

Smartcards on c2c: what do passengers think?

Summary report



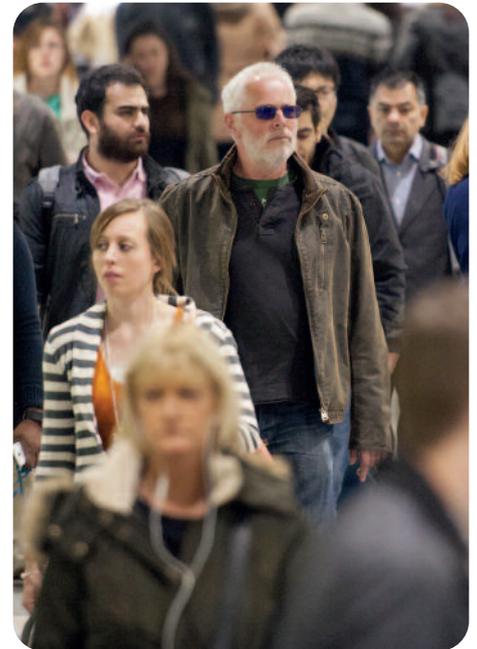
Foreword

from Anthony Smith, chief executive

It's great to see the introduction of a new smartcard scheme on a busy commuter line into London. c2c's passengers are now enjoying some of the benefits which come with smart ticketing on rail.

Transport Focus would like to see smart ticketing programmes designed and implemented in a way which makes travel simple, convenient and offers the best possible value for money for passengers. As such, we are pleased to be involved in assessing how effective the c2c Smartcard has been so far, and finding out what improvements could be made to make it even better for passengers.

This research will provide an effective case study for other operators as smart ticketing is rolled out across the country. Passengers do see the practical



benefits of moving away from paper and look forward to smart ticketing unlocking future benefits such as getting better value for money.

Background

c2c introduced **smart ticketing** over two phases in 2014.

Phase 1 was launched in June on a part of its route up to Tilbury Town and West Horndon stations (the two stations just outside the Oyster boundary). **Phase 2** was launched in October when the scheme was rolled out to the rest of the route into Fenchurch Street.

We wanted to identify and explore any issues which have emerged from the introduction of smart ticketing on the c2c line. This will help improve the scheme, as well as share learnings for the introduction of smart ticketing elsewhere in the country.

What we wanted to find out

- Understand passengers' awareness, views and experience regarding the c2c Smartcard
- Understand staff views about, and experience of implementing, the c2c smart ticketing scheme

How we did it

- **24 face-to-face detailed interviews with passengers** (12 with non-users and 12 with users)
- **71 short interviews with passengers** (46 with non-users and 25 with users)
- **Online survey with c2c Smartcard users** (620 completed interviews)
- **16 detailed interviews with c2c staff** involved in the scheme

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

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

Key findings

c2c Smartcard experiences

The c2c Smartcard was introduced in 2014, in two phases. We spoke to users to find out how well the scheme was working and whether the card had changed their journey experience. We also spoke to non-users to find out why they had not made the move to smart ticketing, as well as staff to get their opinions on how the scheme had been rolled out.

c2c Smartcard users

Results from our survey showed that on the whole users welcomed the introduction of the smartcard. Over three quarters of card users (81 per cent) associated the smartcard with being modern and innovative, while over half (60 per cent) thought the card had improved their travel experience.

Sample overview

All c2c Smartcard users were sent an email survey and 620 users of the c2c Smartcard completed online surveys.



Profile of our typical smartcard user was...

Male
(65% men, 33% women)

Travelling almost daily
(84% users travel this frequently)

Season ticket holder
(91% have season tickets, 6% other tickets)

Working full time
(94% work full time, 4% work part time)



Passenger awareness and expectations of the c2c Smartcard

User and non-user awareness

Users

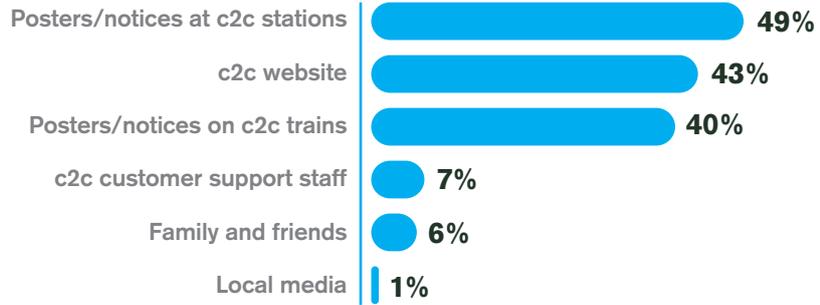
- Some users very proactive in terms of seeking information. For example following c2c on Twitter and asking about smartcard introduction by email.
- A few annual season ticket holders also informed by staff at the point of renewal.

Non-users

- A mix of those unaware of the card and those who knew about it.
- Those aware noticed posters, leaflets, barriers, and signs on postcard readers.

Awareness

Promotional materials at stations and trains were the main ways that users and non-users were made aware of the c2c Smartcard. However, users were more likely to actively seek out information online as well.



"I thought it might be like an Oyster card. I thought you add money to it and if you have enough for that journey you can just go."

Female, 59, non-user

Expectations

As our previous research on smartcard pilots showed, familiarity with Oyster card often informs passengers' expectations of new smartcards.



- A few passengers even thought/hoped Oyster was being extended when they saw the barriers being installed
- All knew you would tap in/out. However, when using ticket machines, a few non-users didn't know they needed to tap for the second time at the end to upload their purchase
- Some assumed and hoped they would be able to upload money and travel flexibly on a Pay As You Go (PAYG) basis.



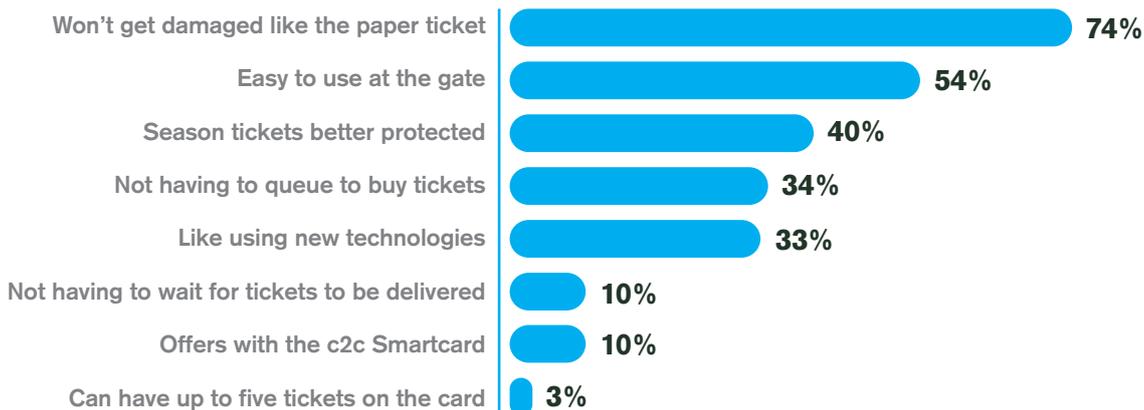
Reasons for getting or not getting the card

Both interviews and our survey suggested passengers were motivated to apply because of perceived benefits including durability of the card and increased speed. The fact that tickets are better protected when on smartcard is also an attractive reason to move a season ticket over.

"I've never known what it was. I thought it was something to do with the Oyster card."

Male, 63, non-user

Reasons for getting the card



Reasons for not getting the card

We have seen in other work that a key challenge for any operator when smart tickets are introduced is educating passengers that smart ticketing is relevant to them. Most non-users thought the c2c Smartcard was for a different type of passenger to them, so didn't think it was relevant to the way they travel. Raising awareness of the range of products available with the card and how the card is suited to different passengers in terms of their frequency of travel may help overcome passenger perceptions that the card is not relevant to them.

"I've seen posters but that is it. I didn't think it was for annual season ticket holders. I thought it was like an Oyster card and you topped it up as and when."

Female, 48, non-user

Who is the card for?

- When we spoke to non-users, less frequent passengers thought the card was for frequent passengers and vice versa
- Some wanted the posters to explain more about what the smartcard is, who it is for and what tickets you can have on it.

Other reasons

A few non-users didn't consider it because of other issues:

- lack of awareness that they could have a season ticket which includes travel in London
- worry they may be less flexible about which stations they can travel to
- worry they wouldn't get railcard discounts.

Passengers' views

Benefits and drawbacks of the c2c Smartcard

Passengers we spoke to thought the c2c card was performing well in some areas, but could be improved in others.



"It would be mainly the amount of time it saves on purchases. It makes it easier. People like easy."

Male, 28, non-user

- More durable than the paper season ticket
- More secure in case it's lost.
- Keeping up with technological developments seen as positive by many
- Quicker to use at the gate.

Note: At the time of fieldwork there were some issues with purchasing daily tickets online, and also the use of railcards, with smartcards. This has since been addressed by c2c, but the fact this was raised spontaneously by passengers shows how important these changes were in improving the experience.



- Mixed experiences of using the smartcard at the gates
- Some claim individual gates can't read their cards or believe they can't collect tickets at gates.



"Not particularly flexible yet because you can't have all sorts of tickets and you can't do it online yet."

Male, 48, user, daily tickets

- Daily tickets not available online so passengers interested in those see the card of limited use to them
- Some other ticket types unavailable
- Complicated online purchase.

"I think the main benefit is not taking the ticket out of the wallet. Also, paper tickets used to get corrupted and then you'd have to apply again for them to issue a new one. That used to happen about three or four times a year."

Male, 60, user, annual season ticket

"It is just convenient getting through the barriers."

Male, 44, user, annual season ticket



Views on the c2c Smartcard and values of smart ticketing

When we asked passengers to evaluate the c2c Smartcard in terms of the attributes commonly associated with smart ticketing, the card was seen to perform well in some respects but not all.

Performing poorly

Performing well

Flexible

- Doesn't work as well for those who travel less than daily
- No Pay As You Go (PAYG) option.

Tailored

- Not possible to adapt it to individual travel
- Some feel it would be more tailored if they could use it on Underground and other rail lines.

Value for money

- Not cheaper than paper tickets.

Simple

- Easy to use at the gate, but some struggle with buying tickets online for the smartcard.

Leading edge

- Modern and innovative but there are other smartcards as well as contactless.

Convenient

- Easy and quick to use (for many season ticket holders).

Secure

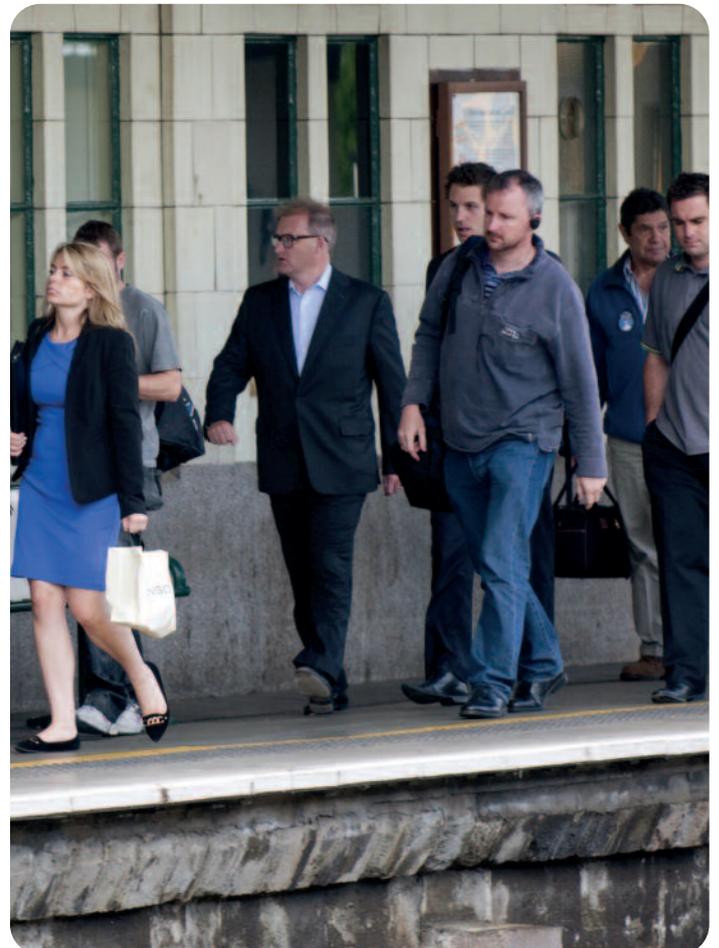
- Purchase recorded in the database.

"It's a great idea and a great concept, innovative you could say, but it needs work, it needs to become reliable."

Female, 56, user, daily tickets

"It was the ease of use I wanted and I embrace technology. It's easier than having to fish your paper ticket out of your wallet and replacing it throughout the year."

Male, 40, user, annual season ticket



Satisfaction with the c2c Smartcard

The results revealed a split in satisfaction which was linked to the type of ticket the passenger wanted. These differences in the ease of using the card with different types of tickets led to users being largely season ticket holders, as it require little effort for them to buy a ticket.

Split in satisfaction of card users – two passenger groups



- Season ticket holders as buying tickets is **low effort**
- Passengers who like **new technology**
- Passengers who **haven't experienced problems** with gates.



- Passengers wanting **daily tickets** as they can't buy them in advance online
- Passengers who have experienced **problems with gates**.

Passenger experiences of the c2c Smartcard

Application process

Overall the application process worked well for the passengers we spoke to, although some encountered particular problems uploading their photo to the website. But generally they felt the process was straightforward and quick, and most passengers were satisfied with the time it took to receive their card.

What worked well?

- Passengers who didn't experience difficulties with uploading the photo generally thought the online application process was straightforward and quick
- Most passengers were also satisfied with the speed of receiving their card.

What didn't work well?

- **Photo uploading** A few reported difficulties with resizing photos
- **Transferring annual season tickets** Some annual season ticket holders reported ticket office staff weren't always sure what to do and a few had to wait for their cards for weeks
- **Daily tickets and the smartcard** Some interested in daily tickets thought information concerning these was insufficient and unclear.

"That's the first thing I asked them, 'How do I transfer my ticket and how long will that take?' They said it would only take three to four days but it took longer, nearly two weeks."

Female, 48, non-user, annual season ticket

"The application was all very straightforward, they have most of your details anyway. It didn't take much effort, it wasn't long!"

Male, 40, user, annual season ticket

73%

of c2c card users thought it was **easy to understand how to apply** for the card

71%

of c2c card users thought it was **easy to apply** for the card

20%

of users **received the card in 1-3 days** and **46%** in 4-7 days

65%

of users thought they **received their card quickly**

Buying tickets

Season ticket holders

Most season ticket holders we interviewed found buying tickets easy, but there was some variation depending on how frequently passengers bought tickets. The group most in need of clearer information on ticket availability and how they can be bought and used were non-season ticket holders.

Most of those getting season tickets onto a smartcard felt it was 'low effort'. For some no work was involved as they already had a paper ticket that staff transferred to their card. Others who bought their season tickets themselves had mixed experiences. Weekly season ticket holders were more likely to complain about the complex online purchase as they have to do it more often.

Other tickets

In addition to wanting single and return tickets to be available to purchase in advance via the c2c website, some passengers made further suggestions regarding the range of tickets available with the smartcard. The disabled passengers and students we spoke to expected to be able to use their railcard discounts with the smartcard, but this was not possible at the time.

From our research we believe that raising awareness about the possibilities to use the card for travel in London may attract new passengers to it. Very few passengers were aware this was possible, with some expressing an interest in the card once they discovered this was available.

Passengers were generally satisfied with the process of buying tickets from machines when they had a choice rather than it being the only option.

Agreement with statements about ticket buying

I can find a ticket that suits my travel on c2c train service



I am satisfied with the range of tickets I can buy with my c2c Smartcard



I get good value for money from the tickets I buy with my c2c Smartcard



Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neither
 Agree
 Strongly agree

Using the card at the gates

Results from interviews and our survey suggest most card holders found using the card at the gates easy, and hadn't experienced any significant issues.

There were some issues, however, with collecting tickets at the gates. Some passengers experienced problems using their card at the gates, so they believed they could not load their tickets by tapping at the gate. Instead, they queued to collect their ticket using a ticket machine. There was a feeling that having to queue to collect tickets rather than just tap in and go defeated the purpose of smart ticketing, that is to say saving time. However, staff felt gate issues were largely due to duplicate tickets, not holding the card long enough on the reader and, very rarely, faulty cards, as passengers should have been able to load tickets at the gates.

This is an example of where effective education and clear lines of communication can be used with passengers to better understand the issues they are having, and also help them find solutions.

"You just put it on the reader and the gate opens! Well chuffed!"

Male, 60, user, daily tickets

"If I go to London it makes more sense to get a travelcard, money wise. So if they could make it so you could use the underground then I'd prefer to do that on my smartcard too."

Male, 45, user, daily tickets

Online account

Our findings suggested card users' experiences varied in terms of how easy or difficult they found using their online account to buy tickets.

Needing to use two accounts in order to buy the tickets – the c2c Smartcard account and another c2c online account – is the

main reason why some passengers struggled to buy tickets online. Passengers thought it was unclear that the two were different in the first place, but when they realised this was the case, they felt the process was cumbersome and illogical.

Those card users who reported struggling

did not understand there were two online accounts they needed to use in order to buy tickets. Passengers would like to see the separate sites integrated so they only need to login once to buy tickets.

How easy or difficult do you find buying tickets online for your c2c card?

Easy

57%

Weekly tickets

44%

Monthly tickets

58%

Annual tickets

Difficult

39%

39%

18%



Customer support

Card users in our sample were categorised by who asked for help. Most of those went to station staff for help. Passengers struggling with using the online service generally asked staff at stations for help.

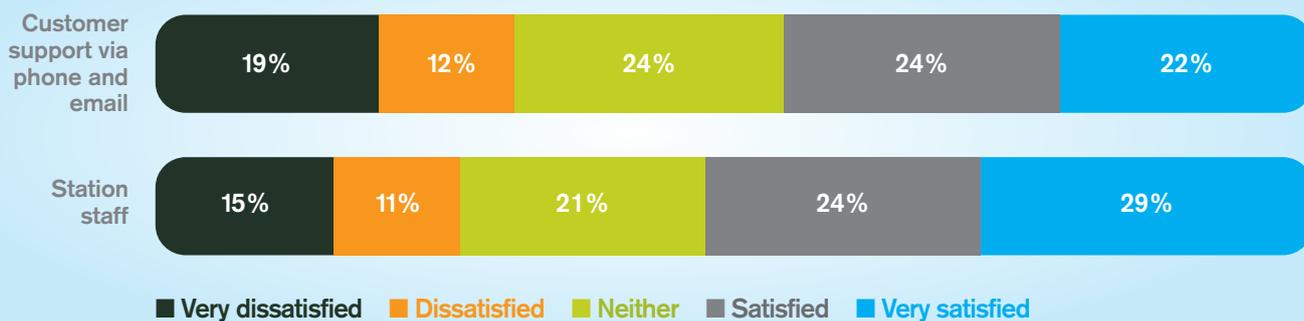
Train companies should ensure that these positive customer-staff relationships are preserved; something which will require training of all customer service staff on all new developments.

Have you done any of the following?



52%
of card users in total
**asked for some form
of customer support**

Satisfaction with customer support



"They aren't very helpful. They seem to know there are issues but it's just a shrug of the shoulders."
Female, 56, user, daily tickets

"My first smartcard stopped working. The staff at Pitsea station were very helpful and assisted me greatly in getting a new one issued. Same with the customer services staff...
More than happy with c2c."
User comment from the online survey

Our results suggest passengers' experience of how much customer support staff were able to provide has been variable. Passengers we interviewed told us c2c staff varied in terms of how knowledgeable and helpful they were with regard to smartcard queries and issues. Those who complained felt station staff often seemed uninterested

in the card, sometimes lacking knowledge, and tended to refer them to the team that deals with online-related queries. Passengers were unaware that station staff may have been assigned a particular role in customer support regarding the smartcard so they expected them to be able to help them with a variety of queries related to the smartcard.

What do staff think?

Most c2c staff we spoke to thought smartcards had the potential to benefit passengers and rail companies alike. However, managing customers' expectations based on Oyster and finding the right balance between online self-service and customer support were highlighted as potential challenges before the launch. Some staff also had concerns over the impact of the smartcard on station staff jobs and whether staff numbers would be reduced as a result. Additionally there was concern over the online-only customer service approach as staff anticipated passengers would ask them for help and they might not be able to provide it.

After implementation all staff thought that the smartcard had benefited season ticket holders and that it was working well for them. Some highlighted the efficient promotion of the smartcard among season ticket holders as they were particularly targeted by emails and ticket office staff too. However, staff believed the card had the potential to benefit other groups of passengers as technology improves to allow for more products, choice, ease and flexibility from a passenger perspective. Station staff particularly felt frustrated about limitations to their role within the scheme roll out and that they weren't able to provide the customer service support passengers expected.

Summary

c2c is constantly improving and refining its smart ticketing programme for passengers. At the time of publication changes had been made to enable passengers to purchase daily tickets online. The findings from this research suggest this will help improve satisfaction with the card and broaden the type of passenger it will appeal to. However, getting passengers to change their behaviour will be a challenge now that habits are formed when it comes to buying tickets using gates and ticket

machines, as c2c constantly evolves and improves its smart offering.

The c2c Smartcard scheme launch has been successful and passengers are already seeing the benefits. We look forward to seeing improvements to the scheme and listening to the feedback from passengers involved in this research. We also look forward to passengers using other train companies being able to experience the same improvements to their rail travel.



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

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Transport Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council.

Published in January 2016
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