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Sarah Champion
Member of Parliament for Rotherham

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Sarah Champion hits out at rail fare increases in the North

Sarah Champion, the Member of Parliament for Rotherham, has taken her fight against rail fare price hikes to the Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin.

Over the past year, many of Sarah's Rotherham constituents have had to endure the continual struggle of rail fares prices going up. In the last 12 months there have been three separate fare increases for some travellers.

It seems northern travellers who are suffering the most. The Government has said fare increases have not been as high as previous years, yet clearly, with prices frequently going up more in the north, that doesn't apply to the whole country.

With many already finding it difficult to afford their fare, Sarah also raised the issue of making discounted fares available from any area where a ticket can be purchased.

At the moment, the majority of discounted tickets are only available online or if paid for in advance. For many these options are simply not viable. Sarah pointed out that some of her constituents cannot afford to pay in advance, or don't have access to online facilities.

Speaking at a Transport Select Committee meeting, Sarah asked:

"The DfT recently encouraged Northern Rail to change the peak period charging times, and those changes have had a greater impact on families who are already struggling to afford rail fares."

"While the Government have announced that their increases are not as high as previous ones, many passengers in the north have already faced three fare increases in the last 12 months. Have Stagecoach any plans to raise off-peak fares above the rate of inflation?"

Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin responded:

"On the East Coast line, Stagecoach have put forward plans that would reduce fares in some cases by up to 10%, so my hope is that that is the case."

Sarah then followed up:

"To pick up on a detail in that point, Stagecoach have said they will introduce smart ticketing within the lifetime of their franchise. Many of the offers that help to reduce fares for the travelling public are available only by booking online or paying in advance."

"I know that many of my constituents find it hard to pay for a fare, full stop, let alone paying in advance. Could the Secretary of State please ensure that all discounted fares are also available from all areas where tickets are available, rather than just online?"

Mr McLoughlin replied:

"This is certainly an area I want to look at a bit more, and I am very keen that throughout the rail industry we get more on top of it. There are a lot of opportunities for cheaper fares, and it is surprising how many people take advantage of them.

"The growth in advance fares and booking fares has been quite large over the last three to four years, but the point you are making is something I very much want to encourage, and I would encourage other franchise operators to do it as well."

Commenting after the debate, Sarah said:

"Many of my constituents are already struggling financially and have been for some time due to the austerity cuts. The rail network provides a way of getting to work for a lot of people, and yet they are continually faced with higher prices.

"The Government claims that increases are not as high as previous years, but the figures show that it is actually the passengers of the north who are paying the price for the Government to be able to make this boast.

"I want to make sure that fares are not raised above the rate on inflation which would make it even more difficult for people to travel. It's also important that discounted fares, which many already use, are made available to everyone to help ease the financial burden."

ENDS

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