Fuel Pricing in West Cumbria

Evidence Submission to the Competition and Markets Authority

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Executive Summary

Purpose of this submission

This document provides evidence of significant fuel price disparities between petrol stations in West Cumbria and asks the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to consider whether competition in rural fuel markets is functioning effectively.

The analysis was undertaken following concerns raised by local motorists about large differences in fuel prices between nearby forecourts.

Geographic scope

The analysis focuses on petrol stations along the main West Cumbria transport corridor connecting:

- Workington
- Whitehaven
- Cleator Moor
- Egremont
- Cockermouth

These communities are linked primarily by the A595 and A596, which serve as the principal travel routes across the region.

Key findings

The analysis identified significant variation in fuel prices between nearby petrol stations.

Petrol prices

- Lowest observed price: 136p per litre
- Highest observed price: 152p per litre

This represents a price difference of approximately 16p per litre.

For a typical 55-litre tank, this equates to approximately £8.80 difference per fill-up, depending on where motorists purchase fuel.

Diesel prices

- Lowest observed price: 148p per litre
- Highest observed price: 167p per litre

This represents a diesel price difference of approximately 19p per litre.

For a typical tank of diesel this equates to approximately £10–£11 per fill-up, depending on where motorists purchase fuel.

Comparison with UK average prices
At the time of analysis, average UK fuel prices were approximately:

Petrol: 135-136p per litre
Diesel: 147-149p per litre

Some forecourts in West Cumbria were therefore charging more than 15p above the national average for petrol and around 18–20p above the national average for diesel.

Rural market considerations

West Cumbria is a predominantly rural area where residents often rely on private vehicles to commute to work, attend hospital appointments, access education and reach essential services.

Public transport options are limited or non-existent in many areas, meaning motorists may have restricted ability to travel further to access cheaper fuel.

In such circumstances, effective local competition between petrol stations is particularly important.

Context: rising global fuel costs

Fuel prices internationally have recently been affected by volatility in oil markets, including geopolitical instability and conflict in the Middle East. Rising wholesale prices place additional pressure on motorists and increase the importance of ensuring that retail fuel markets operate competitively.

Request to the CMA

Given the significant price variation observed between nearby petrol stations in West Cumbria, this submission asks the Competition and Markets Authority to consider whether the evidence raises potential concerns regarding competition in rural fuel markets.

This evidence is provided to support the CMA’s ongoing monitoring of the UK road fuel market.

Introduction

This document provides evidence of fuel price disparities across West Cumbria. The analysis has been undertaken by Josh MacAlister MP following concerns raised by local motorists regarding significant differences in petrol and diesel prices between nearby petrol stations.

The geographic area analysed covers the principal transport corridor linking:

- Workington
- Whitehaven
- Cleator Moor
- Egremont
- Cockermouth

These towns are connected primarily via the A595 and A596 road corridors, which serve as the main transport routes across West Cumbria.

The purpose of this submission is to provide evidence to the Competition and Markets Authority regarding the scale of fuel price variation across local forecourts and to request that this information be considered as part of the CMA's ongoing monitoring of the UK road fuel market.

Methodology

Fuel price data was collected from publicly available sources including fuel price comparison services and forecourt listings.

The analysis includes petrol stations located along the main transport corridor used by motorists travelling between towns in West Cumbria.

Prices represent a snapshot of pump prices at the time the analysis was undertaken and include:

Petrol (E10) prices per litre
Diesel (B7) prices per litre

The objective of the analysis is to identify the degree of price variation between stations within a relatively small geographic market where motorists would reasonably expect competitive pricing.

National Context

The UK average fuel price at the time of analysis was approximately:

Petrol: 135–136 pence per litre
Diesel: 147–149 pence per litre

These averages provide a benchmark against which local forecourt prices can be compared.

Fuel prices globally have recently been affected by volatility in international oil markets. In particular, geopolitical instability and conflict in the Middle East have placed upward pressure on wholesale oil prices, which in turn affects retail fuel prices.

In this context, it is especially important that retail fuel markets operate competitively and transparently so that motorists are not exposed to unnecessary additional costs.

Local Context: West Cumbria

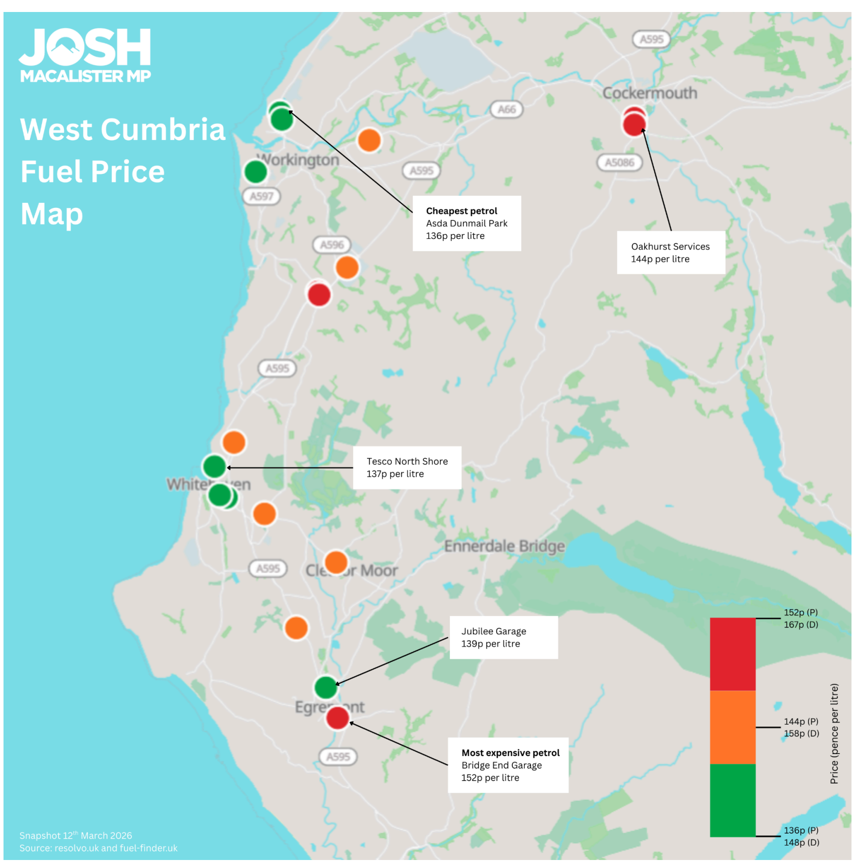
West Cumbria is a predominantly rural area where many residents rely heavily on private vehicles for everyday travel.

Car journeys are often required for:

- commuting to work
- attending hospital appointments
- accessing education
- reaching shops and services

Public transport options are limited or non-existent in many parts of the region. As a result, fuel price differences between nearby petrol stations can have a significant impact on household budgets.

Motorists in rural areas may also have limited ability to travel further distances in search of lower fuel prices.



Station Price Data

The following table shows petrol and diesel prices recorded across forecourts within the study area.

Station	Town	Brand	Petrol (p)	Diesel (p)
Asda Dunmail Park	Workington	Asda	136	148
Morrisons Derwent Drive	Workington	Morrisons	137	152
Tesco North Shore	Whitehaven	Tesco	137	154
Morrisons Flatt Walks	Whitehaven	Morrisons	138	154
Pelican Service Station	Whitehaven	BP	139	159
Middlemoor Service Station	Workington	BP	139	159
Long Mile Filling Station	Workington	BP	139	159
Crossfield Garage	Cleator Moor	Independent	140	158
Park House Service Station	Egremont	Texaco	140	162
Shell Ivy Mill	Whitehaven	Shell	140	158
Lillyhall Service Station	Workington	Esso	142	159
Lamplugh Road Service Station	Cockermouth	Asda Express	144	159
Jubilee Garage	Egremont	Jet	139	164
Bridge End Garage	Egremont	BP / Spar	152	167

Key Findings

The analysis highlights significant price variation between forecourts within the West Cumbria corridor.

Petrol price range

Lowest price observed: 136p per litre
Highest price observed: 152p per litre

This represents a local petrol price difference of 16p per litre.

For a typical 55 litre family car, this equates to approximately £8.80 difference per tank, depending on where motorists purchase fuel.

Diesel price range

Lowest price observed: 148p per litre
Highest price observed: 167p per litre

This represents a diesel price difference of 19p per litre.

For a typical tank of diesel, this equates to a difference of approximately £10-£11 per tank, depending on where motorists purchase fuel.

Competition Considerations

The Competition and Markets Authority has previously identified concerns regarding competition within the UK road fuel retail market.

In particular, the CMA has noted that:

- fuel retail margins have increased in recent years
- local market competition may vary significantly across regions
- rural areas may experience weaker competitive pressure due to lower station density

West Cumbria has a relatively small number of petrol stations distributed across a wide geographic area. Motorists may therefore face limited choice compared with more densely populated urban areas.

The scale of price variation observed between nearby forecourts raises questions about whether local competitive conditions are functioning effectively.

Conclusion

This evidence submission highlights significant fuel price disparities across petrol stations within West Cumbria.

Key findings include:

Petrol prices ranging from 136p to 152p per litre
Diesel prices ranging from 148p to 167p per litre

A local petrol price gap of approximately 16p per litre

These differences occur within a relatively small geographic market where motorists might reasonably expect greater price alignment between nearby forecourts.

Given the reliance on private vehicles in rural areas such as West Cumbria, such disparities may have a disproportionate impact on local households and businesses.

This dossier is therefore submitted to assist the Competition and Markets Authority in its ongoing monitoring of the UK road fuel market and to highlight potential competition concerns within rural fuel markets.