

By **Eleanor Hayward**
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RAIL bosses plan to replace peak and off-peak fares with ticket prices that change throughout the day.

In a bid to end the crush at rush hours and encourage more passengers to travel during quiet periods, rail companies have called for the two tiers to be scrapped – but critics claim that it could make the ticket system even more confusing.

As peak tickets are much more expensive than off-peak – for example, a rush-hour ticket from London to Manchester can cost £175 compared to £88 off-peak – trains just outside peak hours are often overcrowded as passengers try to save money.

Peak hours usually fall between 6.30am and 9.30am and 4.30pm and 7pm. But it means the cost of a ticket on a heaving off-peak train just after 9.30am is the same as an

'Negative impact'

almost empty mid-afternoon train. Now the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), which represents operators and Network Rail, wants to increase the cost of travelling near peak hours, while dropping fares during hours of low demand in the middle of the day and late at night. They hope that 'smoothing the cliff edge of prices' with a sliding scale of fares will ease congestion by removing the rush on the first or last off-peak trains.

But campaigners warned that adding even more ticket prices for the same journey risked adding to existing confusion.

James Daley, from consumer group Fairer Finance, said: 'The wide variety in prices for the same journey causes a lot of confusion

at the moment. It's clear we need reform and simplification but it would be very easy to come up with a system that's even more confusing. People need to know what price they will be paying.'

Britain's rail ticketing system is underpinned by regulations which

are unchanged from the mid-1990s, with around 55million different fares. But the RDG claims that under its Easier Fares For All plan, passengers would automatically be charged the best-value fare.

Under the new scheme, a commuter travelling in one direction

passengers would automatically be charged the best fare.

Currently, you could save £40 travelling from Southampton to Manchester tomorrow morning by splitting the cost across eight different tickets, according to website Trainsplit. And in one extreme case in 2017, a Newcastle United fan bought 56 tickets to cover a return journey for two to Oxford for an FA Cup match, saving him nearly £60.

during peak hours and the other during off-peak hours could save money by paying a cheaper fare on the off-peak journey rather having to buy a peak return ticket.

Paul Plummer, chief executive of the RDG, said: 'Reconfiguring a decades-old system originally

designed in an analogue era isn't simple, but this plan offers a route to get there quickly.'

Mike Richardson, director of split ticketing site Trainsplit, said: 'Saying some fares will rise and some fares will fall could have a significant negative impact for a large number of passengers.'

Darren Shirley, chief executive of the Campaign For Better Transport, claimed the existing fares and ticketing system is 'broken and desperately needs fixing'.

He added: 'We're particularly pleased to see proposals for more flexible commuter tickets to reflect modern work patterns. What's not clear however, is if these proposals will also lead to an end to the annual fares rise, which fails to reflect the level of service passengers receive the previous year.'

A Department for Transport spokesman said: 'We are ready to work with the industry on how their proposals might work and be tested in the real world.'

Trials of changes to the fares system are expected to begin later this year. The new system could be rolled out over the next three to five years.

Is it peak, off-peak... or in-between? More rail fare confusion on way



Now we'll get best prices without 'splitting' tickets

THE planned overhaul of rail fares could end the need for 'split ticketing', a trick used by passengers to save money.

Due to Britain's complex ticketing system, instead of buying just one ticket to the final destination, it can be cheaper to buy multiple to cover different stages of a single journey.

But industry body the Rail Delivery Group claims split ticketing would not be necessary under its new plans as

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