TICKET CHECKS ON TRAINS
by Roger Davis

"You never get your ticket checked". "You never see a conductor on this service". These are the perennial moans of Stourbridge Line User Group members, and I am one of the most vociferous.

In 2002, I started recording details of every rail journey that I took, both local and long distance. I noted the date, train operating company, departure and arrival stations, scheduled and actual departure and arrival times, the delay to the arrival time and whether my ticket was checked on the train, at a station gate line or not all, and stored these on an Excel spreadsheet.

Unmanned gate lines at Snow Hill and Moor Street stations on Monday 21 September greeted passengers who had not had their tickets checked on board the service from Stourbridge Junction.

The original idea was to do this for about a year but, 14 years on, the spreadsheet is still growing with about 5,000 journeys recorded. I decided recently that the time had come to analyse the ticket check results and find out how true those claims of fellow passengers were. Fortunately, I had rudimentary knowledge of Visual Basic to write some programs to interrogate the ticket check data.

The ticket checking statistics can be summarised as follows:-

- All statistics are based on journeys that either start from or end at Stourbridge Junction or Cradley Heath.
- The majority of journeys were off-peak journeys on semi-fast services.
- Over the 14 year period, on-board ticket checking levels has been poor with tickets checked on less than 50% of journeys.
- The percentage of tickets not checked at all on the Stourbridge line dropped significantly after 2009 due to the introduction of gate lines at Snow Hill and Moor Street, but this may account for the drop in on-train ticket checks.
- Unfortunately, the percentage of journeys to and from Snow Hill and Moor Street with no ticket checks proves that the gate lines are left open and unmanned far too often which necessitates on-board ticket checking as well.
- Overall, the highest percentage of on-board ticket checks were done under Central Trains (44.9%), this dropping to 32% when London Midland Class 150's operated the service and rising slightly to 34.9% when the Class 172's took over. Chiltern Railways fare (pardon the pun) even worse with tickets checked on only 24.2% of journeys.
- The situation is gradually getting worse, with tickets checked on over 40% of journeys between 2002 and 2006 (Central Trains) but less than 40% on most years since (London Midland), and as low as 25% in 2014.
- Ticket checking percentages on Chiltern Railways services have been worse than Central Trains/London Midland in 8 of the 14 years.
- The highest percentage of on-board checks (74.6%) is on the Stourbridge Town shuttle and this figure is higher than those when the Class 153 DMUs operated the branch - 63.2% under Central Trains and 61.2% under London Midland.

Unfortunately, it would impossible to detail all of my findings as they would fully occupy the next three editions of Platform. The full statistics are available on the Stourbridge Line User Group website (*www.stourbridgelineusergroup.info*) under the News and Comment tab.

Fare evasion is a problem in the West Midlands. It would seem that more still needs to be done by the Train Operating Companies to counteract this.