



Smarter ticketing - lets get on with it!

Anthony Smith says smart ticketing, if introduced in the right way with the right products and communication, will be a success. But passengers have questions...

Passengers like the idea of, and indeed expect, smarter ticketing that suits their needs. That's the broad conclusion from our latest research report. We carried out passenger research looking at London and South East commuter views and needs around smart ticketing. This is the area covered by the snappily titled South East Flexible Ticketing programme which will eventually bring rail smart ticketing across the region.

Key principles emerged from passengers. Value for money - smart should involve cost saving. Convenience (including durability), simplicity, security, flexibility are also key, coupled with the ability for passengers to manage their own accounts. Leading-edge technology was perceived as less important. How these principles are translated into reality will be key and the reason we became involved in the smart ticketing debate.

However, passengers had questions. How would purchasing work? How and when can smart tickets be used? What happens if things go wrong, especially at the ticket gates? Some concerns were expressed about security - waving mobile phones around at stations was not seen as ideal.

Clear communication vital

Oyster has set the tone of the debate for many passengers. There is a degree of familiarity with the system and the advantages it brings. Integration with other modes is seen as 'ideal and essential'. One solution for all is required. The main barrier perceived is the lack of clarity about the benefit of moving to smart ticketing. Clear communication is going to be vital. Those passengers not used to Oyster had many more questions about how it could work.

The sort of products envisaged were also clear, as long as some cost saving is realised. Tailored season tickets that encouraged or rewarded off-peak use were popular, as were carnets and 'part-time' seasons. Oyster's pay-as-you-go feature was positively mentioned.

So, all in all a positive endorsement and it will be very interesting to see how Go-Ahead's 'the key' smartcard product fares in its major roll out this year. Add to this the ability to actually communicate and build up relationships with passengers and smart, if introduced in the right way, with the right products and communication will be a success.

To print or not to print

Meanwhile in a dark corner of the industry passengers have to not only make sure they get the right sort of ticket at the right price, but have to think how they get hold of the ticket. 'Print at home' is heavily pushed by train companies. It keeps costs down. However, what happens if you change your mind? Advance tickets are tied to specific trains but normally

can be changed before the day of travel for a £10 per ticket 'administration fee'. Not, however, if they are printed at home. Fears of fraud and a lack of investment in new ticket-reading technology means you will lose all you have paid (which can be over £100 for the most expensive Advance tickets).

However, East Coast allows you to change all tickets, including e-tickets, up to 1700 or 1800, the day before. Investment so guards on trains can 'read' the e-ticket also avoids fraud issues. It seems the delay in replacing franchises has also slowed this sort of investment by other companies. **RP**

Anthony Smith is chief executive of Passenger Focus