

Using smartcards on rail in the south east of England: what do passengers want?

Summary report



Foreword

from Anthony Smith, chief executive

We are all becoming increasingly familiar with technology in all aspects of our lives.

Transport Focus wants to see technology on public transport that is designed with the passenger in mind. It needs to be simple, convenient and cost effective to use.

Smartcards are a good example of how technology can help to make public transport easier to use. Of course, requirements

and expectations around smart ticketing are evolving as technology develops. This project looks at how commuters expect smart ticketing to work when it is introduced on rail in the south east.

It is important we continue to understand passengers' views and preferences around smart ticketing and that these are taken account of in designing

processes and communication.

It is clear that many of the challenges are around communication and support. The industry needs to explain how smartcards will make things better for passengers and what they will need to do differently in the future.

Background

Building on initial research into smart ticketing carried out in 2012, this research sought to understand how passenger opinions and preferences around smart ticketing have evolved as technology use has increased.

This time the focus was specifically on rail commuters in the south east of England in order to gauge expectations and preferences of passengers who will soon be able to use smart ticketing in this part of the country.

What we wanted to find out

- The overall aim of this research was to explore what passengers need and want when it comes to smartcards
- Specifically, we wanted to find out more about passenger expectations of smartcards, their reactions to a smartcard offer, and how they want smartcards to work.

How we did it

- 10 small group discussions lasting two hours with commuters from the south east.
- We had a good mix of passengers in terms of age, gender, how they travel and levels of experience with smart ticketing for train travel, as well as confidence in technology
- Eight one-hour face-to-face interviews which included an accompanied online task
- Discussion guides and stimulus were developed from a workshop and a pilot Department for Transport group discussion.

All our smarter travel research can be found at:
<http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/smarter-travel>

This is the latest report from our joint programme with the Department for Transport exploring passenger needs from smart ticketing.

Key findings

Passenger expectations

Overall passengers were positive about the introduction of smart ticketing noting that it is 'about time' that smart technology becomes available for their train journeys.

Many expressed enthusiasm for smartcards and, although they ideally would like to see a range of smart solutions to ticketing, passengers envisage that in the first instance, the improved convenience will motivate them to take up a smartcard when available.

Passenger expectations and suggestions for functionality are based on how they currently use paper tickets and experiences of using the Oyster card and contactless payment cards in London. Views are also shaped by experiences of smart technology in general, whether it be airline boarding cards, gym membership cards or paying for their children's school meals. It is agreed that existing ticketing processes that work well should be mirrored by smartcard functionality.

"To have any stress taken out of your journey, for a commuter, is a great thing."

Eight core principles

Based on their experience, passengers seek smartcard functionality that reflects eight core principles. Passengers are typically open towards proposed smartcard options as long as it reflects these core principles and what they have to do makes sense to them.

Value for money

Convenient

Simple

Flexible

Secure

Tailored

Leading edge

Trust

"It would be quicker, I hate having to get there on a Monday morning extra early and stand there to get a ticket... you would just do it online or on your phone."



Value for money

Many passengers expect that the introduction of smartcards will bring new products offering greater value for money and a tailored approach to fare calculations.

"If this type of system could do a quick delay repay, that would be good."

There is strong appetite for a pay-as-you-go product and fares that are structured to reflect modern working patterns, for example number of journeys made instead of journeys within a designated time period. There is also an expectation that smart technology will be able to automatically calculate delay repay and provide

a refund. New products and automatic delay repay emerged in this research as key ways to encourage adoption of smartcards.

Reaction to a deposit cost for a smartcard is largely negative and could deter take-up.

Convenient

Passengers assume smartcards will offer a more convenient experience compared to paper tickets.

What does convenience mean?

- Smartcard durability
- Speed and ease of using smartcards at ticket barriers (tapping in and out)
- Having an online account with option of online ticket purchase to avoid queues
- Option for automatic ticket renewals
- Automatic refund and compensation calculation
- Quick and easy options to request a smartcard and register any issues or requests for a replacement.

Making the passenger journey more convenient, with a particular focus on avoiding queues and saving time, could encourage take-up of smartcards.

"Pay for my ticket online and I swipe it at the barrier - that would be ideal!"

"Hopefully it would be similar to Oyster. You load up the card, you get the best deal when you use the card. You can use it anywhere."

Simple

Passengers expect it to be simple to get and manage a smartcard.

"If there is disruption and you have to get a different train, and the card prevented me from doing that, I would find it infuriating."

What does simplicity mean?

- Expect to be able to order smartcard online or offline (although most envisage doing this online)
- Being able to validate smartcard at barriers or platform validator
- Inspectors to check tickets with handheld devices
- Ability to use it on different train operating companies and in central London
- Being able to keep your smartcard if your commute changes
- To ideally be able to keep your unique smartcard number if your smartcard is lost or replaced.

Passengers recognise smartcards will involve greater reliance on technology and therefore expect that simple processes will be put in place to deal with any queries or errors that could arise. They suggest offline and online support including live chat options and clear routes for where to access information and support for different queries.

Flexible and tailored

There is an expectation from passengers that they will be able to use smartcards across different train operators' services in the south east. This flexibility is considered crucial to take-up of smartcards. There is also strong desire for smartcards to deliver a tailored experience for passengers.

"If I were able to purchase a week's worth of day returns and load them on to my card that would be helpful."

"Maybe automatically credit your smartcard, as it removes the necessity to apply for a refund."

"With season tickets the advantage would be having your usual journey saved onto an online account and if your card details were also saved then you would just click 'renew'."

What do flexible and tailored mean?

- New ticket options that better match passengers' needs
- Automatic calculation and capping of fares
- Automatic calculation and payment of refunds and compensation
- Special offers/loyalty schemes.

Passengers recognise that these tailored offerings may not immediately be available, but they are considered key ways to encourage the use of smartcards.

Secure

Passengers seek reassurance that personal details will be secure. General familiarity with smart technology in wider life means that many are comfortable with the security of smart technology and are happy for a photo and/or name to appear on their smartcard for security purposes.

Leading edge

The move to smartcards is welcomed by most passengers with only a few citing technology concerns. The most tech-savvy passengers query whether contactless payment is more leading edge and whether smartcards will soon become outdated.

"If the technology fails or the network crashes what would you do? You would want to be able to speak to staff."



Trustworthy

Passengers expressed concern that the introduction of smartcards will mean loss of staff and they seek reassurances that positive relationships already built with staff will be maintained. Staff are considered the first point of reference when at the station so there is an expectation staff will be available at the station to answer any smartcard queries.

Passengers also felt the introduction of smart ticketing to be an opportunity for train operators to build trust with their passengers through aligning smartcards with value for money.



"I think the word smart means it works with your life and works with everybody's situations. It shouldn't be holding us back."

Potential deterrents and communication needs

Key deal breakers and deterrents for passengers involve:

Additional cost

Additional complexity

Additional time

Passengers instinctively associate smart technology with simple, convenient and flexible solutions that offer value for money. They therefore expect smartcards to deliver this.

Overall, passengers are likely to seek reassurance that smartcard functionality will be simple, secure and sensible. They are also

likely to want to know the rationale for any aspects of functionality that may challenge expectations and be different to how ticketing currently works. Although passengers hope smartcards will be available for any train journey across the country, they recognise that roll-out will begin in the south east, meaning clear communications regarding the boundaries are essential.

What do we think?

The introduction of smart ticketing for commuters in the south east is a very exciting prospect...

However, the results of this research show the importance of good communication and simplicity in order to increase passenger take-up. Staff support is essential to any new programme, and this includes

sympathetic treatment when passengers first start to use their smartcard. Passengers expect that staff at stations will be able to answer any questions and will be understanding if they make a mistake or need assistance.

This research is part of the joint Department for Transport/Transport Focus smarter-travel research programme. This research project was carried out by GfK.

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