20% by 2030. Set against this policy context it is imperative to shift mindsets and behaviours when it comes to modes of travel. This must mean making rail fares cheaper and more affordable overall and it must mean scrapping peak fares permanently.

### **Why was the Scottish Government wrong to restore peak fares?**

For all the reasons set out above the Scottish Government was short sighted and fundamentally wrong to restore peak fares, and has failed to consider the long term economic, environmental and social benefits of making train travel affordable at all times.

The number of people using the trains was increasing during the pilot. However, consistent growth in rail travel did need a longer time period for the pilot, arguably it needs a definitive decision by the government to scrap peak fares and invest in affordable fares for rail travel so that car travellers have the confidence to switch from car to train. We believe that the Scottish Government did not give the policy enough of a chance to succeed and was too quick and hasty in stopping the pilot and restoring peak fares. It was a short-sighted decision that flew in the face of achieving many of their own policies.

Restoring peak fares has had a significant impact on people who use the trains at peak times, predominantly workers. It is of great concern to us that the government disregarded this impact and took no account of the individual savings made by rail travellers and how this additional income benefited them and their wider local economies. It is staggering that no economic analysis of individual savings/more disposable income for travellers and the impact/benefit for local economies was undertaken by the government.

We urge the Scottish Government to rectify their mistake and invest in scrapping peak fares and reducing fares overall and make them affordable and accessible.

### **Transform Scotland written submission, 4 April 2025**

#### **PE2120/F: Permanently remove peak fare pricing from ScotRail services**

Transform Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to Petition PE2120, calling for the permanent removal of peak fare pricing from ScotRail services. We strongly support this petition and urge the Scottish Government to reconsider its decision to reinstate peak fares, which contradicts its own climate and transport objectives.

Scotland's railways are a vital public service, providing crucial connections for work, education, and leisure while offering an essential alternative to car travel. Given the Government's commitment to reducing car traffic by 20% by 2030, **reintroducing peak fares is a counterproductive move** that makes train travel less attractive and undermines efforts to shift travel patterns towards public transport.

The off-peak fare removal trial was a rare and much-needed intervention that simplified Scotland's complex and often costly ticketing system. The trial removed the financial penalty for peak-hour train use – a burden that car users do not face, and demonstrated the potential for a more equitable, transparent, and accessible rail fare structure. Scrapping the trial, without a clear strategy to improve affordability and accessibility, **risks reinforcing car dependency** at a time when we need to be encouraging modal shift to rail.

Scotland's rail fares are among the highest in Europe, making travelling by train an expensive option for many. A permanent removal of peak fares would help **rebalance transport pricing**, ensuring that public transport is a more viable and attractive alternative to car travel. [Public transport passengers have seen massive real-term fare increases over the past 15 years](#), while the cost of driving has remained relatively stable.

Transform Scotland urges the Scottish Government to take a long-term, strategic approach that prioritises fare affordability and improved service reliability with investment in rail infrastructure. Removing peak fares permanently is a simple yet effective measure that would make train travel more appealing and help Scotland achieve its traffic reduction and climate goals.