

TRAIN TICKET

MINEFIELD

Trains	Later	Tickets
8m 14:36 → 14:44 Cheapest Ticket £4.80	i	Cheapest Advance Single £2.10 Valid on specified Northern Trains only
15m 14:39 → 14:54 Cheapest Ticket £2.40	i	Advance Single £2.40 Valid on specified Northern Trains only
14m 14:43 → 14:57 Cheapest Ticket £2.10	i	Off-Peak Day Single £4.80 Valid only Avanti West Coast services.
9m 14:54 → 15:03 Cheapest Ticket £2.10	i	Anytime Day Single £5.00 Valid only Avanti West Coast services.
8m 14:57 → 15:05 Cheapest Ticket £4.80	i	Anytime Day Single £5.10

Introduction

There are many railway routes in England which are served by a single train operator. On these (mainly rural) routes there is just one consistent Off-Peak fare for each of the possible journeys along that route, plus an Anytime fare. There are however many routes which are served by more than one operator and it is common practice for each operator to set its own fares, which may differ from those of other operators.

A glaring example of this situation is the just over 5 mile journey from Stockport to Manchester Piccadilly. This route is served by no less than six train operators, each of which have a set fare for the single leg. Over the period between 15.40 and 16.48 there are 16 trains available for use, but the intending traveller must quickly become aware that a ticket bought for one operator's train is (generally) not valid on that of another operator. For example, there is a TPE train at 15.55 for which the single fare is £3.30. Two minutes later a slightly quicker journey can be taken on an Avanti West Coast train but at a cost of £4.80. Wait another four minutes and the single fare on the Transport for Wales train will cost a mere £1.60. However, Code C Restriction states "Seat reservations are compulsory". Yes, you must (in theory at least) reserve your seat for the 14 minute journey!

Overall the single fare range spans from £1.60 (TfW), through £2.10, £3.30, £4.80, and £5.00 to £5.10 (any train). *brfares.com* lists another 11 fares but these are not offered on Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) for the journeys in question.

For the non-expert, perhaps first-time, traveller there is an inherent threat when choosing the 'right' ticket to buy. The Stockport station TVMs specifies the operator by name (or just abbreviation), but the naïve user won't have a clue whether it's a blue train or a red and white train or whatever. If a £3.30 ticket has been purchased for the 15.55 (TPE) train and the 15.57 (Avanti WC) train arrives first, because the TPE train was running late, the passenger will be committing an offence if he/she joins the Avanti. Failure to read the 'small print' on the ticket means it is just possible that an enthusiastic conductor or revenue protection officer will check the ticket and impose a massive penalty.

The above case is just one example of the multi-fare issue which will apply to all routes served by multiple operators who are permitted to set their own fares for journeys along their own lines of route. Some of the operator specific fares are competitively priced, whilst others could be viewed as excessive in relation to others charged for the same journey.

There is generally for each journey an Anytime fare which may be used for any train on the chosen route, regardless of operator. Such fares tend to be the most expensive for the journey in question.

The modern complexity of train ticket purchase is discussed in detail below.

Ticket types and conditions of use

Advance tickets	Train operator specific; The cheapest range of tickets; Bought in advance of travel, sometimes up to ten minutes prior to departure; Only available for single journeys; Sold in limited numbers, subject to availability; Sold on first come, first served basis; Amendable up to time of travel. A service charge may be applied; Non-refundable except in event of train delay or cancellation; Discounts available for children and Railcard holders; Only valid on the date and train specified on the ticket; Some advance tickets require a reservation; Break of journey is not permitted, except to change trains.
Anytime tickets	Validity not linked to specified train operator; Ticket numbers are not limited; Fully flexible with no restrictions on when to travel; Available in advance or immediately prior to travel; Discounts available for children and Railcard holders; Sometimes seat reservations are available (and desirable); Break of journey is permitted; Tickets are refundable, subject to a service charge.
Off-Peak tickets	Generally valid from 09.30 in cities and large towns and 09.00 elsewhere; Weekends and bank holidays are off-peak all day.
Availability	Tickets may be purchased at: Station ticket offices – with travel advice being available; Station TVMs - limited advice; Web purchase - National Rail Enquiries; Web purchase - Individual train operator's site; Web purchase - Commercial, e.g. Trainline.
Medium	Traditional paper tickets Bar code or QR code on mobile phone

For the majority of selected routes there is a requirement that the appropriate ticket is purchased, using one of the methods above, prior to boarding the train. Larger stations are equipped with electronic gatelines which are opened by presentation of a valid ticket. Within Penalty Fares areas a fine (currently £100 plus the price of the full single fare applicable for the intended journey) will be applied if the passenger, having boarded a train, does not have a valid ticket for the whole journey or if the ticket validity does not apply to the operator of the train.

On the following pages there are examples which identify the complexity of ticket purchase on routes covered by multiple operators.

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Stockport to Manchester Piccadilly

Range of **Single** tickets available for journeys during the late afternoon period

Stockport (dep)	Manchester (arr)	Journey duration (min)	Operator	National Rail quoted fare(s)	Validity	Notes
15.40	15.50	10	Northern	Advance - £2.40 Anytime - £5.10	Northern only Any train	
15.48	16.02	14	Northern	Advance - £2.10 Anytime - £5.10	Northern only Any train	
15.51	15.59	8	Cross Country	Anytime - £5.10	Any train	
15.55	16.05	10	TPE	Off-Peak - £3.30 Anytime Day - £3.40 Anytime - £5.10	TPE only TPE only Any train	
15.57	16.05	8	Avanti WC	Off-Peak - £4.80 Anytime - £5.00 Anytime - £5.10	Avanti WC only Avanti WC only Any train	
16.01	16.15	14	TfW Rail	Advance - £1.70 Anytime - £3.20 Anytime - £5.10	TfW Rail only TfW Rail only Any train	Seat reservation required Seat reservation required
16.02	16.16	14	Northern	Advance - £2.10 Anytime - £5.10	Northern only Any train	
16.10	16.19	9	Avanti WC	Anytime - £5.00 Anytime - £5.10	Avanti WC only Any train	
16.15	16.25	10	Northern	Advance - £2.10 Anytime - £5.10	Northern only Any train	
16.19	16.29	10	Cross Country	Anytime - £5.10	Any train	
16.25	16.35	10	East Midlands	Anytime - £5.10	Any train	
16.26	16.40	14	Northern	Advance - £2.10 Advance - £2.40 Advance - £3.20 Anytime - £5.10	Northern only Northern only Northern only Any train	
16.33	16.47	14	Northern	Advance - £2.10	Northern only	
16.36	16.44	8	Avanti WC	Anytime - £5.00 Anytime - £5.10	Avanti WC only Any train	
16.40	16.50	10	Northern	Advance - £2.40 Advance - £3.20 Anytime - £5.10	Northern only Northern only Any train	
16.48	17.02	14	Northern	Advance - £2.10 Advance - £2.40 Advance - £3.20 Anytime - £5.10	Northern only Northern only Northern only Any train	

An example of a potential problem

If an intending passenger purchases a TfW Rail advance ticket (£1.70) for the 16.01 service but finds that the TfW Rail service is delayed and therefore decides to board the 16.02 Northern service (the Advance fare being £2.10) the passenger stands the chance of being fined for having a non-Northern validity ticket. Neither service is 'better' than the other as each takes 14 minutes to reach Manchester Piccadilly.

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Manchester Airport to Manchester Piccadilly

Range of **Single** tickets available for journeys during the late afternoon period

Man Airport (dep)	Man Picc (arr)	Journey duration (min)	Operator	National Rail quoted fare(s)	Validity	Notes
15.07	15.28	21	Northern	Advance - £4.50 Advance - £4.70 Advance - £5.30 Anytime - £6.50	Northern only Northern only Northern only Any train	
15.17	15.31	14	Northern	Advance - £4.70 Advance - £5.30 Anytime - £6.50	Northern only Northern only Any train	
15.25	15.43	18	TfW	Advance - £3.10 Advance - £3.60 Anytime - £4.70 Anytime - £6.50	TfW only TfW only TfW only Any train	Reserved seat req'd Reserved seat req'd
15.29	15.48	19	Northern	Advance - £4.70 Advance - £5.30 Anytime - £6.50	Northern only Northern only Any train	
15.32	15.52	20	Northern	Advance - £4.70 Advance - £5.30 Anytime - £6.50	Northern only Northern only Any train	
15.44	15.57	13	TPE	Off-Peak - £4.80 Anytime - £5.60 Anytime - £6.50	TPE only TPE only Any train	
15.48	16.01	13	Northern	Advance - £5.30 Anytime - £6.50	Northern only Any train	
16.04	16.19	15	TPE	Advance - £4.30 Advance - £4.50 Advance - £4.60 Advance - £4.70 Advance - £4.80 Advance - £4.90 Off-Peak - £4.80 Anytime - £5.60	TPE only TPE only TPE only TPE only TPE only TPE only TPE only Any train	Not available day of travel Not available day of travel Not available day of travel Not available day of travel Not available day of travel Not available day of travel
16.07	16.28	21	Northern	Advance - £5.30 Anytime - £6.50	Northern only Any train	
16.17	16.31	14	Northern	Advance - £5.30 Anytime - £6.50	Northern only Any train	

Paying the price for naivety

Having arrived off a long plane journey and suffered the frustration of baggage reclaim the intending train user (new to the country) purchases a ticket to Manchester from the TVM. The purchased ticket is for the 15.25 TfW train but, as far as the holder is concerned it is simply a ticket to Manchester. He/she notices that there is no sign of a train to leave at 16.25 but there is a train on an adjacent platform due to leave at 16.29. Although it is going to Barrow in Furness the CIS screen lists Manchester as a calling point. The passenger boards the train and 'gets booked' for having the wrong ticket. (There is a strong argument that sympathetic consideration be given in cases like this.)

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Lancaster to Preston

Range of **Single** tickets available for journeys during the late afternoon period

Lancaster (dep)	Preston (arr)	Journey duration (min)	Operator	National Rail quoted fare(s)	Validity
15.28	15.46	18	TPE	Off-Peak - £7.20 Off-Peak - £9.40 Anytime - £8.60 Anytime - £10.10	TPE only Any train TPE only Any train
15.40	15.57	17	Avanti WC	Off-Peak - £8.10 Anytime - £8.80 Off-Peak - £9.40 Anytime - £10.10	Avanti WC only Avanti WC only Any train Any train
15.47	16.05	18	Northern	Advance - £6.30 Off-Peak - £9.40 Anytime - £10.10	Northern only Any train Any train
16.29	16.46	17	TPE	Off-Peak - £7.20 Anytime - £8.60 Off-Peak - £9.40 Anytime - £10.10	TPE only TPE only Any train Any train
16.39	16.56	17	Avanti WC	Off-Peak - £8.10 Anytime - £8.80 Off-Peak - £9.40 Anytime - £10.10	Avanti WC only Avanti WC only Any train Any train
16.50	17.08	18	Northern	Advance - £6.30 Off-Peak - £9.40 Anytime - £10.10	Northern only Any train Any train
17.00	17.17	17	Avanti WC	Off-Peak - £8.10 Anytime - £8.80 Off-Peak - £9.40 Anytime - £10.10	Avanti WC only Avanti WC only Any train Any train

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Manchester Piccadilly to Sheffield

Range of **Single** tickets available for journeys during the late afternoon period

Man Picc (dep)	Sheffield (arr)	Journey duration (min)	Operator	National Rail quoted fare(s)	Validity
15.13	16.08	55	TPE	Advance - £15.10 Advance - £16.60 Anytime - £26.60	TPE only TPE only Any train
15.43	16.35	52	East Midlands	Anytime - £26.60	Any train
15.48	17.06	78	Northern	Anytime - £20.10 Anytime - £26.60	Northern only Any train
16.13	17.09	56	TPE	Advance - £15.10 Advance - £16.60 Anytime - £26.60	TPE only Booked TPE only Any train
16.43	17.39	56	East Midlands	Anytime - £26.60	Any train

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Crewe to Stockport

Range of **Single** tickets available for journeys during the afternoon period

Crewe (dep)	Stockport (arr)	Journey duration (min)	Operator	National Rail quoted fare(s)	Validity	Notes
14.10	14.35	25	Avanti WC	Off-peak day - £14.10 Anytime - £15.60 Anytime - £15.70	Via Wilmslow Avanti WC only Via Wilmslow	
14.30	15.01	31	TfW Rail	Advance - £7.80 Off-peak day - £14.40 Anytime - £14.20 Anytime - £15.70	TfW only Via Wilmslow TfW only Via Wilmslow	Seat reservation required
14.46	15.26	40	Northern	Advance - £4.70 Off-peak day - £14.40 Anytime - £15.70	Northern only Via Wilmslow Via Wilmslow	
15.10	15.35	25	Avanti WC	Off-peak day - £14.40 Anytime - £15.60 Anytime - £15.70	Via Wilmslow Avanti only Via Wilmslow	

Other fares listed in *brfares.com*

Fare set by

Validity

Advance	£9,998.00	TfW Rail	TfW only	Seat reservation required
?	£12.50	Avanti WC	Avanti WC only	Std Premium Onboard
Advance	£8.80	TfW Rail	TfW only	Seat reservation required
Advance	£7.80	TfW Rail	Northern only	
Advance	£7.10	TfW Rail	Northern only	
Advance	£6.30	TfW Rail	Northern only	
Advance	£6.00	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£5.60	TfW Rail	TfW only	Seat reservation required
Advance	£5.30	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£5.00	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£4.90	TfW Rail	TfW only	Seat reservation required
Advance	£4.70	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£4.40	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£4.20	TfW Rail	TfW only	Seat reservation required
Advance	£4.00	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£3.80	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£3.60	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£3.50	TfW Rail	TfW only	Seat reservation required
Advance	£3.40	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£2.00	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£1.00	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£0.50	Northern	Northern only	
Advance	£0.10	Northern	Northern only	

In addition to the fares listed above with respect to specific trains the website www.brfares.com lists many more. This website is an online version of the rail industry fares manual. There is a world of difference between the headline fare of £9998.00 and £0.10, neither of which is ever likely to be used in practice. So why are they all there in the first instance? Searching the website for any chosen journey between two stations produces a similar abundance of fares.

This Comparison of Ticket Prices shows the wide variety of prices for the identical journey from Stockport to Manchester, all within 13 minutes.

OUT				
Mon 29 Apr 2024				
Stockport (SPT) to Manchester Piccadilly (MAN)				
< Earlier		Later >		
SPT 15:57	SPT 16:01	SPT 16:02	SPT 16:10	
↓	↓	↓	↓	
MAN 16:05	MAN 16:15	MAN 16:16	MAN 16:19	
8m 0 changes	14m 0 changes	14m 0 changes	9m 0 changes	
Advance Single Specified train only. No refunds.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> £1.60 Limited availability			
Advance Single Specified train only. No refunds.		<input type="radio"/> £2.10 Limited availability		
Advance Single (1st Class) Specified train only. No refunds.	<input type="radio"/> £2.40 Limited availability			
Anytime Day Single Travel any time of day.	<input type="radio"/> £3.20			
Off-Peak Day Single Any off-peak train.	<input type="radio"/> £4.80			
Anytime Day Single Travel any time of day.	<input type="radio"/> £5.00		<input type="radio"/> £5.00	
Anytime Day Single Travel any time of day.	<input type="radio"/> £5.10	<input type="radio"/> £5.10	<input type="radio"/> £5.10	<input type="radio"/> £5.10
Anytime Day Single (1st Class) Travel any time of day.	<input type="radio"/> £6.70	<input type="radio"/> £6.70		<input type="radio"/> £6.70

Source: Northern Trains journey planner

Is it not surprising that many intending customers are truly baffled ?

Competition ?

It has been made clear by representatives of the railway industry that this plethora of fares arises because of the requirements monitored by the Competition and Markets Authority whose duty is to ensure healthy competition between companies in the UK for the benefit of companies, customers and the economy. Hence, each train operating company (TOC) is required to act unilaterally when determining fares for each pair of stations along each of the routes on which they provide services. Any decision by TOCs to simplify the fares system would be deemed to be anti-competitive and therefore not permitted. As a result present passengers have to put up with a complex system.

Looking at it, as an outsider, it would seem that there is a belief held by the law makers that TOCs perform their duties in a competitive manner. In reality, as a result of the network characteristic of train operations, each TOC is limited in the degree to which they can be truly competitive. When a timetable is constructed for a line of route each TOC may submit bids based on service frequency, speed (determined by the nature of the stock used) and the station stopping pattern. It is the role of Network Rail to fit the competing aims into a workable, theoretically reliable, timetable. It would seem that the only visible element of 'competitiveness' will result from creative advertising, in hard copy, on the web etc, and overall public satisfaction.

The only truly competitive involvement is currently provided by open access operators, e.g. Hull Trains, Grand Central and Lumo. These are companies which provide meaningful competition to the existing monopoly providers.

In public transport the true competition is rail versus road and air (or the ultimate decision not to travel). Decisions made by intending travellers involve consideration of comparative costs, speed, comfort, convenience, etc. On routes which involve multiple TOCs these decision makers will rarely say "I prefer TOC (a) to TOC (b) as I like the colour of their trains (etc)". As an example, on the route which prompted this investigation, people do not approach Stockport Station thinking "I must travel by (a TOC's name) today". They simply wish to reach the centre of Manchester quickly, comfortably, safely and at a sensible price.

It has already been announced that an incoming Labour government, subject to success at the next General Election, will 're-nationalise the railways'. Whether this plan will materially alter the current government proposal to create *Great British Railways* remains to be seen. A staged process to replace the present TOCs (part autocratic, part governed by the Department for Transport) by service providers, whose roles will be to provide a meaningful service without any semblance of competition, will be a good thing.

With specific reference to the fares structure, there is a better way

Take advice from Switzerland

In total contrast to the haphazard public transport system in England, and to a lesser degree in Scotland and Wales, the Swiss public transport system is 100% integrated. This is evidenced by the existence of a single country-wide, mode-wide, source of information, present on the SBB website.

Whilst SBB CFF FFS (Schweizerische Bundesbahnen, Chemins de fer fédéraux suisses, and Ferrovie federali svizzere, to reflect its linguistic regions) is by far the majority operator, it is joined by BLS (Bern-Lötschberg-Simplon-Bahn + other routes), RhB (Rhätische Bahn), and countless lesser operators of standard or narrow gauge trains, funiculars, cable cars, trams and ships.

The timetables, etc. of the vast majority of all these forms of integrated public transport can be found on the single site www.sbb.ch. The website is a model of clear presentation and contains a wealth of information.

The SBB journey planner offers the following information not normally present on the GB National Rail Enquiries site:

- All information is provided in German, French, Italian or English;
- Journeys can be planned for many months into the future rather than the 12 week limit in GB;
- Ticket validity is not limited to a specified operator;
- Basic ticket prices are usually consistent throughout the day;
- Detailed station plans, relating to the chosen journey, are presented;
- A map of the overall journey, with walking routes at interchange stations shown when applicable;
- Station maps show the location of nearby buses and trams, etc.

The SBB website permits multi-modal journeys to be planned.
For example:

Beatenberg to Adelboden

Funicular to Beatenbucht (20 min)

5 min connection to bus stop

Bus to Thun station (31 min)

24 min connection at Thun station

Train to Frutigen (22 min)

9 min connection at Frutigen

30 min bus to Adelboden

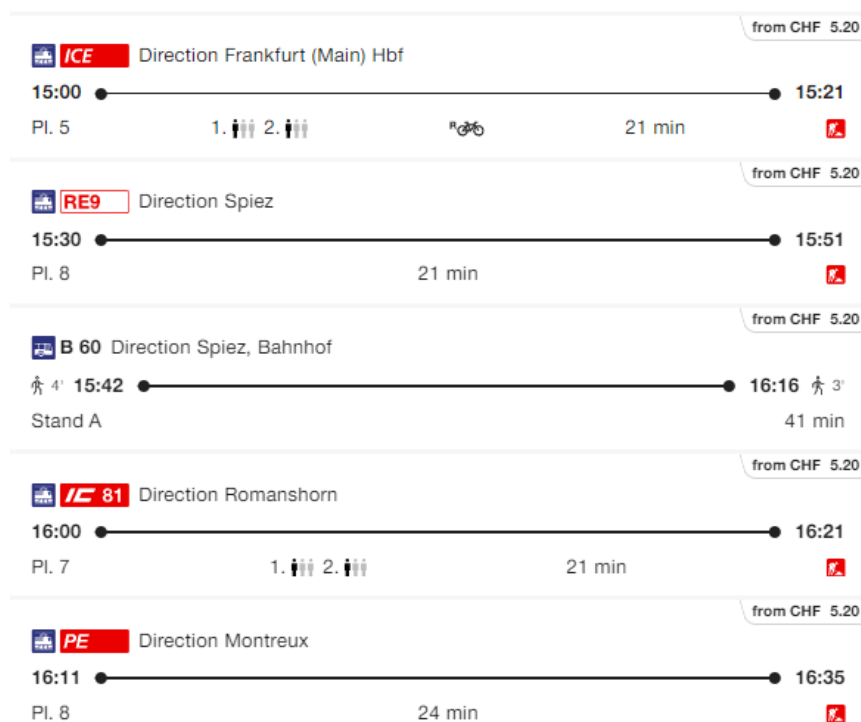
Overall journey time 2hr 12min

Point-to-point Ticket – CHF 22.00

Tap in at journey start – tap out at journey end

Single overall payment deducted from a/c

An enquiry for a public transport journey from A to B produces a listing of all forms of transport which are available along the line of route, primarily trains and buses. In complete contrast to the English train fares system, a single fare is presented for all modes. A simple journey from Interlaken Ost station to Spiez shows . . .



Option 1 is a German ICE train bound for Frankfurt (Main). InterCity style accommodation all for the single quoted price of CHF 5.20*. It is possible to reserve a seat for CHF 5.00 but hardly necessary for this short 22 minute journey.

Option 2 is a regional train which costs CHF 5.20 for 21 minutes.

Option 3 is a local bus, stopping at a possible 19 stops on the way and taking 41 minutes but again at a cost of CHF 5.20.

Option 4 is an SBB InterCity train bound for Romanshorn, via Bern, Zurich and Zurich Airport. This local journey takes 22 minutes at a cost of CHF 5.20

Option 5 is a very special train which changes its characteristics on its way to Montreux. The local trip to Spiez again costs CHF 5.20 (taking 24 minutes) but this standard gauge train (named the Golden Pass Express) continues via Thun to Zweisimmen where the train's wheel gauge automatically changes to metre gauge to allow it to continue to through the Golden Pass to Montreux.

* All fares listed on the SBB website are in fact half fares. A high percentage of Swiss residents purchase an annual Half Fare Card so the journey planner assumes this will be used. A non-card owner, e.g. a visitor from England, will pay CHF 10.40 (approx £9.00) for the above journey. Certainly not cheap, but Switzerland overall is an expensive country.

On many longer routes, whilst the standard fares are always listed, there may be a chance to purchase a Supersaver ticket. The standard fare allows one to use any train whilst the Supersaver is limited to the specified journey. None of the standard fare tickets are operator specific.

Conclusion

Whilst the English railway system operates on a pseudo-competitive basis for most of the network there is an implied obligation to obey the rulings of the Competition and Markets Authority, leading to the plethora of individual operator determined fares which, because they are widely varied for a chosen journey, seems to confirm that 'competition is a good thing'. The outcome has created a baffled customer base as outlined on Page 9.

The Swiss public transport system involves numerous operators, often occupying multi-operator routes or sections of routes, where there is an underlying concept of 'co-operation' rather than 'competition'. Hence the opportunity for consistent set fares for each journey, regardless of who provides the transport.

I believe that the complexity of fares in England for even simple journeys on routes which are used by more than one operator presents a significant disincentive for people who may normally travel by car to choose the train instead. That disincentive would become permanent if the naïve passenger were, through genuine ignorance of 'the system', come face to face with an enthusiastic Revenue Protection Officer.

"The train in five minutes will cost £5.10 but the one just one minute later will cost just £2.10. But both trains are going to the same place. It just doesn't make sense."

Disgusted of Stockport

Removing the concept of competition (which ought to happen on the proposed re-nationalised railway) should end the frustration over fare differentials and should steadily attract more people to enjoy the pleasures of train travel.

David J Butterworth
TravelWatch NorthWest
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admin@travelwatch-northwest.org.uk