

THE PASSENGER

THE NEWSLETTER OF RAIL USERS IRELAND

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Park and be Taken for a Ride

By **THOMAS STAMP**

IRISH RAIL commuters, faced with no choice but to drive to their stations, are now facing extortionate Car Parking charges for no reason other than to boost cash income to CIE.

Contrary to Irish Rail's press campaign, not only is there no financial need for charging at car parks at all, Rail Users Ireland can confirm that the company's other reasons are equally bogus, so let us set the record straight and see if you, or the company and its contractor's benefit.

There is no need to recoup the costs of building new Car Parks, renovating car parks, installing CCTV or improving access for people with disabilities—the taxpayer has paid for this already. The only extra costs are, perversely, the costs associated with charging you to use what you have already paid.

The claim that Car Park charging will deter people from using train

stations as free parking during their shopping will come as news for those whose stations are so far out of town as to make this activity non-existent. Even if it were true, the price of €2 per day or €8 per week will not stop that, in fact it may present the cheapest parking in town.

Here is the big question: why? Surely for the money being spoken about, two million a year split between CIE and the Parking Company, Irish Rail could set up a proper integrated Feeder Bus system, which would really encourage people to leave their cars at home.

Instead of adding a potential €500 to the average commuters journey costs they could simply use the same validation system that many stores such as Tesco and Dunne's use and allow those with a return ticket use it to leave the car park for free. This readily available technology could be installed instead and save you hundreds of Euro.



PARKING BESIDE LUSK STATION EARLIER THIS YEAR

However, saving you hundreds of Euro is not what they are about.

If they're not fleecing you in the trains dining car or the trolley, then they're fleecing you at the station for little or no improvements in the current service. You can however look forward to some of the highest clamping fees in the state.

If CIE were really interested in eliminating un-necessary car journey's, in helping the environment and in easing the strain of those living nearby Stations they could provide for the same sums involved a shuttle bus service instead of ripping car owners off.

It seems they have no interest in that, instead they have chosen to exploit passengers without even confirming that the taxsaver.ie scheme will be extended to cover the car park charges, just as the Luas does.

Don't be taken for a ride by CIE and their car parkers, contact your local TD and raise hell, and don't forget to tell them Rail Users Ireland sent you.

While you're at it, don't forget to tell them to petition the Minister for Transport to abolish this charge. He approves of it after all, unlike Seamus Brennan who found there was no case for it.



CAR PARK: ALREADY PAID FOR

The Big Fares Rip-Off

By **MARK GLEESON**

THE PASSENGER can reveal that Irish Rail have been ripping off passengers by not telling them of the cheapest fare for their journey—despite it being in the so-called "passenger charter".

In one instance, last year a family booked (on-line) a Cork Dublin return for 2 adults and 3 children at a cost of €185.

The ticket checker on the train was amazed it cost so much when they could have purchased a family ticket for €115 had they book at a station. This is because whilst the family special ticket is available at stations, Irish Rail has not made this feature available on-line, resulting in the potential for massive rip-offs of the travelling passengers who have chosen the train over MPVs.

Since this incident a notice has appeared on the online booking system that family tickets are not available online: *The Passenger* asks—Why Not?

Another passenger who wished to travel return from Clonmel to Dublin was quoted a fare of €54.90 online and was told by the conductor on the train that the fare was actually €21.50.

We have discovered that by

paying for two single tickets instead of one passengers can save money, a fact that Irish Rail don't want you to know about and which they actively discourage by insisting that you cannot use the loophole.

This state of affairs is resulting in more money being paid by hard pressed passengers than they should otherwise have to pay. (Continues overleaf)

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The Big Fares Rip-Off

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As one passenger discovered, a direct ticket from Maynooth to Drogheda cost €3 more than getting one ticket from Maynooth to Connolly and one from Connolly to Drogheda. The passenger was stunned to discover that he had been paying over the odds for years. Similarly, a ticket from Maynooth to Balbriggan and from Balbriggan to Drogheda the saving is a colossal €10.90. Nothing in the Bye-Laws prevents this. The drawback is that you must break your journey in Balbriggan.

These are not isolated incidents - we have learned of many more right across the network including between Mallow, Cork and Cobh.

Intercity passengers traveling via Dublin face similar overcharging. A Drogheda Rosslare single bought from the ticket vending machine in Drogheda costs €49.50, however it can be up to €15.50 cheaper to buy a ticket to Connolly and another from there to Rosslare.

As passengers have no way of knowing the fares in advance since there is no facility for them to check online nor is the guide issued to staff publicly available, the situation results in them being left in the lurch.

Interestingly it is also possible that student tickets can end up more expensive than adult tickets which Irish Rail appears to be in no hurry to solve.

Irish Rail are now talking of making changes to the fare structure. But will they be in the interests of the passenger? *The Passenger* will be monitoring developments carefully.



How much can you save by checking fares?

Reservation doesn't mean a seat

By OUR REPORTER

THOSE WHO have waited decades for seat reservations and in traditional fashion now they are here they don't work. A deluge of complaints has reached us of non-existent seats, seats not marked as reserved, machines that refuse to print tickets and staff who don't help you claim your seat.

We decided to test the situation and bought three return trips from Dublin to Thurles, Newry and Thurles—Limerick.

On all on the journeys there were no notices telling passengers not to occupy reserved

seats. Only once was our reporter asked to show his seat reservation. On half of the journeys there was no notice that the seats had been reserved by our reporter. In fact we twice found reservation notices in the seats for trips earlier in the day leading to predictable confusion. You cannot blame someone for sitting in a reserved seat which is not displayed as such—which happened three times on this test.

Irish Rail say they have dedicated staff to assist you. You may have seen these yellow t-shirted people but they only work in Heuston and Cork (but not at weekends!).

They also can't help if you board mid-journey. We put our findings to Irish Rail we were told about upcoming investment and new trains, as usual. This is despite the fact that in our observations on the newest trains in the fleet the electronic reservation displays work about 50% of the time.



Reservation Display on Trains

It's All About Spin

By MARK HENNESSY

DART and Suburban commuters will have spotted a series of posters that have started to appear on trains and in stations featuring DJ's and Ballerina's telling us something about timing. The posters claim that Irish Rail are meeting punctuality on DART and Suburban journeys close to 98% of the time. Before gloating to our Swiss cousins about our clockwork railway, *The Passenger* decided to investigate the spin behind the numbers.

As any commuter who has spent many an anxious morning stuck outside Connolly station wondering if the train will get them to work "on time", the definition of "on time" is quite simple. One would imagine that this simple definition of being on time is the way

by which Irish Rail use to give their rather impressive figure. Alas, all too predictably, this is not the case.

Irish Rail actually have their own definition for being on time. Their version of "on time" is not simply keeping to their published timetable. Irish Rail's version of on time is that "the train must be no later than 10 minutes arriving at its final destination". In effect this means that the published times for intermediate stations can sometimes be closer to a work of fiction than a fact. This is especially true on commuter journeys across the city. A train can be delayed for up to 15 minutes pulling into a city centre station affecting thousands of commuters. So long as that train reaches its final destination in Bray no more than 10 minutes later than the scheduled

train, then this train is "on time".

Furthermore to add to the insult, there are no penalties for Irish Rail's tardiness. As Irish Rail are not accountable to anyone, lest of all their customers, there are no enforceable service levels that Irish Rail must adhere to. There is a "memorandum of understanding" between the Department of Transport and Irish Rail but the Department of Transport refuse to release the details of this non-enforceable "understanding" to pesky commuters who would dare question the punctuality stats from Irish Rail.

The Passenger will be keeping independent statistics of punctuality over the coming months and the results will be available on our website, www.railusers.ie.

**TELL US YOUR STORY!! OUR E-MAIL IS info@railusers.ie OUR MESSAGEBOARD IS www.railusers.ie/forum
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