

Railway station ticket machines charging more than twice as much as a major online retailer – study finds

Railway station ticket machines charge passengers more than twice as much as a major online retailer for some journeys, analysis has found.

Consumer group Which? said its investigation found the best value fares are either unavailable or hidden among a huge number of options on many machines.

Rory Boland, editor of Which? Travel magazine, said millions of tickets are bought each year meaning “huge numbers of us are potentially paying significantly more than we need to when we commute to work or visit friends and family across the country”.

He added: “Significant numbers of elderly people don’t have internet access at all – leaving them with little choice but to run the gauntlet of ticket machines which either don’t offer the best prices, or make it difficult to find the appropriate fares.”

Industry figures show more than two out of five stations in England do not have a ticket office, while tickets for around 150 million journeys were bought from machines in 2022.

Which? sent mystery shoppers to 15 stations – each run by a different train operator – to compare the price of tickets for 75 journeys offered by machines with those from online retailer Trainline.

Researchers attempted to buy the cheapest one-way ticket for

travel that same day, the following morning, and in three weeks' time.

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Which? found fares purchased online were cheaper around three-quarters of the time, with travel on that day costing an average of 52% more from machines.

A journey from Holmes Chapel in Cheshire to London was priced

at £66 by a machine, whereas Trainline offered the same trip for £26.

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A journey from Northampton to Cardiff was found to cost £107 from a machine, but just £43 online.

There are several factors accounting for the price discrepancies, such as some machines not offering cheaper advance fares or split-ticketing, or making off-peak fares less visible.

Mr Boland said: “The price differences we found between booking online and using station ticket machines were simply astounding... Wherever possible we’d recommend booking train tickets online for the cheapest options, but that won’t be possible for everyone.”

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A spokeswoman for industry body the Rail Delivery Group said: “Since the industry set out the case for fares reform in 2019, there has been some good progress, but more can be done.

“The introduction of single-leg pricing and expansion of pay-as-you-go contactless fares are both important changes making fares easier and simpler for customers.

“We will continue to work with government and industry stakeholders to achieve further reforms and deliver more benefits for our customers.”

Trainline charges booking fees, whereas passengers can purchase tickets for no extra cost from many other websites and apps, including those belonging to train operators.

In October, [a planned widespread closure](#) of railway station ticket offices in England was scrapped in the face of

widespread opposition.

Transport Secretary Mark Harper asked train operators to withdraw their proposals, which were brought forward due to pressure from ministers to cut costs.

On Tuesday, operator London North Eastern Railway (LNER) launched a two-year trial for some of its routes, which involves reducing the number of fares and pricing tickets based on demand.