

Sparks fly after Oyster cards are overcharged

TRAVELLERS

TO FIREWORKS DISPLAY URGED TO CHECK IF THEY WERE BILLED FOR

MAXIMUM FARE

By KATE GOULD

RAIL passengers are being urged to check their Oyster card bills after it emerged many were overcharged when they visited a fireworks display.

Transport for London (TfL) and train operator Southeastern took the decision to open the barriers and tape over the card-readers at Blackheath station on the evening of Saturday, November 5.

They said it was to prevent overcrowding from the huge numbers of people attending the nearby Blackheath fireworks event.

It meant any passengers using pay-as-you-go Oyster cards were unable to tap in or out and were charged the maximum fare of £6.50 rather than a single journey at £2.50.

Caroline Pidgeon, Lib Dem chairwoman of the London Assembly transport committee, said she had received reports suggesting many people had not been reimbursed by TfL.

Passengers told Ms Pidgeon that, if they had not checked their accounts, they would not have known about the overcharging.

They had to call the Oyster helpline to get their money back.

Ms Pidgeon said: "Many would be unaware they had been overcharged and, for those who were, the onus was on them to collect back the overcharged amount."

"It beggars belief Southeastern merely taped over the Oyster readers leading to so many people being overcharged on their Oyster cards."

A Southeastern spokeswoman said its priority had been getting the estimated 20,000 people through the station and on to trains home at the end of the event.

She said: "To prevent overcrowding on the platforms we closed the 'normal' exit at the station but opened two additional exits."

"Also some Oyster readers were covered to prevent crowding."

"Arrangements were made with TfL to 'auto-complete' journeys so passengers weren't charged the maximum fare."

"Anyone who believes they've been overcharged for their journey should contact Oyster helpline for assistance."

A TfL spokeswoman said: "We would urge any passengers who have not received their refund to contact the Oyster helpline as soon

as possible. TfL only holds passenger Oyster data for eight weeks so passengers have until December 30 to claim their refunds."

kate.gould@elp.co.uk

