

## Cheapest rail fares at your station are at risk due to the imminent arrival of contactless – write to your MP

This press release relates to these stations:

- Chiltern stations: Aylesbury, Aylesbury Vale Parkway, Great Missenden, Little Kimble, Monks Risborough, Princes Risborough, Saunderton, Stoke Mandeville and Wendover.
- Greater Anglia stations: Billericay, Bishop's Stortford, Chelmsford, Harlow Mill, Harlow Town, Hatfield Peverel, Hockley, Ingatestone, Prittlewell, Rayleigh, Rochford, Roydon, Sawbridgeworth, Southend Victoria, Southend Airport, Stansted Airport, Stansted Mountfitchet, Wickford and Witham.
- GN/TL stations: Harlington (Beds), Knebworth, Leagrave, Luton, Watton-at-Stone and Welwyn North.
- Southern stations: Ashted, Box Hill & Westhumble, Dorking (Main), Dormans, East Grinstead, Hurst Green, Leatherhead, Lingfield, Oxted, Reigate and Woldingham.

In time, this could apply to journeys to London from a boundary of Bedford, Cambridge, Witham, Rainham, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells, East Grinstead, Brighton, Guildford, Aldershot, Didcot, Oxford, Bicester and Milton Keynes, including Stevenage, Tonbridge, Three Bridges, Haywards Heath, Redhill, Woking, Wokingham, Farnham & Didcot.

All stations listed are subject to change.

Railfuture is calling on rail passengers to write to their MP (copied to their Train Operator and local councillors) to call on them to lobby for the preservation of the cheapest rail fares from local stations to London. The last time contactless payments for rail fares were promised to new stations it came with two stings in the tail – the loss of the cheapest rail fares and the non-arrival of contactless (initially due to ‘delays’ generally, and, later, due to TfL’s Cyber Incident). Contactless is still only available at 6 of these 53 planned stations.

A key reason for the loss of these cheap fares is that contactless payment is provided by Transport for London using their fares system. And this, in line with fares within London, only support two prices – peak and off-peak. And it don’t support National Rail Railcards and other concessions (unlike the system for Oyster).

Neil Middleton, Railfuture’s Director specialising in Fares, who lives in Hertfordshire commented:

There are two options – and it is all about picking the least bad, at least in the short term. The two choices are:

- Lose the cheapest fares and have something that is supposedly simple

- Retain the cheapest fares and have some complexity.

If it really were simple, then Railfuture might be keener on the first choice. But it isn't – for instance only some purchase options allow railcard discounts; contactless doesn't support child fares (including Kids for £1/£2); a traditional travelcard might be cheaper; if you don't use contactless you might need to buy separate tickets just before each journey.

So, it's going to still be complex even with the first choice – so our vote is for the second option – at least the complexity is about finding the cheapest fare.

As Contactless fares come into use for stations further from London, the gap between the cheapest and most expensive off-peak fare gets wider – eg for Bedford, the cheapest off-peak fare to London is £19.00, and the most expensive is £37.70, almost 100% more (the any-time ticket is £53.00). That extra £18.70 per person is a big disincentive to travel and thus put money into the industry's farebox.

We have four key asks:

1. Retain the current fares and add contactless fares as an extra.
2. That TfL make changes to their systems to support railcards (and to allow railcards to be registered).
3. If the Government won't do 1, then at least make the fare change concurrent with day one of contactless in use. At least that way there is pain and benefit on the same day. Not pain now and benefit later.
4. That the Government looks for a PAYG service provider that can match the pricing opportunities currently in place.

Option 1 has been used in the past – when contactless fares were introduced in 2019 for Thameslink and Great Northern (as far as Luton Airport Parkway, Welwyn Garden City and Hertford North), all existing fares were retained.

In terms of what you can do, Neil advises:

This is a political decision, so please write to your local MP to ask them to lobby for you and other constituents. And copy local politicians and your train operator – so they can also apply pressure and be ready to provide data respectively.

A briefing on the rollout of bank card contactless for stations near to London is here

[\[redacted\]](#).

An outline letter and information on obtaining prices is below.

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## Writing your letter

Send to your MP (see <https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP> if needed).

Remember to include your address, including post code.

Dear MP

I am writing to express my dismay that the cheapest fares from my station to London may be removed as part of the imminent arrival of contactless. This will have the following impacts on me \_\_\_\_\_. I am upset about the increase in my costs | I will travel less etc.

The current off-peak fares from my station range from \_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Based on Bletchley station, it is likely that the new single off-peak fare will be \_\_\_\_\_. I will be faced with an \_\_\_\_% increase. (Mention imposition of evening peak if relevant and include in your prices)

I ask that you lobby the Government to retain all existing fares when buying from the Ticket Office, Ticket Vending machines and rail retailers. If they refuse this, the government needs to be lobbied to at least defer arrival of the new fares until day 1 of contactless availability.

(if relevant) I am a railcard holder and I am disappointed that Railcards are not available when using contactless (something about the impact on you). I ask that you lobby the Government to arrange with Transport for London to support Railcards for bank card contactless fares.

I also ask that you pressure for contactless functionality to be further extended to support all fare types and also child fares for £2.

If you want to know more about the situation, Railfuture's Press Release at [redacted] and situation report at [redacted] provides more information.

To get all the prices you might pay, the peak hours contactless fares from any station will be half the peak return fare. An off-peak single will be priced somewhere in between the range of most expensive and cheapest existing off-peak fare. And if you don't already have it, the off-peak fare will not apply for journeys from Central London starting between 1600 and 1900 Monday to Friday. To get current prices, either use any Train Operating Company or National Rail's website – or give <https://www.brfares.com/> a try out.