



Get smart – the benefits of smart ticketing for passengers

Smart ticketing could make a real difference to passengers' travel experiences, argues Passenger Focus researcher **Louise Hall**.

On behalf of the Department for Transport (DfT), we have been researching passengers' interest in potential new schemes and their perceptions of existing ones, covering both bus and rail.

The themes emerging from these projects are common and clear. Overall many passengers are receptive to the idea of smart ticketing. They can easily come up with real examples of how using smart ticketing would be better for them than how they currently buy and use paper tickets. Some of these are due to positive personal experiences, especially with Oyster, and others are because of frustrations or problems with today's conventional ticketing schemes.

Our first research looked at reactions to smart ticketing systems among rail commuters in the south east of England. It produced nine spontaneous benefits:

- Not requiring interaction with staff to load tickets
- Managing purchase and renewals without queues
- Smartcards being more durable than paper tickets
- Purchasing tickets online
- Discounts
- Storing details so easy to trace/replace
- Not having to rely on ticket vending machines
- Managing one card preferable to multiple tickets
- Quicker

Bus users mentioned the same benefits, but in addition identified benefits around an ability to use smart ticketing to assist with budgeting, by pre-paying for travel at the start of the month.

The benefits passengers describe can be summarised under seven key requirements of smart ticketing. Of course, not all passengers explicitly need all of the benefits to be realised for them personally. For many, if smart ticketing offered everything they currently get from a paper ticket, and a clear distinction on one or more of the benefits that are important to them, then this would be

enough to encourage them to use smart tickets.

We suggest these seven key requirements can be used as a checklist for a successful implementation of smart ticketing: Value for money; Convenient; Simple; Secure; Flexible; Tailored; and Leading edge.

Passengers expect that they will be able to obtain better value for money from smart tickets, whether through cheaper fares, price-capping or more cost-effective tickets and products. Simply converting what is already available on paper onto a plastic format will generate limited additional interest in smart ticketing – but enabling passengers to save money by accessing better travel products (with smart ticketing seen purely as the channel to achieve this) will encourage uptake.

There is also an expectation that smart ticketing will make buying and using tickets more convenient. They expect it should make their life easier, rather than more complicated. Features such as online purchase, top-ups and less reliance on cash are often seen as adding convenience. So these practical benefits all seem attractive to many passengers:

- Not needing to have the enough cash on a Monday morning to buy their weekly ticket
- Being able to load a card with credit for their children's travel rather than giving them cash
- Not having to queue at a ticket machine for several minutes, or to interact with staff
- Having an easy way of accessing and recording all the journeys they have made, for example for claiming expenses

There is also a perception that using smart tickets can offer additional security to passengers. For example, if a smartcard is lost or stolen, it can easily be cancelled and the ticket or credit replaced. This is particularly attractive for those with children at school – they like the idea of sending them with paid-for travel rather than with cash, which can be lost, taken or spent on other things. But of course, some reassurance about security of personal data and online systems is required – as with the implementation of any new systems.

Travelling by public transport is a necessary part of life for passengers, not something they want to have to think about too much. Ticketing is no exception. So, simplicity is important for both understanding how smart ticketing works, and how much effort is involved in taking it up. This is especially so for those unfamiliar with smart technology or smart ticketing.

Passengers want smart ticketing to be flexible. They want the ability to choose and purchase new products and tickets that offer flexible travel options, such as carnets or part-time season tickets. They also want flexibility with managing their smart ticketing account to include being able to make ticket purchases at the last minute and being able to upload tickets and money in different ways.

They also place value on the ability to tailor smart ticket products to their needs, including managing smart ticketing accounts. Participants would like to choose how they prefer to manage their account (online, app, text message), and look for reassurances that this will be tailored to be compatible with the technology they own.

Passengers are clear that the introduction of smart ticketing is a shift into a more technology-focused way of ticketing and would like the systems to be leading edge and long-lasting. While for some this means simply that it should be a system that will be durable, others are keen that the technology used is forward-thinking and will not need to be replaced soon.

Overall, we think that if a smart ticketing scheme delivers on each of these, its chance of being successful is high, as long as all elements are well designed and then explained and communicated well throughout.



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